



## Hollywood: Her Story October 2020 ENewsletter Stuntwomen

The documentary *Stuntwomen: The Untold Hollywood Story* came out recently in 2020. It profiles the often invisible women who do daring and dangerous stunts in lieu of the actress they are standing in for – so-called stunt doubles. Stunts have been performed since the early days of the movie industry when men often wore wigs and dresses and stood in for the actresses. Women, however, were just as capable and fought to be hired as stuntwomen.

One of the first stuntwomen was Gene Gauntier. As was typical in those early days of the movies, she did much more on a film – acting, directing, producing, and screenwriting. As a screenwriter, she wrote the screenplay adaptation for *Ben Hur* in 1907. It took her just two days! Gauntier is also credited with inventing the serial and would often write the scenes that she would then act in.

Gauntier talked about her stuntwork:

*A double was never even thought of in those days.*

*Only youth and a strong constitution could have stood up under it. I was playing in two pictures a week, working in almost every scene, and writing two or three scenarios a week, in the effort to keep up with our production. My screen work was all strenuous, horseback riding for hours each day, water scenes in which I committed suicide or floated on spar in shark-infested waters, climbing trees, coming down on ropes from second-story windows, jumping from roofs or rolling down to be caught in blankets, overturning skills, paddling canoes, a hundred and one 'stunts' thought out to give the action Kalem films demanded. I was terrified at each daring thing I had to do, but for some inexplicable reason I continued to write them. They never seemed so difficult when I was seated before the typewriter in the throes of creating them, but as the moment for performance drew near they assumed unwarranted aspects of terror.*

Let's learn about some modern-day stuntwomen. .



Considered one of the best stuntwomen who has ever lived, if not *the* best, **Jeannie Epper** is from a stunt family. Her father was a stuntman as were her three brothers and her two sisters. She has more than 150 movie credits and is probably best known for being Lynda Carter's stunt double for the television series *Wonder Woman*. Epper is a charter member of the Stuntwomen's Association of Motion Pictures and is featured in 2020's *Stuntwomen* documentary as well as the 2004 documentary *Double Dare*. At age 78, in 2019, Epper was still doing stunts – although no longer leaping onto moving horses or swinging on a rope across a ravine. She said, "I like the adventure, the adrenaline, being able to do things a normal person can't do."



Born into a stunt family, horsewoman **Bonnie Happy** has been inducted into the California Rodeo Salinas Hall of Fame. Like Epper, she was part of a stunting family that included her mother, Edith Happy Connelly, and her sister-in-law, Marguerite Happy. She was a charter member and served as president of the United Stuntwomen's Association. When asked about the danger of stunting, she said, "I don't think of stunts as dangerous. I love the work, I love the people, I love figuring out how to do the stunt."

In the entertainment industry for more than 20 years, **LaFaye Baker** has



more than 135 credits as a stunt performer. She was the first African-American woman to stunt coordinate a big budget project – HBO's *Introducing Dorothy Dandridge*. Baker is the founder of the Diamond in the Raw Foundation whose mission statement reads: "devoted to empowering and transforming the lives of foster care and at-risk teen girls through the arts and S.T.E.M. [science, technology, engineering and mathematics] Education." She, too, is featured in the *Stuntwomen* documentary.



World trampoline champion **Leigh Hennessy** has worked as a stunt performer in the film industry for more than twenty years. She was the stunt double for Demi Moore in the 1997 movie *G.I. Jane*. Hennessy later transitioned into stunt coordination and coaching other stunt performers. She and her father are the first father-daughter pair to both be inducted into the USA Gymnastics Hall of Fame.



**Jennifer Caputo** is known for her daredevil driving of motorcycles and cars. Motorcycles are second nature to her – she began riding when she was seven. Caputo stunt doubled for Emma Stone in *The Amazing Spider-Man* (2012). Caputo received the 2017 Artemis Stunt Lifetime Achievement Award for creating amazing stunts and has more than 180 credits for more than 20 years of stunting. Caputo also is featured in the *Stuntwomen* documentary.

Women in front of and behind the camera make the movies that we all welcome into our hearts and homes. Women across all the areas of moviemaking from actress to animator, editor to stuntwoman, costume designer to screenwriter, producer to director have contributed to the success of the movie industry since its founding in the 1890s. Help us celebrate these women who are written into movie history in *Hollywood: Her Story*.

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