

A photograph of Director Jenni Gold, a woman with short blonde hair wearing a red shirt, smiling and looking through the viewfinder of a professional motion picture camera. The camera is mounted on a dolly or similar equipment. The background is dark and out of focus.

Ready Willing & Able!

Director Jenni
Gold at work.

Low Budget
Agreement
Helps Put
Jenni Gold
Into the
Director's
Chair

By Jerry Roberts

“I am an optimist,” asserts Jenni Gold. “Some have said that I will not be given a chance because I am a woman as well as a woman with a disability. But I know that the audience enjoys my films and the way I look at it the only difference between me and other directors is that my director’s chair has wheels and goes seven miles per hour.”

Gold, who has muscular dystrophy, is hoping that her newly completed independent film, *Ready Willing & Able* — about a female former CIA agent who returns to sleuthing in a wheelchair after a disabling incident in the line of duty — will help open the doors to a Hollywood career.

She and her producer, Jeff Maynard, shot the film in the fall of 1997 under the Guild’s Low Budget Agreement.



Christopher Templeton (left) with Gold.

The Orlando-based Extreme Stunt Driving Team handles the rough stuff and the familiar TV-guest-spot actress and longtime soap opera star Christopher Templeton (*The Young and the Restless*) plays the agent. The plot has its *Dirty Dozen* aspect: the agent recruits a team of misfits to thwart terrorists from stealing a tractor-truck load of chemical weapons.

She co-wrote the screenplay with Pete Bauer and plans to have an industry screening later this fall. Recently the film was selected to open the Hermosa Beach Film Festival and this November it will screen at the Fort Lauderdale International Film Festival.

Gold, whose Guild membership was sponsored by Jerry Lewis, Walter E. von Huene and Jay Dubin, has shopped ideas around Hollywood this summer and understands the vicissitudes of indie financing and hooking investors.

"*Ready Willing & Able* is the first action film about a woman with a disability by a woman with a disability breaking into the business," Gold says. "But the disability of the character is a side note to me. We initially pitched it as 'Mission Impossible meets Ironside.' Now, we're talking about selling it as 'La Femme Nikita in a wheelchair.'"

Gold, who has been using a wheelchair since the age of 7, had the first inkling of her chosen profession through her voluntary work on several editions

of the nationally televised annual Jerry Lewis Muscular Dystrophy Association Telethon. Seeing the personnel, activity and skill of the people behind the scenes excited her into making directing a life's goal.

Born in Toledo, Ohio, and raised in Miami and Fort Myers, Fla., Gold made her first film in the seventh grade. At Cape Coral High School in Fort Myers, she created *AM Magazine* as a film/TV project, basing it on TV's then-popular *PM Magazine*. She landed Red Skelton as a guest and filmed police attack dogs in another installment.

While attending film school at the University of Central Florida in Orlando, she acquired experience as a freelance non-linear AVID editor and at various production jobs for Nickelodeon and Universal Studios, Florida. Still, as she gauged her success barometer on the classmates around her, an idea dawned.

"As I saw my peers climbing the ranks in physically demanding jobs, I realized that my career path would be different from my peers. It seemed smart to become a writer and producer. That way, I could hire myself to direct."

She graduated *summa cum laude* with Bachelor of Arts degrees in both film and radio/television as her two collegiately-made short films became award winners.

Panic, a 16mm drama, won a

regional Emmy Award in college competition and a Crystal Reel from the Florida Motion Picture & Television Association.

Her next award-winning film, *Now Showing*, paid homage to Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho*. "We shot at the Universal Studios Florida *Psycho* house. I'm a big Hitchcock fan, so it was a thrill. Financing my short films really taught me how to produce on a shoestring."

During the past decade, in addition to various writing assignments, Gold developed a made-for-television film called *The Beverly Chapman Story*; directed a documentary, *The History of Film Editing*, for Montage Inc.; a music video, *Hip to It*, for the band Pitch Blue Jam; the TV pilots *Exposure* and *Cinema-Go-Go*.

Willfulness and optimism count for a lot, and skill and a hardscrabble collection of résumé accomplishments are requisites for the climb in the business.

"Getting the Guild membership was always a goal," Gold says. "Directing films is first and foremost in my mind. I always wanted to be in the DGA."

The director's next project is also an action picture entitled *Adrenalin*. "It's already half-storyboarded," Gold says. "If I had the money, I'd start tomorrow. It has nothing at all to do with disabilities. It's a Hitchcockian-style thriller in which the women happen to be the bad guys. It is a fun and sexy ride with femme fatales."

"I'm looking forward to a career that allows me to tell a variety of entertaining stories. Action is a lot of fun, but I also like suspense and I'd love to do a romantic comedy," she said. "People always tell you how impossible it is to make an independent film, so I took it as a challenge and shot an action film. People also say that, being a woman in a 'chair, it is unrealistic to expect a Hollywood career as a director. But, I will continue to make films because directing is what I live for. I can't imagine doing anything else. I am a director and my career is just beginning." ❖

Jerry Roberts, a Los Angeles-based freelance writer and critic, is a frequent contributor to industry trade papers and magazines.