

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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*Pressroom for more information and/or downloadable images:*

*www.itvs.org/pressroom/photos*

*Program companion website: www.pbs.org/sunsetstory*



**INDEPENDENT LENS's "SUNSET STORY"  
FUNNY AND FEISTY DOCUMENTARY ABOUT  
GROWING OLD IN A RETIREMENT HOME FOR  
POLITICAL PROGRESSIVES**

**Film to Premiere on "Independent Lens" the Emmy Award-winning Series on PBS Hosted By Susan Sarandon**

**Tuesday, March 22, 2005 at 10:00 P.M. (check local listings)**

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*"A pitch-perfect paean to friends. SUNSET STORY has such an abundance of wisdom and courage, and plenty of warmth and humor, that it lingers in the heart long after it's over."*

— Kevin Thomas, Los Angeles Times

(San Francisco) — **SUNSET STORY** is a funny and intimate documentary drama that will make viewers think differently about growing old. Set against the backdrop of a retirement home for political progressives, the film goes inside the world of two women, Irja (81) and Lucille (95), whose feisty engagement with life inextricably draws them together. **SUNSET STORY** will be broadcast on *Independent Lens* on Tuesday, March 22, 2005 at 10:00 P.M. (check local listings).

Deep in the heart of central Los Angeles, in a neighborhood bustling with immigrant Latino and Korean families, lies a fascinating anomaly. A "retirement home for free-thinking elderly," founded in 1923, Sunset Hall integrates aging with progressive activism, giving residents the opportunity to engage daily with causes they hold dear. The library, overflowing with books and adorned with a bust of Lenin and a portrait of Paul Robeson, is the site of many a heated debate. Bingo, dismissed by one resident as "a ridiculous

game," is categorically rejected.

Yet, as their bodies and minds deteriorate, the 25 Sunset Hall residents, aged 65 to 101, struggle to participate in these lively activities. In the midst of a lecture, discussion or meal, many will doze or stare off into space; others will insert non-sequiturs or belligerent remarks; still others remain in the common living room, glued to the television.



Irja Lloyd and Lucille Alpert, the most lucid residents of Sunset Hall, are different. Like their fellow residents, they wrestle daily with the obstacles of aging. However, their friendship, in their words, has "saved both of our lives." Having moved into Sunset Hall within weeks of one another, they formed an

unbreakable bond. They are symbiotic—socially, intellectually and physically. To be assured of stimulating conversation and emotional sanity, the two sit together at every meal and every meeting. One cannot move about without the other. At 95, Lucille needs help in order to walk, so she braces herself against the back of 81-year-old Irja's wheelchair, and simultaneously propels Irja's chair forward.

The film follows Irja and Lucille for a period of several months as they venture out for manicures, political protests and meals at their favorite deli. Meanwhile, at Sunset Hall, they are among the few who speak up during political discussions and the only ones alert enough to care about the appalling menu offerings. In private, they air their frustrations about fellow residents and debate a fitting observance of the upcoming Jewish holidays from disparate perspectives—as a Finnish Unitarian (Irja) and an assimilated Jew (Lucille). Then, when Lucille receives a terminal cancer diagnosis, Irja must confront the possibility of losing her lifeline.



Lucille and Irja explode familiar stereotypes of doddering "old ladies." Sharp-witted, up-to-date and often provocative, the two are not afraid to weigh in with opinions on men, sex, gender roles and social attitudes toward the elderly. They operate as a classic comic team, an odd couple, with Irja playing the "straight man," the eternal idealist and Lucille, the irreverent skeptic, cracking ironic dry jokes.

In a society in which the elderly are isolated and discarded as "unpleasant" reminders of the aging process, Irja and Lucille are surprising with their vitality and their quest for meaning and connection. **SUNSET STORY** allows viewers to laugh with, and at quirky elderly characters; it links us into a world never thought relevant and ends up hitting home with unexpected urgency and emotion.

Additional information and/or downloadable photographs from **SUNSET STORY** are available at [www.itvs.org/pressroom/photos](http://www.itvs.org/pressroom/photos).

The companion website for **SUNSET STORY** features detailed information about the film, including exclusive filmmaker Q&A interviews, filmmaker and cast bios and Learn More links and resources pertaining to the films' subject matter. The site will also feature video previews and a Talkback section for viewers to share their ideas

and opinions.

### On Air Participants

#### LUCILLE ALPERT

A native of Chicago, Lucille graduated from the University of Chicago and worked as a social worker her entire professional life, retiring at age 76. Lucille's husband died when their son was a baby and she never remarried. She was a left-leaning news-junkie and happy to supply witty, opinionated commentary on any topic of the day until the day she died.

#### IRJA LLOYD

Irja Lloyd, the daughter of Finnish immigrants, grew up poor in Avon, Connecticut. Her first exposure to activism was through her father, who organized the laborers of their local steel factory. In Irja's words, living through the Depression made her almost revolutionary—she was engaged with politics and activism her entire life — both for the special education students she taught and for all the other causes she held dear. After retiring at age 76, she had even more time for organizing and was a beloved member and leader of the Sunset Hall community. Irja passed away in August of 2003 at age 83.

### SUNSET STORY Credits

PRODUCER/DIRECTOR DIRECTOR, PRODUCER:

PRODUCERS:

EDITOR:

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY:

COMPOSER:

LAURA GABBERT

CAROLINE LIBRESCO

EDEN WURMFELD

WILLIAM HAUGSE

SHANA HAGAN

PETER GOLUB

### AWARDS

WINNER, AUDIENCE AWARD, 2003 IFP/LOS ANGELES FILM FESTIVAL

SPECIAL JURY AWARD, 2003 TRIBECA FILM FESTIVAL

SPECIAL JURY AWARD, 2004 MIAMI INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

WINNER, BEST DOCUMENTARY, 2004 AGEN (FRANCE) FILM FESTIVAL

WINNER, BEST DOCUMENTARY, 2004 FARMINGTON COMEDY FILM FESTIVAL

### ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

#### LAURA GABBERT (Director, Producer)

While in graduate school at UCLA's School of Theater, Film and Television, Gabbert produced and directed the hour-long documentary, *The Healers of 400 Parnassus*. *Healers* aired on PBS, was distributed worldwide by Films Transit and won a 1997 National Educational Media Silver Apple Award. Gabbert also associate produced the ITVS feature *TARANTELLA*, starring Mira Sorvino. She produced the Joyce Carol Oates adaptation feature film, *Getting to Know You* (1999 Sundance and Venice Film Festivals), which premiered at the Film Forum in 2000 and had a limited theatrical run. Most recently she directed and produced the critically acclaimed, feature length documentary **SUNSET STORY**, which premiered at the 2003 Tribeca Film Festival (Special Jury Award) and won the Audience Award at the 2003 IFP/Los Angeles Film Festival She is currently co-writing and producing a second Joyce Carol Oates adaptation, *Love My Way*, and producing the feature film *Chinese Baby*, starring Megan Mullally. Gabbert is also developing **SUNSET STORY** into a narrative project.

**CAROLINE LIBRESCO** (Producer)

Caroline Libresco is feature film programmer for the Sundance Film Festival, where she coordinates the World Cinema program. Prior to joining Sundance, she was a programming and communications specialist for the Independent Television Service (ITVS). She was also associate director of the San Francisco Jewish Film Festival, senior publicist for the San Francisco International Film Festival and development director at U.C. Berkeley and the Library Foundation of San Francisco. She co-wrote and produced the gritty independent feature *Fanci's Persuasion* (directed by Charles Herman-Wurmfeld). She also produced *Barrier Device*, an award-winning featurette starring Sandra Oh. Libresco is currently developing a documentary on the life and times of Detroit activist, Grace Lee Boggs.

**EDEN H. WURMFELD** (Producer)

Eden began her feature producing career in 1994 on her brother Charles Herman-Wurmfeld's experimental feature *Fanci's Persuasion*. From there she served as production manager on Doug Liman's directorial debut *Swingers*, released nationwide by Miramax in 1996 and went on to collaborate with Liman on *See Jane Run*. She is best known for producing the indie hit *Kissing Jessica Stein*, distributed in 2002 by Fox Searchlight. After its successful release, she was named one of *Variety's* "10 Producers to Watch" and was also a finalist for the IFP's Indie Spirit Motorola Producers Award. She was awarded UCLA Film School's Alumni Association Award in 2003. She is producing the family drama *Son of A G-Man*, written and to be directed by Will Geiger (Ocean Tribe) and Adam Corrolla's film debut *The Hammer*. Lastly, she and her brother Charles Herman-Wurmfeld are developing a half-hour comedy pilot with Brillstein Grey called *Bringing Up Mom*. Wurfeld co-authored *The IFP West Independent Filmmaker's Manual* (Focal Press), a "cookbook" on how to make an independent film.

**WILLIAM HAUGSE** (A.C.E., Editor)

William Haugse A.C.E. has been nominated for both an Oscar (for *Hoop Dreams*) and an Emmy (for *The Last Days of Kennedy and King*) and has received the American Cinema Editors Eddie Award among many other prizes. His credits also include scores of shorter films as director and editor, including his short feature *Breakfast in Bed*, starring John Ritter, which garnered several festival awards. He worked with Orson Welles and John Cassavetes editing shorter films, including making trailers for their films *F For Fake* and *Opening Night*. Other editing work includes the Universal feature *Cattle Annie and Little Britches* featuring Rod Steiger and Diane Lane and *Paul's Case* starring Eric Roberts. Recent work includes *Stevie*, directed by Steve James and *American Coup d'Etat*, about the 2000 Florida presidential election, for Robert Greenwald. He is currently editing a PBS program about feudal Japan.

**SHANA HAGAN** (Director of Photography)

Shana Hagan has photographed over 30 documentary and narrative films, shot countless hours of documentary and reality-based television programs, and has worked with such distinguished filmmakers as Michael Apted and Jessica Yu. Hagan's work includes *Breathing Lessons*, which won Best Documentary Short at the 1997 Academy Awards, an IDA award and an Emmy. Hagan also shot the award-winning documentary *Homeland*, a film about four Lakota families living on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota. *Homeland* received several critical mentions for its cinematography. Hagan's recent work includes *Close to Home*, a look at survivors of child sexual abuse, which was in Documentary Competition at Sundance in 2002, and *SHAKE-SPEARE BEHIND BARS*, a year in the lives of a Shakespeare acting company comprised of inmates at a Kentucky prison. Credits also include *The Living Museum* for HBO, *Georgia O'Keeffe* for A&E and two National Geographic Specials. Hagan also shot the feature film *Indemnity* and *Better Late*, a short narrative that played at the 1997 Sundance Film Festival.

## **PETER GOLUB** (Composer)

Recent film credits include the Emmy-nominated *The Laramie Project* (HBO), *Speakeasy* (Miramax/Project Greenlight), *U.S. Seals* (Nu Image) and independent films such as *Night Of The Wolf*, *Play Dead* and *Straight Right*. Theatre credits include: *Hedda Gabler* (Broadway), *Betty's Summer Vacation* (Playwright's Horizon), *The Idiots Karamazov* (American Repertory Theatre) and *Camino Reale* (Williamstown Theatre Festival). Golub's musical, *Amphigorey, with words and designs* by Edward Gorey was nominated for the Drama Desk Award. He is the director of the Sundance Film Music Program.

## **ABOUT INDEPENDENT LENS**

*Independent Lens* is an Emmy Award-winning weekly series airing Tuesday nights at 10 P.M. on PBS. Hosted by Susan Sarandon, the acclaimed anthology series features documentaries and a limited number of fiction films united by the creative freedom, artistic achievement and unflinching visions of their independent producers. *Independent Lens* features unforgettable stories about a unique individual, community or moment in history, which prompted Nancy Franklin to write in *The New Yorker*: "Watching *Independent Lens*... is like going into an independent bookstore—you don't always find what you were looking for but you often find something you didn't even know you wanted." Presented by ITVS, the series is supported by interactive companion websites, and national publicity and community outreach campaigns. Further information about the series is available at [www.pbs.org/independentlens](http://www.pbs.org/independentlens). *Independent Lens* is jointly curated by ITVS and PBS, and is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), a private corporation funded by the American people, with additional funding provided by PBS and the National Endowment for the Arts.

## **ABOUT ITVS**

Independent Television Service (ITVS) funds and presents award-winning documentaries and dramas on public television, innovative new media projects on the Web and the Emmy Award-winning weekly series *Independent Lens* on Tuesday nights at 10 P.M. on PBS. ITVS is a miracle of public policy created by media activists, citizens and politicians seeking to foster plurality and diversity in public television. ITVS was established by a historic mandate of Congress to champion independently produced programs that take creative risks, spark public dialogue and serve underserved audiences. Since its inception in 1991, ITVS programs have revitalized the relationship between the public and public television, bringing TV audiences face-to-face with the lives and concerns of their fellow Americans. More information about ITVS can be obtained by visiting [www.itvs.org](http://www.itvs.org). ITVS is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, a private corporation funded by the American People.

**ABOUT PBS** PBS is a private, nonprofit media enterprise that serves the nation's 349 public noncommercial television stations, reaching nearly 90 million people each week. Bringing diverse viewpoints to television and the Internet, PBS provides high-quality documentary and dramatic entertainment, and consistently dominates the most prestigious award competitions. PBS is the leading provider of educational materials for K-12 teachers, and offers a broad array of educational services for adult learners. PBS' premier kids' TV programming and Web site, PBS KIDS Online ([pbskids.org](http://pbskids.org)), continue to be parents' and teachers' most trusted learning environments for children. More information about PBS is available at [pbs.org](http://pbs.org), the leading dot-org Web site on the Internet. PBS is headquartered in Alexandria, Virginia.



ITVS is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, a private corporation funded by the American People.

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