

Cinema

Cannes prize for best actress for her role in *The Official Story*, also this year's Oscar winner for best foreign film). Rachel Levin, a U.S. stage actress making her film debut, plays the title role as Gaby. Robert Loggia (*Scarface*, *Prizzi's Honor*) and Lawrence Monoson, who had an extraordinary role in *Mask*, round out the cast.

Hungarian Lajos Koltai (*Mefiste*, *Angy Very*, *Colonel Redl*) is photographic director, Alejandro Luna (*Frida*) is in charge of set and Lucinne Donnai, a native of France and long-time resident of Mexico, with years of experience in theater and opera, is wardrobe director.

GABY BRIMMER, A Gigantic Film Production in Mexico

The cameras began to roll in Mexico City on September 22 as Mexican film-maker Luis Mandoki directs the production of *Gaby Brimmer*. The leading roles are played by noted Swedish star Liv Ullman and Argentine Norma Aleandro (1985 winner of the

Very few times has such an outstanding cast and technical crew worked together in Mexico under a Mexican director (in recent times we can only recall *Fox-Trott*, directed by Arturo Ripstein). To make things even more unusual, Mandoki, born in 1954, is practically a debutante in the movie world. While he has made several shorts, he has only one full-length feature to his credit, *Motel*

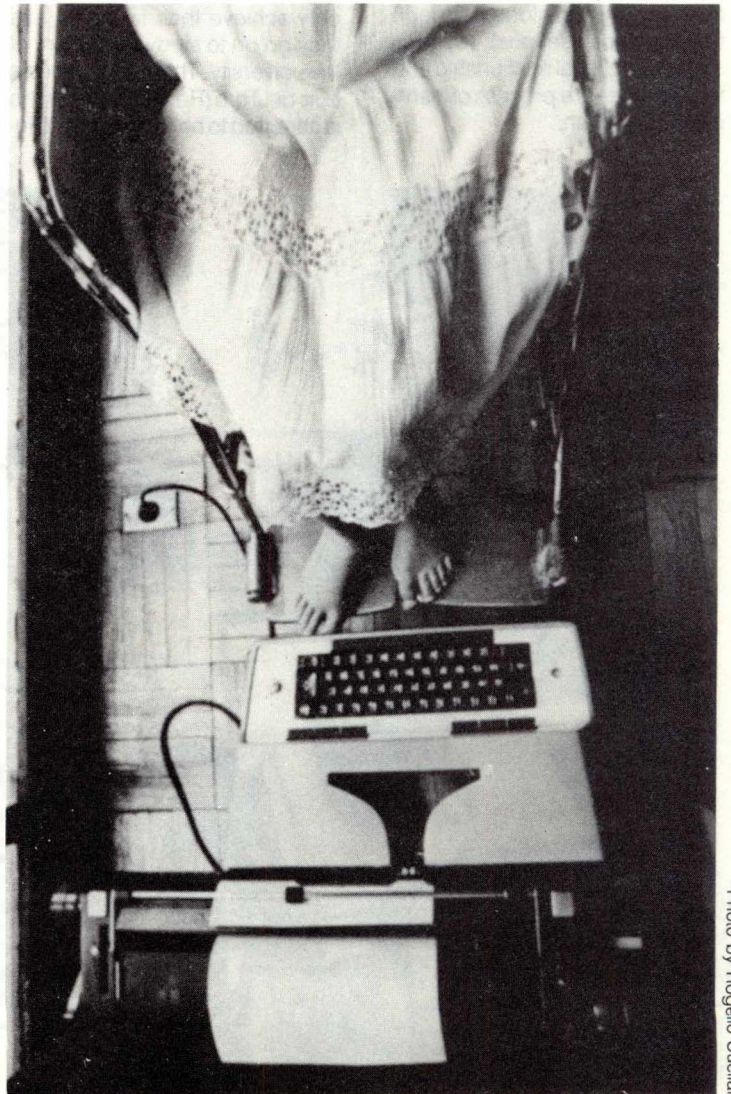


Photo by Rogelio Cuellar

Gaby's difficult way of writing.

The aviator hallucinates in *Mirrors*

odds and ends

(1983). While not a particularly bad film, it was no gem either (although it did show a fine use of closed and asphyxiating environments). His greatest claim to fame came with a Cannes award for best short film, but even with that, people are asking: How did Mandoki manage to pull together a production like *Gaby*?

WHO IS GABRIELA BRIMMER?

Gabriela Brimmer (Rachel Levin), daughter of Austrian Jewish immigrants, was born in Mexico City in 1947 with cerebral palsy. Her future was quite uncertain at first, as her parents debated over integrating her into the family or sending her away to live in a specialized institution. Her life changed when a new servant appeared at the house. Florencia Morales (Norma Aleandro), illiterate and of Indian origin, discovers Gabriela's intelligence and sensitivity; and she discovers something even more important, that the child can express herself through the movements of her left foot, the only part of her body she controls. And that is how these two human beings, both marginalized from society and alone (although for different reasons), build a strong emotional relationship and together begin a process of learning and growth.

Institutionalization disappears as a possibility, and Gabriela begins to study at a school for the handicapped. There she falls in love for the first time, with Fernando (Lawrence Monoson). Together they try to break out from the narrow realm of the handicapped to face the "normal" world. Their dream is to be able to attend a regular public high school. But at the critical moment, Fernando pulls back, terrorized, and she is left alone in her project, hesitant and insecure.

As this process develops, Gaby's mother Sari (Liv Ullman) becomes more involved. Carried along by the subconscious fantasy of seeing her daughter transformed into a normal person, she fully supports Gaby's increasing aspirations until "reality's" concrete and fictitious limits give way to Gaby's true condition.

Gaby enters a high school for "normal people" only to discover that if the handicapped world is marginal, her life among the "normal" is a complete island. Nonetheless, she devotes herself to her studies, and Gabriela-the brain and Florencia-the body not only achieve their first goal, but they go on to study journalism at the university. There, Gaby meets Luis del Toro (Robert Beltrán) who is attracted to her courage and in-

telligence. They begin a close companionship. Florencia, together with the mother and father (Robert Loggia), fear another disappointment for Gaby, like the one with Fernando.

When the father dies, Gaby's mother, alone and fearful, threatens to retire to the province. Gabriela seeks Luis' support, and together they look for work for her. But because she is crippled, newspaper editors will not hire her. Seeking another route to independence from her mother, Gaby declares her love to Luis and proposes that they live together. He makes it clear that he can offer her friendship and admiration, but nothing more. And Gabriela is crushed. The mother takes advantage of her daughter's moment of weakness to move the three of them, Gaby, Florencia and herself, to a rest home in the province. By the time she reacts, it's too late, and Gabriela's life is once again how it was before knowing Florencia.

The mother learns she has cancer and goes to the the United States, without explaining the real reasons to the other two women. Florencia once again takes control of things and carries Gaby back to Mexico City. There Gaby gets a second wind and begins her career as a writer. Later the

two women learn of the mother's illness, and Gabriela is understanding. The three reunite, and without demanding explanations, begin daily life together again from a new perspective.

Gabriela-the brain and Florencia-the body continue to work in literature and journalism and together adopt a child: Alma Florencia.

Mrs. Brimmer dies of cancer in 1982.

The above is a kind of synopsis that lies somewhere between the script and Gabriela Brimmer's true story.

The movie project began in 1980 when Luis Mandoki returned to Mexico after studying film-making in England. He first heard about Gaby from a book about her life, written together with Elena Poniatowska. Mandoki contacted Gabriela, who agreed to the project, and they started work. Under Mandoki's direction, she wrote about those moments in her life that could be portrayed in a movie, rewriting some and writing up others for the first time. Using this original manuscript, finished in 1980, a whole string of script writers tried to develop a suitable film script, but none of them satisfied Mandoki, Gabriela or Florencia.

Meanwhile, Mandoki cut *Motel*, his first full-length movie. The Brimmer project seemed illusive. Then in 1983 at the Cuban Film Festival, Mandoki met Martín Salinas, an Argentine film writer who had studied at Mexico's Center for Cinematographic Training. Salinas began his professional career as an animator with *Grupo Cine Six*, winner of numerous international awards for its work, including a film on Pancho Villa and a series for Nicaragua's literacy campaign.

Salinas picked up *Gaby*, laying aside the scripts produced by other writers. He worked only with Brimmer's original material, following her ideas and Mandoki's. Meanwhile he also made his full-length movie, *Noche de Califas* (*Night of Califas*); it had no special merits and has still not opened in Mexico. Mandoki was the executive producer.

It is important to note here, however, that for both Mandoki and Salinas, *Motel* and *Noche de Califas* were really just projects to let them polish the skills of their trade and to help them survive. Their real project was *Gaby Brimmer*.

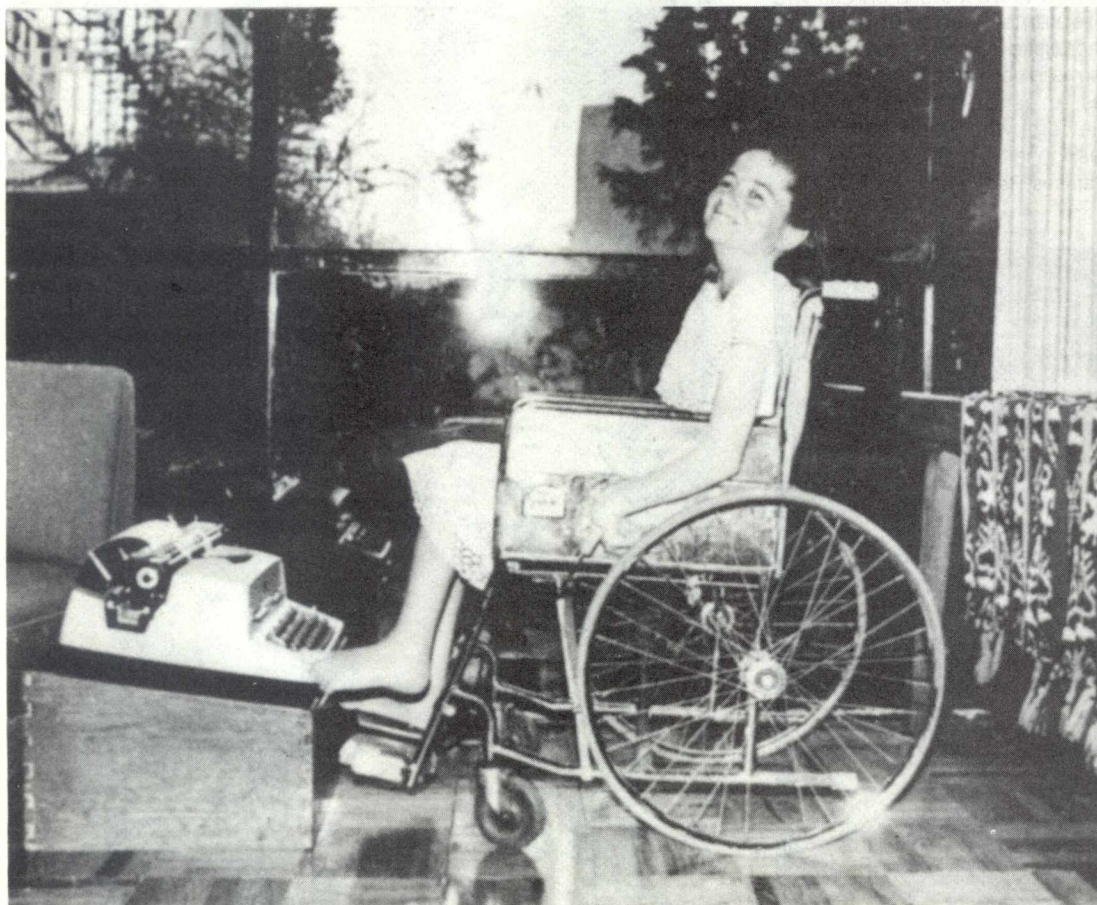


Photo by Rogelio Cuéllar

Gaby Brimmer