

Interviews: Women in Film Chicago 2017 Focus Award Recipients

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on March 21, 2017 - 11:08am

- [Activism](#) [2]
- [Carrie Hunter](#) [3]
- [CEO](#) [4]
- [Director of Photography](#) [5]
- [Focus Awards](#) [6]
- [Harvey Keitel](#) [7]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [8]
- [Interview](#) [9]
- [It's Pat](#) [10]
- [Julia Sweeney](#) [11]
- [Julie Smolyansky](#) [12]
- [Kefir](#) [13]
- [LGBTQ](#) [14]
- [Mary Morten](#) [15]
- [Patrick McDonald](#) [16]
- [Producer](#) [17]
- [Pulp Fiction](#) [18]
- [Quentin Tarantino](#) [19]
- [Saturday Night Live](#) [20]
- [Tari Segal](#) [21]
- [Women in Film Chicago](#) [22]

CHICAGO – Women in Film Chicago (WIFC) continues its role as one of the best resource and advocacy groups for women filmmakers. Last month, they celebrated their Focus Awards and honored four women – producer Julie Smolyansky, cinematographer Tari Segal, filmmaker Mary Morten and comedian Julia Sweeney.



Focus Awards Honorees, LtoR: Mary Morten, Julie Smolyansky, Tari Segal and Julia Sweeney

Photo credit: Patrick McDonald for HollywoodChicago

Before the event, HollywoodChicago.com interviewed Julie Smoyanksy ([click here](#) [23]), the CEO of Lifeway Foods and producer of the documentary “The Hunting Ground.” At the event itself, the other three honorees were interviewed on the Red Carpet.



Julia Sweeney, Comedian and Cast Member of “Saturday Night Live”

Julia Sweeney was a force of comedy during her years on “Saturday Night Live” from 1990 to 1994, where she created memorable

characters, including the androgynous “Pat” (no one could tell if she was a man or woman). She moved on into one-woman shows, including her famous (and filmed) monologue “God Said Ha!,” about her and her brother’s struggle with cancer treatment, as they went through it at the same time. She also made a notable cameo in the film “Pulp Fiction,” did a film version of her character called “It’s Pat,” and also appeared in “Coneheads” and “Stuart Little.”



Comedian, Author and Monologist Julia Sweeney

Photo credit: Patrick McDonald for HollywoodChicago

HollywoodChicago.com: You moved to the Chicago area eight years ago, what does it mean to you to be embraced by Women in Film Chicago?

Julia Sweeney: It’s funny, because I don’t think I really deserve it, because I haven’t really done anything here yet. I’ve really focused on raising my daughter, and the house we bought in Wilmette had a basement that I converted into a home theater, because I’m a film buff. I got to indulge in the film nerd desires I’ve had all my life, and it has helped to understand which styles I like. It’s been great.

HollywoodChicago.com: Since this is a Women in Film Chicago event, what was your experience in comedy when it came to sexism, and was it an ‘old boy’s club’ in your years on ‘Saturday Night Live’?

Sweeney: I kind of feel a little bad when I look back on it, because in those days it was accepted that every comedy group was comprised of six guys and two women. I didn’t realize how bad that was, I was just dealing in the reality of it. It makes me feel guilty that I saw women more as competitors than collaborators. I’m grateful to see that ‘Saturday Night Live’ has changed, the women performers are often the strongest, and I admire Amy Poehler and Tina Fey for that – and they both came out of Chicago.

HollywoodChicago.com: In your one woman shows, you spoke a lot about your relationship with God, and your subsequent determination of atheism. What do you think is the prime motivator for believers, since you explored the subject so fully?

Sweeney: It’s fantastic to believe, because they get so many benefits. I get mad at the atheist community when they put down believers because they put down religion so much. Now I am an atheist, but I don’t like to describe myself with that term. I prefer secular humanist. But I do see first hand how beneficial religion is, for example if you are a refugee getting in a boat to take you across the Mediterranean, a belief in God is an advantage. I completely understand that comfort.

HollywoodChicago.com: I love your cameo in ‘Pulp Fiction.’ What connection got you that small but significant part, and what does it feel like to be frozen in time in a seminal film, to presumably live forever?

Sweeney: Are you talking about 'It's Pat,' the movie? [laughs] First off, it only took an hour to do that part in 'Pulp Fiction,' one hour of my entire life. It was a huge honor, of course, and it might be the most lasting thing I've ever done. If there are humans in 500 years, it might be the only bit of me still existing.

I met Quentin Tarantino when he came to SNL to watch Harvey Keitel host the show. We connected as film nerds, and talked all night. He was writing 'Pulp Fiction' at the time, and would call me occasionally to read what he had written. One day he told me 'I wrote you a part!' So that's how it came to be.

HollywoodChicago.com: What is your best advice to people who have to deal with tragedy afflicting loved ones, to maintain a center and a purpose in their own lives?

Sweeney: I have a philosophy of life. I am a stoic. And not a stoic in the common usage of the word...the stiff upper lip, etc. But stoicism as a philosophy of life. It involves imaging terrible things happening all the time, and getting used to it, so reality isn't so bad. And then you're always happy. You really just have to think yourself through it. That is how I've been able to come to happiness, but it is a subtle difference between scaring yourself all the time with terrible things happening, it's more about actually about making peace with it. That's my advice.



Mary Morten, Filmmaker and Activist

Ms. Morten is the President of Morten Group, LLC., a consulting firm specializing in social change through skills development, public policy and advocacy. She has been acknowledged for her work through many avenues, and served on Mayor Richard M. Daley's liaison team to the LGBTQ community. She is also a filmmaker of note, as her full length documentary "Woke Up Black" toured the country and was featured on PBS in Chicago. She is working on a sequel to that film, and a documentary entitled "Miss Gay Black America," about her brother Ronnie Reed, also known as Terri Livingston, a female impersonator.



Filmmaker and Activist Mary Morten

Photo credit: Patrick McDonald for HollywoodChicago

HollywoodChicago.com: What does the honor mean to you, given that it is from the Women in Film Chicago organization?

Mary Morten: I am so excited by this honor, and it's in my hometown, I'm a native Chicagoan. I am also thrilled by Women in Film Chicago, it's an organization that I always will be a fan of, and will contribute to.

HollywoodChicago.com: As an LGBTQ activist, what continues to be misunderstood about the community from outsiders, despite the tremendous strides that have occurred post the millennium?

Morten: I think we have to understand that some people in the community still do not have basic protections in the workplace. I may be able to get married now, but there are many states where there is no protection if you get fired because you are 'out' at work. We still have some work to do, and there are many intersectional issues, such as homelessness and immigration. We are part of all those communities, and we have to work in coalition with them.

HollywoodChicago.com: How does art, in your case as a writer and filmmaker, best help to translate and communicate community issues to a general audience, and what breakthroughs have occurred through your work – either to you or someone who fed back to you as an audience member?

Morten: I think a picture is worth a thousand words, and somebody came up to me after a screening once and said that they had issues with people from the LGBTQ community, but saw my film and understood that they couldn't feel that way anymore. It was a light bulb moment – if one person walks out of a screening and realizes a change in perspective, counter to what they felt before the screening, then that is extraordinary.

HollywoodChicago.com: We've recently experienced a backward movement in the transition from Barack Obama to Donald Trump, who seems like the epitome of the patriarchy. In the the push back to Trump, what have you seen that encourages you, and says we will survive him?

Morten: First off, as a person of color, this circumstance is not an unknown feeling. I'm a black lesbian, living in America, so you know... [laughs] We've been here before, and we will do just fine. We just have to come together in ways we haven't before, and work across the issues...not to think that one particular issue is ours and ours alone. We must be an ally to other people whose voices are not being heard, and we must stand up for them.

★ **Tari Segal, Cinematographer**

Tari Segal has Chicago roots embedded in her DNA. Her family ran the legendary Jazz Showcase Club, and she graduated with a Bachelors in Cinematography from the local Columbia College. Since moving to Los Angeles, she has worked on several feature films and TV shows, finding her way back to her hometown through her work as second Director of Photography and A-Cam operator for NBC-TV's "Chicago Justice." She also is a mentor in a program sponsored by OUTFEST and the Los Angeles LGBTQ community, teaching filmmaking skills to at-risk LGBTQ youth.



Cinematographer Tari Segal

Photo credit: Patrick McDonald for HollywoodChicago

HollywoodChicago.com: As a hometown Chicagoan, what does it mean to you to be honored by Women in Film Chicago?

Tari Segal: Well, when I left here to move to Los Angeles, I worked my butt off to get the opportunity to come back here and work. So it means a lot to me to be back here, in the city I grew up in, and to be honored through Women in Film Chicago.

HollywoodChicago.com: What did you learn being a camera operator that eventually made you a better cinematographer?

Segal: I learned from other DPs and mentors that the best place to be, when shooting on film, is right behind the camera lens. There is a lot of judging the lighting through the lens, and many times I end up operating that camera. From cinematographer Christopher Doyle, I learned that there is a dance between the DP and the camera, that makes it more organic.

HollywoodChicago.com: You mentioned film, but how does shooting on digital change the equation for a cinematographer?

Segal: I'm looking for something on set that will allow me to have room in post production, because if I don't control the image at the source, somebody else will do it afterward. It's different from film, because with film you already know what you're getting.

HollywoodChicago.com: You've been on all levels and types of sets. Is there something you observe or detect that tells you immediately what type of set it will be, or does it take awhile for an atmosphere to sink in?

Segal: It takes me awhile – because when I read a script I have my own ideas about how something will look – so I always bite my tongue and wait until I meet the director and hear what they are thinking. Collaboration and another mindset can really change things. So I bring my point of view, and we add them together, and it becomes something else.

HollywoodChicago.com: Since filmmaking is such a technical and collaborative art form, what still fills you with a sense of awe when something really works out, either as a camera operator or cinematographer?

Segal: I would have to say when people on the set are really working together, and there is no ego involved, and everything gels – people are really happy and that's when the best stuff happens. Usually it can be the grind of just working, but occasionally you get a group of people that really become family.

For more information about Women in Film Chicago, including upcoming panels, conferences and events, [click here](#). [24]



[25]

By [PATRICK McDONALD](#) [26]

Writer, Editorial Coordinator

HollywoodChicago.com

pat@hollywoodchicago.com [25]

© 2017 Patrick McDonald, HollywoodChicago.com

Source URL (retrieved on Dec 5 2021 - 4:20am):

<http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/27357/interviews-women-in-film-chicago-2017-focus-award-recipients>

Links:

- [1] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/users/hankq>
- [2] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/activism>
- [3] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/carrie-hunter>
- [4] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/ceo>
- [5] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/director-of-photography>
- [6] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/focus-awards>
- [7] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/harvey-keitel>
- [8] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/hollywoodchicagodotcom-content>
- [9] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/labels/interview.html>
- [10] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/it-s-pat>
- [11] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/julia-sweeney>
- [12] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/julie-smolyansky>
- [13] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/kefir>
- [14] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/lgbtq>
- [15] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/mary-morten>
- [16] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/patrick-mcdonald>
- [17] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/producer>
- [18] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/pulp-fiction>
- [19] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/quentin-tarantino>
- [20] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/saturday-night-live>
- [21] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/tari-segal>
- [22] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/women-in-film-chicago>
- [23]

<http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/27267/interview-producer-ceo-julie-smolyansky-2017-women-in-film-chicago-focus-awards-honoree>

[24] <http://www.wifchicago.net/>

[25] <mailto:pat@hollywoodchicago.com>

[26] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/about#PAT>