

## Marlo Thomas plays woman fighting to free husband

### Drama revolves around real-life Beirut hostages

By Mary Ann Townsend

Marlo Thomas has been portraying women with spunk ever since she starred as a single woman making it on her own in the big city on *That Girl*. In a drama airing Sunday, Jan. 13, on ABC, Thomas plays a socialite-turned-political activist.

Thomas stars in one of the title roles in *Held Hostage: The Sis and Jerry Levin Story*, based on the real-life incident in 1984 when CNN correspondent Jerry Levin was taken hostage in Beirut, Lebanon. His wife, Lucille (Sis), fought a code of silence to see her husband freed after 11 months.

It was the metamorphosis of this character that initially attracted Thomas to this role.

"She always had her hair and nails done once a week, and she was a part of the Junior League, and she was a volunteer on the arts council. She had never been active in any social concerns," Thomas said of Sis' readiness for her husband's kidnapping. "She just wasn't prepared at all for this kind of life."

Throughout the next few months, Sis met with the American Embassy, the U.S. State Department and finally CNN, and the consensus was that she should not negotiate with the captors. But the disappearance of other journalists and the bombing of the U.S. Embassy in Beirut prompted Sis to speak out, despite warnings from the government.

"She said we had to start talking to these people, that quiet diplomacy was just another word for deadly silence," Thomas said.

While Thomas was impressed with the change in Sis, the actress said she is even more inspired that the Levins continue efforts today to see hostages freed.

"She found her voice, and she is now very active in the peace movement... she is getting her doctorate in peace

studies, she teaches. I was impressed with that kind of change that she went through, and that she didn't just get her husband out and say, 'Well, that's that I've got mine, to heck with everybody else.'"

During the filming, which was done in Israel, Thomas and the others working on *Held Hostage* had a real-life brush with terrorism. They were in the Middle East the day Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait.

She described the mounting tension as ships and helicopters converged on the area and as local newspapers ran front-page stories on where to obtain gas masks.

"We got a first-hand feel of what it was really like to be in that part of the world. We, as Americans, have never lived near a war. It was very strange to be there and see how these people live every day," she said.

*Held Hostage* not only focuses on Sis' struggle to free her husband, but also on Jerry's struggle to survive as a hostage.

"You see him being held captive, what happened to him and what he's



Marlo Thomas plays a socialite who becomes a political activist in *Held Hostage: The Sis and Jerry Levin Story*.

going through. I found that very interesting," Thomas said. "You see him trying to hold onto his mind. He's always trying to remember the baseball teams and who plays what position and all that, to keep his mind intact."

Generally, *Held Hostage* is uplifting and inspiring. But it hits painfully close to home.

"It's very timely, unfortunately," Thomas agreed. "I didn't realize it would be this timely."

## THURSDAY



A lab accident turns Tina into a ruthless criminal dead set on killing *The Flash*, Thursday. Emmy-winner John Wesley Shipp plays CBS' comic book-based hero.

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