



PETRA KELLY - ACT NOW!



STUDY GUIDE

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Petra Kelly was a trailblazing political figure of the 20th century, co-founding the German Green Party in 1980 — the world's first green party to achieve prominence. A passionate advocate for peace, environmental protection, and human rights, she fought for radical social change and believed in the power of individuals to transform the world. Influenced by the American civil rights movement and Martin Luther King's concept of civil disobedience, she campaigned against uranium mining and stood in solidarity with peace movements worldwide. Through rare archival footage and personal accounts, the film portrays a visionary leader whose ideals continue to inspire today's climate activists. Her issues are today more topical than ever before.

Early Life

Petra Karin Kelly was born in Günzburg, Bavaria, Germany, in 1947 as Petra Karin Lehmann. Her parents were Marianne Margarete Birle and Richard Siegfried Lehmann. In 1954, her father abandoned the family. A few years later, her mother met an American army officer named John Kelly. The two were married, and Petra changed her last name to Kelly. While living in Germany, Kelly attended a Catholic girls' school.

In 1959, the family moved to Columbus, Georgia, in the United States after John Kelly was transferred there. Petra's half-sister, Grace Kelly, was also born that year. Petra Kelly attended public school in Columbus and later in Hampton, Virginia, after her stepfather was transferred there. She graduated from high school in 1966 and enrolled in American University in Washington, D.C. She campaigned for Robert F. Kennedy and Hubert H. Humphrey for the 1968 elections. In 1970 she graduated with a bachelor's degree in international relations.

Kelly moved back to Europe in 1970 and went to study at the University of Amsterdam. Her sister, Grace, died in 1970, at the age of ten. Kelly graduated from the University of Amsterdam in 1971 with a master's degree. After graduating, she worked at the European Economic Community in Brussels, an organization that worked to facilitate economic integration of its member states.

Activism

Throughout her life, Kelly was an outspoken activist for many different causes including peace, nuclear disarmament, environmental protection, women's rights, and indigenous rights. She used peaceful protest methods such as civil disobedience, which is the refusal to obey certain laws or government commands, with the goal of provoking change. Civil disobedience was widely used in the American civil rights movement.

In 1982, Kelly was awarded the Right Livelihood Award, which is also referred to as the Alternative Noble Peace Prize. When she accepted the award she said, "If the governments do not take these first steps [to disarm], we shall take these first steps for them! We must work towards a disarmament race."

In 1984, Kelly's book, *Fighting for Hope*, was published. This book is described as "An urgent call for a world free from violence between North and South, men and women, ourselves and our environment." Kelly also wrote *Nonviolence Speaks to Power* (1992). In 1983 was named "Woman of the Year" by a group called Women Strike for Peace, which was based in Philadelphia.

The German Green Party

Kelly was a co-founder of the German Green Party, an environmentalist political party that was founded in 1979. According to Right Livelihood, Kelly described the Green Party as, “A non-violent ecological and basic-democratic anti-war coalition of parliamentary and extra-parliamentary grassroots oriented forces.” In 1983 she was elected to the Bundestag, which is Germany’s federal parliament. Members are directly elected by the German population and serve a term of four years. She was re-elected in 1987.

In addition to her involvement in parliament, she was an outspoken activist for causes in many other parts of the world. According to the Environment and Society Portal, “She became increasingly active in shaping green politics as an international project. With the resources of an MP at her disposal, Kelly traveled the world ceaselessly in the 1980s, participating in protest campaigns, making speeches, and building connections with activists.” After the Green Party lost their seats in 1990, Kelly continued her international activism. The Environment and Society Portal states, “Together with her partner . . . Gert Bastian, Kelly traveled in 1991 alone to the UK, India, Switzerland, Tibet, the United States, Austria, and Mexico. Among other topics, she spoke frequently of the challenges facing the international peace movement after the end of the Cold War and of her concerns about a resurgence of nationalism in reunified Germany.”

LaRouche Movement

The LaRouche movement was a political movement started by Lyndon LaRouche, an American political activist who was born in 1922. Early in his political career, LaRouche’s beliefs were on the far left, however, they later moved to the far right. Critics have likened his following to a cult and maintain that he perpetuated many conspiracy theories. In 1987 he was convicted of taking more than \$30 million in loans from his supporters and deliberately defaulting, and he served time in a federal prison. LaRouche ran for president eight times. He died in 2019 at 96 years of age.

Gert Bastian

Gert Bastian was born in Munich, Germany, in 1923, and was more than twenty years older than Kelly. He was a retired military officer and politician. He was married.

Death

Kelly died in 1992, at the age of forty-four. She was found shot to death in the house that she shared with Bastian in Bonn. Bastian was shot dead too. They were discovered on October 19, after a relative reported that they had not heard from Bastian or Kelly in some time. However, the couple were believed to have died on October 1. According to news reports, Kelly had sent her grandmother a package on September 30, and Bastian had started to write a letter on his typewriter on October 1, but stopped part way through. The electric typewriter was still on when police entered the house. Kelly was found in her bed and had been shot in the head. An open book lay nearby. Bastian was lying outside the bedroom, also shot.

One journalist describes what police found: “When the police climbed the stairs at the back of the house, they came across Bastian’s lifeless body sprawled in the narrow hallway leading to the bedroom. A pistol lay beside the 69-year-old former army general. It was Bastian’s .38caliber derringer special, a gun which holds only two bullets. One of these had been shot downward into the middle of Bastian’s forehead, killing him instantly. The fate of the other bullet became clear when the police proceeded to the bedroom. It

had been fired, from a distance of no more than two inches, into the left temple of Petra Kelly while she lay in bed. She, too, died instantly.”

Most people believe that Kelly was shot by Bastian, who then shot himself. However, some people question whether it really was a murder-suicide, or if something else happened. Because the bodies were not discovered for so long, they were badly decomposed, which made it more difficult to understand what had happened.

Discussion Questions

1. What are some of the factors that contributed to Kelly’s pacifism, as shown in the film?
2. How do you think the U.S. civil rights movement influenced Kelly?
3. One of the women in the film argues that Kelly’s legacy comes from the seeds she planted in the world. What do you think some of the seeds were?
4. The film argues that women who raise issues of power attract aggression. Why do you think this might be the case?
5. Why do you think people were inspired by Kelly?
6. Why do you think some people disliked Kelly?
7. How did Kelly give hope to the Lakota people, as explained in the film?
8. The film mentions Kelly’s authenticity. How do you think this affected her relationships and her career?
9. How is the relationship that people have to the earth central to how they treat each other, as argued in the film?

Additional Resources

- Environment and Society Portal, “Petra Kelly Timeline.”
<https://www.environmentandsociety.org/exhibitions/petra-kelly/timeline/petra-kelly-timeline>
- Petra Karn Kelly, *Fighting for Hope*. Boston, MA: South End Press, 1984
- New York Times, “Founder of Green Party Dies Mysteriously in Bonn,” October 20, 1992.
<https://www.nytimes.com/1992/10/20/world/founder-of-green-party-dies-mysteriously-in-bonn.html>
- Sara Parkin, *The Life and Death of Petra Kelly*. London: Pandora, 1994.
- Right Livelihood, “Acceptance Speech—Petra Kelly.”
<https://rightlivelihood.org/speech/acceptance-speech-petra-kelly/>
- Right Livelihood, “Petra Kelly.”
<https://rightlivelihood.org/the-change-makers/find-a-laureate/petra-kelly/>

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