

# Movies: Fearless Filmmakers -- women get reel

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This month's Fearless Filmmakers screening focuses on female directors.

By Stephanie Dickrell



Photo by Tom Wallace

Melody Gilbert will show footage from "Divorce Camp" and "Fritz: The Walter Mondale Story."

Some might call Melody Gilbert fearless. Some might call Gayle Knutson fearless. Some might call anyone attempting to work in independent filmmaking fearless.

Gilbert and Knutson are two of the 12 female directors who will be featured at this month's Fearless Filmmakers event at [Oak Street Cinema](#). For the first time in the series' three-year history, all of the works shown will be by Minnesota women, with topics ranging from vice presidents to the Holocaust to meat raffles. Included will be films in all stages of development, from trailers and raw footage to completed works.

The festival is a means for generating buzz in the local community, said Fearless organizer Bobby Marsden. "When you look at what it takes to really commit yourself to make a film, you have to be fearless," Marsden said. "It's that inner fire that filmmakers have."

For decades, filmmaking has been a "men's club," said Gilbert, but it's not easy to get a foothold in the business, regardless of gender.

Knutson agrees. "Nobody's just going to hand you anything in this business," she said. "You think you've earned it, and then you realize you've got to do it again on the next one."

The Fearless program includes Knutson's "Prisoner 32,232," a short documentary about Reidar Dittmann, who spent part of World War II in a Nazi concentration camp as a political prisoner from Norway. He settled in Minnesota after the war, teaching art and Norwegian at St. Olaf College in Northfield. The film was part of the Greatest Generations Project by the Minnesota Historical Society, an entry in the "Moving Pictures-Shared Stories of Minnesota's Greatest Generation" contest. Knutson's film won the MHS award for 2007's special topic "Coming of Age in the 1940s."

Knutson's past work includes "Grandfather's Birthday," a short drama, and the documentary short "If There Were No Lutherans ... Would There Still Be Green Jell-O?" The latter, about a Stillwater minister's creativity with his church sign, won the "Best of Fearless" award in June 2006.

Gilbert plans to screen footage for a documentary called "Fritz: The Walter Mondale Story," which follows former Vice President Mondale as he teaches at the University of Minnesota, spends time with his family, and reflects on his legacy as a vice president. "You can divide every vice president in American history into two categories," former veep Al Gore says in an interview for the documentary. "Pre-Walter Mondale, and post-Walter Mondale."

Gilbert will also show a trailer for her documentary "Divorce Camp," a camp that prepares women for what they will have to tackle in the months leading up to and following a divorce.

In January 2006 Gilbert, a broadcast journalist turned independent filmmaker, screened a trailer for her now-released documentary "Urban Explorers: Into the Darkness," a film about a group of renegade adventure-seekers who explore the underbellies of cities, government sites, and even the catacombs of Paris. She also screened webisodes produced for Best Buy that were part of a viral marketing-themed Fearless event last year.

Fearless Filmmakers provides a support system of sorts for local filmmakers whose ability to network with powerful people in New York and Los Angeles might be limited, Marsden said. So in addition to the screenings, Fearless includes the requisite after-party to celebrate a job well done and give locals the opportunity to expand their contact lists.

For Gilbert, the awards and recognition (and the schmoozing) take a back seat to the near-compulsion to tell a story. "I can't not do these stories," she said.

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