

ATOMIC MOM

A DOCUMENTARY BY M.T. SILVIA

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Smartgirl Productions, along with the *San Francisco Film Arts Foundation* (fiscal sponsor), is producing *Atomic Mom*, a documentary portrait of an independent and strong woman, Pauline Silvia, whose ambition to do cutting-edge scientific research led her to conduct experiments that would haunt her many years later. In the 1950's, Pauline worked in the Navy as a biologist in the Atomic Testing program conducted at the Nevada Test Site.

"Operation Upshot-Knothole", a series of 11 detonations, was designed to glean information about weaponry, firing procedure, radiological damage, and civil defense. Pauline witnessed, firsthand, these atomic detonations, and tells stories of feeling the blasts from a so-called safe distance and then going into ground zero to collect mice, the biological samples she would use for her research experiments.

Pauline is as much a woman of science as she is a woman of faith. In a late life crisis of conscience, she renewed a commitment to her faith and became active in her church community. She has now decided to break her decades long silence with her daughter, filmmaker M.T. Silvia and share her complex feelings about her work--work that included testing with dogs. This mother and daughter's personal journey takes them back to the site of the crater-littered Nevada desert near where the tests took place and to the abandoned Radiological Defense Laboratory in San Francisco's Hunters Point. The filmmaker travels to Hiroshima where the atomic bomb was first used and meets a survivor, also a mother with a daughter, who offers more than an olive branch to Pauline. Through this exchange, a remarkably potent message of peace is beautifully realized. Audiences will experience how atomic energy impacted many of those who created it, worked on it, and those who were destroyed by its use.



Atomic Mom is a compelling portrait of an insider involved in the research and testing of the most destructive technology of the twentieth century, much of it done in Las Vegas's backyard. With intelligence, compassion, and forgiveness, filmmaker M.T. Silvia trains the camera on her mother in an effort to tease out the truth about Pauline's deeply conflicted emotions. What emerges from this mother-daughter t te- -t te is a stunning revelation of a scientist's work during the Cold War, and a rigorous questioning of the ethical and moral questions that are raised by science and technology. The film will be an important tool that will provoke public discussion and an exchange of views on the legacy of the Atomic Bomb on the world, on our nation, and on our personal lives.