



## Mr. Michael Alan Gray

April 18, 1931 - March 4, 2019

Motion picture executive dies in Baltimore at age 87

Michael A. Gray, a motion picture marketing executive and video producer who coined the phrase "electronic press kit" and produced the behind-the-scenes coverage of more than eighty major movies, died in his sleep on March 4th in Baltimore, Maryland following complications to a hip fracture.

Raised in Manhattan, Gray was a devoted movie-goer from childhood and initially trained as an actor at Carnegie-Mellon University; the early death of his father prompted a return to New York, and he graduated from NYU with a degree in English.

He began his career as a newspaperman before transitioning to the world of publicity. He became publicity manager of Columbia Pictures' TV subsidiary, Screen Gems, where he helped launch such series as "Naked City," "Route 66" and "The Flintstones.", and after several years with the Rogers and Cowan agency, he was appointed World-Wide Publicity Director of United Artists Pictures, heading a staff that included such future filmmakers as Jonathan Demme and Mort Engelberg. Under his direction, the studio's celebrity-hosted screenings of "Midnight Cowboy" became a template for positioning films with awards potential.

In 1969, Gray moved with his family to London to head UA's European production marketing, working on such films as the Bond adventure, "On Her Majesty's Secret Service" and Norman Jewison's "Fiddler on the Roof." But his greatest accomplishment, he insists, was hiring Demme as the unit publicist on Roger Corman's "Von Richtoffen and Brown." Within a few years, Corman gave Demme his first directing opportunity.

When UA cut back its overseas operations, Gray remained in London as Managing Director of Network Cinema, Ltd., the European arm of an American theater circuit; after building the first automated cinema in Paris, he developed multiplex theaters in cities across the UK.

On his return to the US he settled in Los Angeles, forming MAGI (Michael A. Gray Incorporated), the agency which created press and promotion kits for literally hundreds of films including "Close Encounters of the Third Kind," "Platoon," "A Fish Called Wanda," "Ghostbusters," "Chariots of Fire" and "Return of the Jedi." Commissioned by Universal Pictures to design a brochure announcing a new television publicity concept, Gray dubbed it "The Electronic Press Kit." The term soon became part of the industry's lexicon. Two years later, he produced his first EPK, for the Rodney Dangerfield comedy, "Back to School." That was followed by EPKs for "Moonstruck," "Dirty Rotten Scoundrels," "Silence of the Lambs," "The Addams Family," "Philadelphia" and scores more.

In 1995, Gray relinquished MAGI to become Vice President, Public Relations, of Universal Studios Hollywood. Two years later, he moved to Baltimore, Maryland, having purchased the century-old home where Barry Levinson filmed much of the movie, "Avalon." "I figured it was time to join AARP and retire," he recalled. Instead, he joined forces with Baltimore's leading production facility at the time, Flite 3, adapting the EPK technique to corporate and public service videos that ranged from a look at the pioneering work of the

Baltimore Child Abuse Center to a light-hearted history of moviemaking in Maryland.

A voting member of the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences, Gray is survived by his wife of 58 years Adele, his daughter, opera singer and Peabody Preparatory Voice Department Chair Madeleine Gray, his son-in-law, musician and educator Bill Murphy, and a beloved granddaughter, Aisling Murphy. He will be remembered for his sense of humor, bad puns, love of horse-racing, cigar-smoking at the typewriter, and lifelong devotion to the movies and those who make them.

# Tribute Wall

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“ *I am devastated to learn of Mike's passing. He was a beloved friend, colleague, mentor and track mate during my years as a then-young publicist at Fox, Disney and MGM, and as a hopeless devotee of horseracing at Hollywood Park and Santa Anita. He taught me how to write marketing copy and pick horses. I shared with him an insatiable love of good movies and bad puns. Condolences to his wonderful family. From Barry Glasser.*

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**Barry Glasser** - May 18, 2019 at 05:21 PM