

Mary Grows Into Actress



Melissa Sue Anderson

NEW YORK (AP) — Melissa Sue Anderson was 11 when she took the role of Mary in NBC's "Little House on the Prairie." Now she's 16, and that says a lot for the success of the series.

"I think people compare their own family with ours in 'Little House,'" says the California-born actress. "Either they wish they were like us, or they're proud they are as close as we are."

"Little House on the Prairie," based on the novels of Laura Ingalls Wilder, was NBC's highest-rated program last season, seventh in a list of 104 programs ranked by the A. C. Nielsen Co.

The series is broadcast Mondays at 8 p.m. EDT.

"Little House" began in September 1974, starring then, as it does today, Miss Anderson, Michael Landon, Karen Grassle and Melissa Gilbert.

For the fifth season — the premiere was Sept. 18 — the Wilder family has moved from the prairie to Winoka in the Dakota Territory. Charles (Landon) manages a hotel and his wife, Caroline (Miss Grassle) cooks for the establishment.

Mary, in the last year, has become permanently blind, and now teaches the sightless in Winoka.

"It's different and it's challenging," Miss Anderson, called "Missy," says of the role that requires her to play a blind, and later in the season, married, woman. "I'm not blind and I'm not married, but I have to act as if I am both."

You get the feeling Miss Anderson will have little difficulty in the more complicated part. "She's not only a beautiful, talented actress," Landon has said of the young star, "but she's bright and curious. By the time she's 20 she'll be able to star and direct."

Indeed, Landon, also the show's executive producer, is teaching Miss Anderson behind-the-camera technique, something he

learned while starring with Lorne Greene in "Bonanza."

Melissa Sue Anderson was born in Berkeley, Calif., and now lives in the Los Angeles area. On the same day this summer, Aug. 10, she was awarded a high school diploma and nominated for an Emmy award as the outstanding lead actress in a dramatic series.

She appeared briefly as a guest in two TV programs, including "The Brady Bunch," before she was chosen for the part in "Little House."

"If I'm lucky," she says, "I'll keep working." And for the time being, that means playing Mary in "Little House on the Prairie."

"I wouldn't mind doing a feature movie," she says. "I've had offers, but there's been no time. And I've turned down others because they were not me."



FOND ADIEU — Mary Ingalls (Melissa Sue Anderson) and Adam Kendall (Linwood Boomer) bid farewell to the rest of the Ingalls Monday on "Little House on the Prairie," at 8 p.m. Monday on Channels 12 and 28.

Review Has To Inform Audience

NEW YORK (AP) — News from the nation's capital is Paul Duke's business, and he's not about to argue that it's always interesting or entertaining.

"I know there are those in television who believe the news has to entertain as well as inform," says the moderator of public TV's long-running "Washington Week in Review." "I take a more simplistic view, that news can and will be dull."

"Our duty is to inform rather than entertain, so we look for a good mix of people and a good flow to the discussion to keep the people interested."

By almost any standard, the formula has been successful. "Washington Week," produced at Washington's WETA, has run on the Public Broadcasting Service network since 1969, longer than any other program on non-commercial TV. It's regularly among the first bought by PBS stations for broadcast each season. More than 95 percent of the network's 276 stations carry it.

Joe Namath Says:

"Ladies Are Good For My Health"

HOLLYWOOD (AP) — Joe Namath reaches for the dictionary and flips through the pages until he comes to the definition for "playboy."

"Yeah, I'm a playboy," he admits, then reads from the dictionary. "It says 'a man whose chief interest is the pursuit of pleasure.' That's close."

"My chief interest is the pursuit of my health. And ladies are good for my health."

Broadway Joe — the monicker hung on him when he was star quarterback for the New York Jets — is playing on a new field as the star of the NBC Friday night comedy series "The Waverly Wonders."

He plays Joe Casey, a former professional basketball player who coaches a winless high school basketball team. The humor derives mainly from the team's ineptness and from Casey's reputation as a swinger. The main challenge to that reputation comes from the school's principal, an attractive woman — what else? — played by Gwynne Gilford.

When he first meets the principal she tells him, "You scored more off the court than on it." She asks him how he likes his coffee and he replies, "With whiskey."

His nemesis is a plodding teacher the kids nickname Pinchface. Pinchface warns the principal that Joe is "sex crazed." Miss Gilford, her interest suddenly piqued, asks, "Do you think he really is sex crazed?"

Namath says, "I imagine I've been in some situations like this. The things we do are very real to me. Some situations I may have handled a bit differently."

He acts with such vulnerability and amiable naturalness that a character who could have been an insufferable boor comes across as likable. As often as not he is the butt of jokes. He seems to be having fun poking fun at Broadway Joe.

The concept of "The Waverly Wonders" has been compared, unfavorably, to ABC's "Welcome Back, Kotter." There are similarities, like the older heavy who disapproves of Joe and the easy relationship with students. But executive producer Marc Merson denies a link to "Kotter."

"If anything," says Merson, "it was borrowed from 'The Bad News Bears' — taking one loser and putting him in with another group of losers. By discovering that he has something to contribute to these kids, he would discover himself."

Namath is in an uphill fight with his first television series, which the experts give little chance for survival. Will it be like Super Bowl III? Can Namath do the impossible again?

He doesn't brag about the show's chances for success, as he did in 1969 when he guaranteed a victory over the Baltimore Colts and the Jets delivered. But he is confident of his acting ability — and so are his co-workers.

"He has a marvelous flair for comedy," says Dick Martin, formerly of "Laugh-In," who is directing the series. "Film comedy is very dependent on reactions because it was born

in the days of silent pictures. Joe is a marvelous reactor."

"I think it's natural," Namath says of his acting. "I sure as hell like having a good time. I couldn't have gone through what I did in sports without good humor. I'd have gone nuts by now. Football is full of ups and downs. When you throw six interceptions in one game, you'd better have a sense of humor."

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