



A documentary by Emmy® award-winning filmmaker
Gayle Kirschenbaum

LookAtUsNowMother.com

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Synopsis

What trauma could make a child certain that she was born into the wrong family? What wounds are inflicted when the home that's supposed to be a haven isolates her as an outsider; when her mother's words are rarely nurturing but instead, ruthlessly shaming, demeaning and critical? What will it take for the adult that child becomes to forgive such a past? Is forgiveness even possible?

This is the dilemma that Emmy® award-winning filmmaker Gayle Kirschenbaum faces in her relentlessly honest and biting funny documentary, *LOOK AT US NOW, MOTHER!* Comprised primarily of decades-worth of intimate family home movies and videos that were never meant for public viewing—from 8 mm film coverage of Gayle's outwardly "Leave it to Beaver-esque" childhood in an upwardly-mobile Long Island suburb, to personal family celebrations, fights, and even tragedies right up to the present—it's the story of one determined woman's quest to reconcile with and understand her past, which means forgiving her proud, narcissistic and formidable elderly mother, Mildred.

With raw courage and equal parts humor and pathos, Gayle invites the audience to take this epic journey along with her—an odyssey of discovery with no bump in the road edited out. Gayle is determined to unlock the key to her family's pain and crack open her mother's brittle shell. When Mildred grudgingly agrees to participate in the process, the two of them uncover shocking family secrets and long-buried suffering that throw their family history into sharp relief, and begin to shift the dynamics of their complex relationship.

The specter of loss haunts the film almost as strongly as the pain of criticism: Mildred's still a powerhouse well into her ninth decade, but Gayle knows her mother won't be around forever. Can she learn to understand, love and forgive her mother—before it's too late?

Look At Us Now Mother! may be about one mother-daughter relationship, but its insights and lessons are universal. In order to move forward into the future, we all have to forgive what happened in our pasts. Understanding is the first step in that journey. Gayle Kirschenbaum brings her unique brand of fearless honesty and laugh-aloud humor to a film that took decades to shoot, about a relationship that took a lifetime to mend.



A film by **Gayle Kirschenbaum**

Director's Statement

I never expected to make such a deeply personal film. I had spent most of my career behind the camera telling other people's stories, but it soon became apparent that the highly charged relationship I had with my mother and its transformation from hate to love was a story I had to tell.

I grew up with a mom who wanted me to behave and look a certain way. One of the many things she wanted to change about me was my nose. She always said that my nose looked like the Indian on the Buffalo Nickel—anyone remember that coin? I ended up making an award-winning short film, *MY NOSE*, about her never ending quest to bob my “schnozzola”. But I was surprised by the overwhelming response. People wondered how I even spoke to my mom, never mind being close friends with her today. After each screening, the audience would line up to share their experiences with me. I soon found myself coaching people on how to deal with a critical parent. I knew then I was given a mission to help others—to teach people how to forgive. I would need to delve deeper though, and make a film about my life and my own journey of healing.

I knew I needed my mom to take this journey with me and was confident she would once I saw her response to the press on *MY NOSE*. The Washington Post wrote “If you have a mother like Gayle Kirschenbaum you better get yourself into psychoanalysis.” Mom’s snappy response was, “Bad press is better than no press. I’m on the cover the Washington Post!”

So with an agreeable, healthy, smart, quit-witted, in your face, “geriatric shock-jock” of a mother onboard, *LOOK AT US NOW, MOTHER!* was conceived and production began.

Why did I grow up being treated so differently from my siblings—my two older brothers—that I was convinced I was adopted? Why was I the black sheep? I had all that I needed to head out on this quest: my passion to tell stories and uncover the truth, a willing participant (my mother), and a huge archive of family photos and 8 mm footage. But as I began to interview my mother on camera, she was repeatedly dismissive with her answers and often changed them depending on her mood. As she grew tired of my relentless questioning her go-to response was, “Why don’t you just water board me and I will confess.” As I grew tired of not getting responses, I knew I needed help. With mom’s agreement, and camera crew in tow, we turned to the professionals. Family secrets were uncovered. I discovered close, nonagenarian family members who were alive and well that I never knew existed, and arranged a mini family reunion with mom. When I asked her first cousin—a smart woman, but not glamorous like my mother—if she was close to mom when they were young, she shared, “No, your mother was stuck up!” I could have told you that, I thought to myself.

I knew that I was not going to give up, or edit out content no matter how personal and revealing it was. I was committed to making an honest, uncensored film and was ready to share my insecurities, struggles and self—warts and all. It is the most complicated and emotionally charged film I have ever done and the most important. This is my story but it also could be your story; laugh a little, cry a little, and discover that forgiveness is possible even when it seems unlikely.

Look ^{at Us} Now, Mother!

A film by **Gayle Kirschenbaum**

Principal Characters

Gayle Kirschenbaum

Gayle bares the truth about her relationship with her mother in her first feature film. Throughout her journey, she is not only a filmmaker but an investigator, searching back through years of family history to discover who the Kirschenbaum's really are, and why she was treated like an outsider in her own family. Though the film shows us various sides of Gayle—artist, producer, personality—at its heart, she is a daughter looking to heal her own pain and forgive those that abused her.



Mildred Kirschenbaum

“What’s on her lung is on her tongue” is how friends describe the formidable Mildred who never holds back from saying what’s on her mind. One part outgoing bon vivant, and one part “Mommie Dearest,” Mildred is sometimes unlikable, sometimes sympathetic, and always incredibly entertaining.

Though in her senior years, living peacefully in Boca Raton, Florida, the film travels back through time, exploring her own traumatic youth and early adulthood as a wife and mother.

Look *at Us* Now, Mother!

A film by **Gayle Kirschenbaum**

Crew and Support

Written and directed by
GAYLE KIRSCHENBAUM

Produced by
GAYLE KIRSCHENBAUM p.g.a.

Edited by
ALEX KEIPPER
GAYLE KIRSCHENBAUM

Original music by
JONATHAN SACKS

Cinematography
STEVEN GLADSTONE
GAYLE KIRSCHENBAUM

Co-Producer
MELISSA JO PELTIER

Editing Consultant
DAVID ZIEFF

Associate Producer
KIRSTEN LARVICK

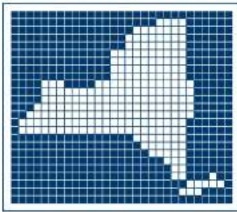
Consulting Producers
LORI CHEATLE
MARK MORI

Music Supervisor
DON DINICOLA

Online Editor/Colorist
STEVE PEQUIGNOT

Sound Design, Edit and Mix
QUENTIN CHIAPPETTA

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Look at Us Now, Mother!

A film by **Gayle Kirschenbaum**

Biographies



GAYLE KIRSCHENBAUM - Writer, Director, Producer, Editor

Gayle Kirschenbaum is an Emmy® award-winning filmmaker, television producer and speaker. Called the “Nora Ephron of documentaries,” with her trademark self-deprecating humor, Gayle now turns the camera on herself. Her documentary, LOOK AT US NOW, MOTHER! is about the transformation of a highly charged mother/daughter relationship from Mommie Dearest to Dear Mom, from hatred to love. This is the larger version of her funny award-winning festival favorite film, MY NOSE, in which we follow her mother’s relentless campaign to get her to have a nose job. Gayle turned the film's lessons into an insightful seminar, featuring "The Seven Healing Tools" for dealing with difficult people.

She created and Executive Produced several “little people” shows for TLC and Discovery Health. Kirschenbaum made a poignant and wacky film with her dog about the human/canine bond called A DOG'S LIFE: A DOGAMENTARY, which premiered on HBO. She co-created the show JUDGMENT DAY: SHOULD THE GUILTY GO FREE that premiered on HBO. Gayle worked in television producing several programs including AMERICA'S MOST WANTED and INTIMATE PORTRAITS.

Gayle founded and runs Writers on the Hudson. Kirschenbaum is a member of the Producers Guild of America, NYWIFT, Film Fatales, the National Speakers Association, and is a judge for the Emmys®. She has been featured in the media including The New York Times, NBC’s Today Show, CBS’s Early Show, Fox TV, Oxygen TV, the Ladies Home Journal, Washington Post, O Magazine, CBC Radio, and BBC radio.



MELISSA JO PELTIER - Co-Producer

Melissa has been honored for her film and television writing, producing and directing with two Emmys® and more than fifty other awards and nominations. An executive producer of the Emmy® nominated and People's Choice winning reality series DOG WHISPERER WITH CESAR MILLAN, she has co-authored five New York Times best-selling books with its star. Melissa was a co-founder of Burbank-based MPH Entertainment, Inc, which during her tenure created over 350 hours of original non-fiction and reality programming. She is now Vice President of Production for the New York based indie film outfit, Ovington Avenue Productions (White Irish Drinkers), and the author of the indie novel, Reality Boulevard (Kirkus Review "Best of 2013")

Look *at Us* Now, Mother!

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Biographies



JONATHAN SACKS - Composer

Jonathan Sacks has composed music for the concert hall and theater and makes a living orchestrating film scores. Mr. Sacks' concert works have been performed and recorded, including *Portals*, for clarinet and large orchestra (recorded by Richard Stoltzman, and the Warsaw Philharmonic, conducted by Carl St. Clair) and *Sagittarius Rising* for large orchestra. As composer for the theatre he has composed music for *Hamlet*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Cymbeline*, *A Christmas Carol*, etc., working with such theaters as the San Diego Rep, the Odyssey, Antaeus, etc. As orchestrator for Randy Newman, Michael Kamen, Mark Snow, etc., he has worked on such films as *MR. HOLLAND'S OPUS*, *THE X-FILES* (both movies), *SEABISCUIT*, *MONSTERS, INC.*, and *TOY STORY 3*. Most recently he has written a book of settings for a number of Shakespeare's Sonnets.



LORI CHEATLE - Consulting Producer

Lori founded the production company Hard Working Movies to produce innovative and entertaining films that tell great stories, with a focus on director-driven feature documentaries. She has produced multiple award-winning films that have screened theatrically, in festivals and on TV in over 50 countries. Her two most recent films are *THE KIDS GROW UP*, directed by Doug Block, which is being released in theaters by Shadow Distribution before its broadcast on HBO, and *THE EDGE OF DREAMING*, directed by Scottish filmmaker Amy Hardie, which was recently broadcast on PBS' *POV*. Additional documentary producing credits include the critically acclaimed *51 BIRCH STREET; THIS LAND IS YOUR LAND*, *DASHIELL HAMMETT: DETECTIVE, WRITER* and many others.



MARK MORI - Consulting Producer

Mark Mori is an Academy Award nominated documentary filmmaker and Emmy® award-winning TV producer. His films have garnered awards, film festival screenings, theatrical and TV distribution worldwide. Mori's most notable projects include: *BETTIE PAGE REVEALS ALL*, Producer/Director (2012), currently playing in film festivals; *BUILDING BOMBS*, Producer/Director (1991), Academy Award nominee Documentary Feature; *KENT STATE, THE DAY THE WAR CAME HOME*, Executive Producer (2000) Emmy® award, News & Documentary; *BLOOD TIES: THE LIFE AND WORK OF SALLY MANN*, Executive Producer (1994), Academy Award nominee Documentary Short; *THE FIRE THIS TIME*, Co-Producer (1994), Sundance Film Festival Grand Jury Prize nominee.



"HEARTWARMING...STORY OF ACCEPTANCE AND FORGIVENESS"

NEW YORK TIMES

"FASCINATING"

THE VILLAGE VOICE

"CHARMING AND ENDEARING"

VARIETY

"EMOTIONAL GRAFFITI ON CELLULOID"

PSYCHOLOGY TODAY

"DELIGHTFUL. HEARTBREAKING AND REAL"

ASSOCIATED PRESS

"TOUCHING, PROVOCATIVE"

THE HUFFINGTON POST

"FUNNY AND MOVING"

THE JERUSALEM POST

Mother-Daughter Journey to Forgiveness

"Look at Us Now, Mother!" is a film about emotional abuse and whether it is forgivable.

By RENÉE BACHER

The filmmaker Gayle Kirschenbaum, whose documentary "Look At Us Now, Mother!" will have a one-week run on Long Island starting May 6, grew up thinking she had been born into the wrong family. And she wasn't thrilled about growing up in Long Island's Five Towns either.

Her family moved to Woodmere when Gayle was 5. "My parents were very conscious of appearances, but exceedingly frugal," she said. The family



relocated to Lawrence during her high school years. As time went by and her workaholic father did well financially, the Kirschenbaums got rid of their Pontiac and bought a Cadillac. Gayle's mother, Mildred, offered her adolescent daughter a nose job.

Gayle, a budding artist who hung around with an earthy-crunchy high school crowd, wasn't interested. "I had no problem with my nose," she says. "I'm probably the least vain person you'll meet, but in the looks department, I think God has been good to me."

Mildred, now 92, begs to differ. Her face has been lifted and her eyelids tattooed with liner so she never has to go without makeup. And her relentless campaign to persuade Gayle to get a nose job has lasted half a century and is still going strong.

"Look At Us Now, Mother!" takes the viewer along on a brave mother-daughter journey, in an effort to understand emotional abuse and whether it can ultimately be forgiven. During the film, home movies show Mildred not only badgering Gayle about her nose, but also telling her daughter she isn't thin enough. Her breasts aren't big enough. Her thick, curly hair is too "big." As if this weren't enough, Mildred is also disappointed that Gayle isn't "Gary," the third son she had been expecting. "I was the target in my family for a lot of anger," Gayle says.

An Emmy Award-winning producer of television shows for TLC and Discovery Health, Gayle first turned the camera back on her own life in 2001, with a film about her Shih Tzu, Chelsea, called "A Dog's Life: A Dogumentary." Her next autobiograph-



Photo: Tina Buckman



Mildred Kirschenbaum, above left, has traveled with Gayle, right, to speak about their improved relationship. Images from "Look at Us Now, Mother!" include, from far left, Gayle as a child with Mildred, Mildred as a young mother and Gayle as a teenager.

A heart-wrenching, and heartwarming, story of acceptance.

The process was so painful for Gayle that she felt physically ill at times and developed a skin condition. Both of her brothers and her mother, she said, were glad to see her finished product and are emotionally supportive of her now (her father died during the making of the film).

After a screening in Delray Beach, Fla., Mildred told the crowd: "When you know you're going to give birth, you go out and get furniture for the nursery and you get instructions on how to put the crib together. Gayle did not come with instructions. I told Gayle, I did the best I know how."

A man in the audience said Mildred hadn't changed and that it was clear she was a narcissist.

"This film was Gayle's interpretation," Mildred said. "Not mine."

"She's completely unaware of what she did," Gayle said to the man. "Never expect anybody who's done wrong by you, like a parent, to ever say they are sorry, because they are clueless. You do the work. You get yourself to the place where you forgive them."

ical project, "My Nose," was a 13-minute tragicomedy that, you guessed it, tackled Mildred's obsession with Gayle getting a nose job. The arrangement was this: Gayle would go for a consultation with a plastic surgeon if Mildred would come along and Gayle could make a documentary about it. Mildred agreed.

The outpouring of empathy from audiences, who shared stories of their own suffering at the hands of their highly critical parents, gave Gayle the idea of expanding her short into a full-length documentary, which would chronicle Gayle and her mother as they attended therapy together.

Think what you will about a mother who says to her daughter on camera, "Speak without a Jewish accent," and "Look how washed-out your eyes look." Not only did Mildred agree to be in the film, she has also spent the

past year traveling the film festival circuit with Gayle, speaking with audiences about their much-improved relationship.

No matter how narcissistic and emotionally abusive Mildred was, what Gayle wanted was to understand why. "I used to wonder what happened to my mother when she was little," she said. "I know today that if you want to know about why someone is the way they are, you have to go back to their childhood."

"Look At Us Now, Mother!" delves into Mildred's difficult past: a suicidal father, a baby sister who stopped breathing while in her stroller on Coney Island's boardwalk, financial struggles and a mother who persevered and never talked about her grief. The result is a heart-wrenching — and, ultimately, heartwarming — story of acceptance and forgiveness.



Running time: 84 min
Shooting Format: HDV
Aspect ratio: 1.78. (16x9)
LTRT/ Dolby Digital / Stereo

DVD and BluRay - Region 0
HD frame rates 1080/60p