

Petra Kelly

By Josh Kamrar

Personal Reflection

When I was assigned Petra Kelly I had no idea who she was. I discovered she was an amazing woman who had a profound effect on the world. By researching Kelly I gained a deeper understanding of the unification of Germany and the political influence she was able to garner for women's issues, the environment and no nuclear power or weapons. I was impressed by the energy she seemed to have and the way in which she was able to impressively articulate herself.

Biography

Petra Kelly was one of the world's foremost and well known environmental activists in the last twenty years. Her contributions to both her country, Germany and the world were wide-ranging. She championed for the environment, changed long-standing German policies, encouraged non-violence protest and was one of the foremost objectors to any form of nuclear power or weapons. She represented these issues from both, her seat in the German Parliament and through many grass roots organizations.

Born in Germany in 1947, Petra Kelly moved to the United States in her childhood and attended American University in Washington D.C. and received a degree in political science. During her time at the American University she had a regular correspondence with Vice-President Hubert Humphrey. She then began her foray in to politics when organized "International Week" at American University and worked on the 1968 presidential campaigns of both Robert Kennedy and Vice-President Humphrey. In 1970 Kelly left the American University and returned to Germany. It was in this arena in which Kelly would excel and leave an indubitable mark.

When Kelly returned to Germany in 1970 she became a Social democrat and went to work at the General Secretariat of the European Commission (EC). After two years at the EC Kelly moved to an administrative post at the Economic and Social Committee (EcoSoc) which had women in only six percent of all administrative posts¹. From her post she championed for women's rights; drawing attention to the lack of female representation in the EC and felt, "no matter how successful a woman becomes or is, there is still a man looking over her shoulders putting his paw marks on something...we are still stuck with a set of attitudes that are like a brick wall."²

Kelly then turned to the issue of the environment. She believed fifty years of industrial pollution had reduced Eastern European environment to a wasteland³. Her own sister had died of cancer which brought Kelly's attention to the dangers of both chemical and nuclear radiation. Kelly became a board member of the Grassroots organization Bundesverband Burgerinitiativen Umweltschutz (BBU) which lobbied the German Parliament. The BBU's stance was "Protection of the environment today means more than eliminating or moderating some of the worst effects of the industrial system...our goal is a more just, a freer and a more human social order."⁴ It was the ideals of the BBU which spawned the creation of the German Green Party.

Kelly became disillusioned with the German Social Democrats and in 1978 she created the "anti-party" party in the German Green Party. One of her co-founders was her lover Gert Bastain. Four years later the German Green party was able to receive over one million votes in the first national elections in which they participated in 1982. It was this platform from which allowed her to make an impact in all things which she became involved.

In her first speech to the Bundestag, the German Parliament, she discussed the environment, nuclear power and women's role in society. This speech outlined the issues Kelly

¹ Parkin, Sara. *The Life and Death of Petra Kelly*. London: HarperCollins, 1994. Pg. 70

² Parkin. *The Life and Death of Petra Kelly*. Pg. 71

³ Breton. *Women Pioneers for the Environment*. Pg. 226

⁴ Parkin. *The Life and Death of Petra Kelly*. Pg. 86

would tackle in her time in the German Parliament. The Green party championed many environmental issues in the German Parliament, this resulted in Germany becoming one of the most environmentally conscious countries of all industrial nations. She promoted the use of ecological and organic farming as opposed to industrialized farming and looked to have many pesticides banned. Kelly led a staunch opposition against nuclear power and weapons due to the effect they had on the environment. She challenged masculine behavior as soon as she became a member of the German Parliament. She quickly attacked the male domination of the Bundestag, even getting the microphones in the Bundestag to be retuned when a woman was speaking. She felt women's issues and rights had "been pushed into the background, hidden away and suppressed"⁵

Kelly believed it was a women's duty to rise against violence that masculine society perpetrates. She believed change could occur with the implementation of non-violent protest. These protests followed in the footsteps of her heroes such as, Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr. and the Dali Lama. It was this civil disobedience which Kelly felt would allow grass roots organizations to further their political agenda. Kelly encouraged this civil disobedience and often would participate in these actions. She used the German Green party to organize non-violent protest of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) decision to deploy cruise missiles, capable of carrying nuclear warheads. In November of 1986 Kelly and several others were arrested for a sit-in to protest the deployment of nuclear warheads to Hasselbach. When they were arrested the police called her actions "reprehensible"⁶. Her actions led the police to refer to her as "an endangered person"⁷.

This was not the first time in which Kelly spoke out against nuclear weapons. The non-proliferation of nuclear arms and universal peace were two things in which she campaigned for both in German Parliament and throughout grass roots organizations. Before joining the German Parliament Kelly used the European commission to speak throughout Europe and Australia against nuclear power. She was a powerful speaker who was able to reach many people; she coined the phrase "It will be a great day when our schools get all the money they need and the air force has to hold a bake sale to buy a bomber."⁸ She stepped into the international spot light when she spoke at a peace rally with a quarter million people in Bonn in 1981. After the formation of the German Green Party Kelly and Bastian led the Green Party in demanding for "the abolition of all weapons of mass destruction."⁹ She personally felt "the nuclear arms race is in large part underwritten by masculine behavior."¹⁰ She called upon women everywhere to speak out against all kinds violence.¹¹

She continued to push forward the Green environmental agenda until 1989 when she embarked on what was to be one of her greatest accomplishments: to see free elections throughout eastern Europe and an unified Germany. The Green party supported the eastern European countries which were breaking free of the Soviet Iron Curtain. She was able to meet with East German President Erich Honecker about the imprisonment of non-violent protestors. As a member of the German Parliament Kelly was allowed to pass freely between East and West Germany. This allowed her to bring supplies to grass roots organizations which were trying to break from behind the Iron Curtain. This was Kelly's ideal type of revolution, "a true non-violent revolution taking place in the streets – it is colorful, creative, happy, friendly and soft revolution."¹² Her support ran too all eastern European countries this led to Kelly being invited to Czechoslovakia's first free elections.

Three years after watching the transformation of Europe Petra Kelly was murdered by her long time companion Gert Bastain. Bastain shot Kelly from point blank range in the head and then turned the gun on to himself. In an instant the woman Time Magazine dubbed as "the

⁵ Kelly, Petra. *Fighting for Hope*. London: The Hogarth Press, 1984. Pg. 72

⁶ Breton. *Women Pioneers for the Environment*. Pg. 225

⁷ Breton. *Women Pioneers for the Environment*. Pg. 223

⁸ Parkin. *The Life and Death of Petra Kelly*. Pg. 71

⁹ Kelly. *Fighting for Hope*. Pg. 20

¹⁰ Kelly. *Fighting for Hope*. Pg. 38

¹¹ Kelly. *Fighting for Hope*. Pg. 74

¹² Parkin. *The Life and Death of Petra Kelly*. Pg. 142

world's best known environmentalist¹³ was dead. Despite the violent cat that ended her life, her legacy lives on through a democracy in Czechoslovakia, the German unification, and her commitment to non-violent protest.

Bibliography

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Timeline

Nov. 27, 1947 - Petra Kelly is born.

Dec. 1951 - Moves to the United States of America.

Aug. 1966 - Enrolls at American University.

Fall 1968 - Works on Herbert Humphrey's and Robert Kennedy's presidential campaigns.

Oct. 1971 - Gets a job at the EC.

Fall 1977 - Is named to the board of the BBU.

Oct. 1978 - Forms the German Green Party.

Nov. 1980 - Meets Gert Bastian.

March 1983 - Is elected and gives first speech in the Bundestag.

Jan. 1988 - Meets with Erich Honeker.

Nov. 1989- Berlin Wall is breached

Oct. 1990 - Germany is unified

Oct. 1992 - Petra Kelly is murdered

¹³ Breton. *Women Pioneers for the Environment*. Pg. 229