Margaret (Peggy) Goldwater (1909–1985) [1]

By: Nunez-Eddy, Claudia Keywords: Reproductive Health Arizona [2]

Margaret Goldwater advocated for birth control [3] and reproductive rights [4] in the United States during the twentieth century. Goldwater was a socialite and philanthropist and was married to Barry Goldwater, US Senator from Arizona. She spent much of her life working to further the women's reproductive rights movement, which sought to expand women's legal, social, and physical access to reproductive healthcare, including contraception [3] and abortions. Goldwater, with guidance from birth control activist Margaret Sanger, helped establish the second birth control [5] clinic in Arizona, the Mother's Health Clinic in Phoenix, Arizona. She conducted large fundraising events and authored articles in local newspapers on the need for contraceptives and family planning [6], in advocacy helped launch [7] and sustain [8] The Mother's Health Clinic, which became the largest provider of women's reproductive healthcare in Arizona, and it later became Planned Parenthood of Central and Northern Arizona.

Goldwater was born as Margaret Johnson on 8 July 1909 in Muncie, Indiana, to Anna Davis Johnson and Ray Prescott Johnson. Throughout her life, Goldwater went by the nickname Peggy. Goldwater's parents were both of British descent but were natives of Indiana. Goldwater's mother was a pianist, while her father was the founder and president of the Warner Gear Company that manufactured automotive parts. Her father's wealth enabled Goldwater and her family to travel significantly. The family spent their summers in Northern Michigan and Europe and their winters in Phoenix, Arizona. The family's wealth also elevated Goldwater's status as a socialite in both Phoenix and Muncie, enabling her to take part in many exclusive organizations and events, making her well known in the community. According to Goldwater's biographer Dean Smith, her wealth and prominence would later enable Goldwater to endorse and financially support causes important to her.

Goldwater attended Einhust School for Girls in Connersville, Indiana, and at sixteen started at Mount Vernon Junior College and Seminary in Washington, D.C., until she graduated high school. She attended the Grand Central School of Art in New York City, New York, where she studied fashion design. After graduating, Goldwater worked for the David Crystal Company in the 1920s as a fashion designer. While in New York City pursuing a career in the arts, Goldwater began volunteering at the New York Infirmary for Women and Children. Goldwater saw many infants born to mothers who were living in poverty and who did not intend to become pregnant. In a later interview, Goldwater described her motivation for the birth control [5] movement and instilled in her a belief that children should not be born into the world if they are unwanted or unable to be cared for.

In the 1920s, Goldwater's father and brother fell ill with tuberculosis. Goldwater's family moved to Phoenix, Arizona, where they had previously wintered, in hopes that the hot, dry climate would cure their illness. While in Phoenix, Goldwater and her mother stopped into Goldwater and Brothers General store to shop. During that visit, Goldwater met business owner and future senator, Barry Goldwater. Goldwater began courting, though the future senator later claimed that she had showed no real interest in him. While her brother recovered, Goldwater's father died, and the Johnson family moved back to Indiana, but the courting continued. On New Year's Eve of 1933, the future senator called her in Indiana, told her he was tired of chasing her, and proposed. Goldwater said yes, so he mailed her an engagement ring. When Goldwater returned to Phoenix in September of 1934, they married. They had four children together: Joanne, Barry Jr., Michael, and Peggy (Peggy Jr.) Goldwater.

After marrying, Goldwater permanently moved to Phoenix where she became active in the community. She continued her medical volunteerism and in the 1930s she became a member of the St. Luke's Board of Visitors, a philanthropic organization [6] that worked primarily on volunteer projects with St. Luke's Sanatorium in Phoenix. The Sanatorium, later called St. Luke's Medical Center, served as a hospital for patients suffering from tuberculosis. Goldwater was also active in the Phoenix Junior League, an invitation only group devoted to volunteerism and fundraising for various causes. In addition to philanthropic work, she used her fashion background to design ladies' handbags that her husband sold in the family store.

On 18 February 1937, Goldwater and several other prominent Phoenix women met with birth control [5] activist Margaret Sanger to discuss the need for family planning [6] services in Arizona. Family planning was a part of the birth control movement [5] and promoted the use of contraception [3] to limit and space births based on how many children a woman could emotionally, physically, and financially care for. Sanger had been active within the birth control movement [5] since the early 1900s. In the United States, Sanger worked to repeal the Comstock Act, which made it federally illegal to distribute contraceptives, information on contraceptives, and anything of a sexual nature. While the Comstock Act worked on a federal level, several states and territories throughout the twentieth century passed Comstock Laws that acted on a state level. In 1936 the Comstock Act was federally overturned in United States v. One Package of Japanese Pessaries (1936), a case in US Court of Appeals in the Second Circuit in New York, New York. That decision effectively made birth control [5] legal in the US. Many states retained their Comstock Laws in violation of the Court of Appeals ruling. The US Supreme Court decision Griswold v. Connecticut (1965) ruled unconstitutional the last remaining state Comstock Laws.

When Goldwater met Sanger in 1937, Sanger was visiting Phoenix after having opened up a birth control [5] clinic in Tucson, Arizona, two years prior. Under the guidance of Sanger, Goldwater and others helped open the Mother's Health Clinic in Phoenix on Seventh and Adams Streets on 1 October 1937. The clinic provided women with information about contraception [3] and prenatal care. Physicians volunteered to fit women with free or reduced cost diaphragms and supplied contraceptive spermicide [3]. At the time of the clinic's opening, there were fewer than seventy birth control clinics in the nation, and only one other clinic in Arizona, greater than one hundred miles away.

Goldwater later described how contraception [3] and sex were largely thought to be obscene and inappropriate to discuss publically or outside of a marriage during the 1930s. Goldwater described feeling bold, daring, and often embarrassed about opening a birth control [5] clinic. However, she stated that she pushed past the embarrassment by knowing the importance of what she was doing. Goldwater oversaw the clinic as the President of the organization [6] for Women and Children. Goldwater saw the experience made her care about reproductive rights and services. Several of her speeches and opinions were published in local newspapers. In one article, published in several local newspapers and in a Planned Parenthood newsletter, Goldwater described why she believed in the idea of Planned Parenthood. She explained that at a fundamental level, contraception [3] is necessary for the successful advancement of the human race. Goldwater described how science had advanced to fight off death, yet the US had not similarly worked to end the birth. Goldwater stated that she believed every birth was important and children should only be born to those who are able and wanting to care for it. Such discussions, once too obscene to print, made the topic of reproduction more acceptable to wider audiences. Through those discussions among the wealthy
Goldwater, Margaret, 1909-1985

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Margaret Goldwater reached the National Margaret Sanger Award from the Planned Parenthood Federation of America for her contribution to the birth control movement and for her work with Planned Parenthood of Arizona. Later, in October of 1982, Planned Parenthood of Central and Northern Arizona established the Peggy Goldwater Award for her commitment to the organization and the birth control movement. The award was given each year to someone who showed similar dedication to the organization and its mission.

Toward the end of her life, Goldwater remained in Arizona with her children and grandchildren while her husband continued his Senate career in D.C. She suffered from blood clots and circulation issues. Goldwater died on 12 December 1985 after suffering complications from surgery. In 1987 the Peggy Goldwater Endowment Fund was established by the Planned Parenthood of Central and Northern Arizona.

Sources


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