

came out, along with www.firedbyannabellegurwitch.com/. And now "Fired!" the documentary is opening Friday at the Laemmle Grand.

"Finally I can walk away," says Gurwitch, who, though she's best known as the host of TBS' "Dinner and a Movie," has gotten used to being referred to as "the fired lady." "I've done what I can, I did what I set out to do."

That was, at first, to make herself feel better. By telling everyone she knew, and even people she didn't, that she had been fired by Allen, a man she considered, even after the whole Mia Farrow/Soon Yi scandal, a demi-god. She discovered to her surprise that almost everyone she knew had a story about being fired, and she began collecting them, through staged readings and then the book.

"With the book, I thought it would make a great present, you know, for someone who had just been fired," she says. "Because when it happens you feel so devastated, so alone, it's important to know that you aren't."

Along the way, Gurwitch says, she began to notice that getting fired was a bit of a national trend — that corporate mergers and the downsizing of American companies meant an awful lot of people were facing life without a paycheck or health insurance.

"The month I was fired something like 160,000 New Yorkers lost their job. Maybe not all by Woody Allen," she adds with a laugh, "but that's a lot of people. It really opened my eyes."

Gurwitch is small and slender with attractively mussed hair and a Spider-Man T-shirt under her black pinstriped suit. Sitting in the Alcove in Los Feliz, she is surrounded by hip mamas and guys in black T-shirts and retro aviator shades, people who all look as if they might have gotten fired by Woody Allen and wound up getting a book and documentary out of it. It's a discrete demographic, native mostly to L.A. and New York — the creative type with just enough insight, chutzpah and narcissism to see within the unfolding of her daily life a message for the world, whether delivered through NPR essay (which Gurwitch also does) or documentary film.

"Fired!" the film follows Gurwitch's personal journey in form as well as content. It opens with a dozen or so entertainers, including Tim Allen, Ileana Douglas, Anne Meara, Sarah Silverman, Jeff Garlin and David Cross, sharing their stories of being fired.

"All of the people I interviewed were my friends," she says. "I didn't consider calling people I didn't know. I had all these great stories from doing the stage shows already."

But "Fired!" then moves past the comfort zone of having successful entertainers share their embarrassing moments and dives into the less soothing world of "real people" — office and factory workers who

*"And refusing to take it off.
That was the key thing."*



SARAH SILVERMAN

On how she was fired from "Saturday Night Live"

*"They faxed me.
Did they fax me?
No, they faxed my agent."*



TIM ALLEN

Fired for making too many locating pins in a tool-and-die factory.

*"Everyone who was slowing
down looked at me and said,
'you son of a. . . .' It caused
a union insurrection."*

have lost their jobs — and their health insurance. She goes to Lansing, Mich., deep in Michael Moore territory, and finds more of the same — factories closing, corporate downsizing, layoffs in the double and triple digits.

"I could have done several different films," Gurwitch says. "I could have done all serious, or I could have done all funny. But I, we — the directors and I — decided to follow the narrative of how I got fired and then what happened, including how I noticed suddenly that everywhere I looked

She takes issue with those who say she took her firing and turned it into a cottage industry. "Believe me, no one makes a documentary to make money," she says. "You make a documentary because you believe so much in a subject that you can't not make it."

There is no doubt that Gurwitch is passionate about the issue that has taken over the last four years of her life. Far beyond her original hope of making people feel better, she hopes her film will start a national conversation that will lead to some sort of reform; the fired stories she continues to collect, she says, prove this country desperately needs to address unemployment. She recently joined United Professionals, an organization begun by Barbara Ehrenreich that, according to its website, provides support for "all unemployed, underemployed and anxiously employed" white collar workers.

"We're very excited because there's a new Congress," Gurwitch says. "We hope to give labor a voice. People who don't have unions. We're hoping to found a healthcare fund."

After her four years listening to tales of the outsourced, she has a few pieces of advice. First, try to get other people fired with you "so you have some drinking buddies." Read the newspaper, so you aren't the last to know that your company's merger is going to mean your dismissal. And don't be complacent — the days of a gold watch at the end of 30 years are gone.

"You should always be thinking about what you can do next," she says.

As an entertainer, she has a natural empathy for that sort of uncertainty. "We're all essentially freelance," she says. "So we've constantly reinvented ourselves. You have to. I read this column about how older women who are fired should dye their hair and cut 10 years off their résumé. I mean, actresses have known that for years. Of course, IMDB has totally blown it for us now, but still. . . ."

Her stint in quasi-political activism now over, Gurwitch is returning to her "normal" life. Her essays appear on NPR's "All Things Considered" and "Day to Day," and she and her husband recently sold a pilot idea to Lifetime. They are also working on a book together, tentatively titled "How Not to Have a Marriage Like Ours." She's also back to acting, doing auditions for pilot season, with a new attitude toward things she took for granted.

"I think every actress should produce a documentary," she says with a laugh. "When you're the one raising the money, when you are writing the check, you really appreciate the people who do it for you. In the middle of all this, I did a 'Boston Legal,' and I was so grateful to have a dressing room, as opposed to changing in my car. To have a hair stylist and makeup, it was just amazing."

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