

## LITTLE MELISSA IS GROWN UP; SO IS HER EGO

Chicago Tribune - Friday, April 12, 1985

Author: Harry Bowman. Dallas Morning News.

Melissa Gilbert's ego has outgrown that "Little House On the Prairie."

Today, it would barely fit Tara.

Gilbert is 20 years old, pretty, and talented. She is receiving excellent reviews for her first feature film, "Sylvester," in which she co-stars with Richard Farnsworth and a horse.

She is so accustomed to success that she obviously takes it for granted. And she is so tired of being interviewed that she makes reporters feel like dentists trying to hit a nerve.

"I'm bored with being interviewed--unless the questions are really good. But they never are," she said at an appearance in Dallas. "I've been doing

this for nearly a month. I pity the people in San Francisco. That's my last stop. They're not going to get anything out of me except 'yes' and 'no' . . ." Gilbert may be tired of interviews, but she wants the publicity. And she has a complaint: "My publicist really screwed up. I was supposed to be on the cover of US magazine this week. But I'm just inside."

Despite this, her agent obviously is on the ball. Gilbert is well represented in "Sylvester." She portrays a spunky 16-year-old named Charlene (Charlie, for short), who dreams of training a horse for Olympic competition. She gives an aggressive, intelligent performance. But she almost didn't get the role.

"It was sort of like a Scarlett O'Hara search, only smaller," she said. "Everybody was trying to find Charlie. There were ads in Esquire and equestrian magazines, teen magazines, drama trades. Lots of things."

Gilbert did not elaborate just how she got the role, except to say, "I read the script and tested for it. I had to do a screen test."

Her experience in "Little House On the Prairie" and the TV version of "The Diary of Anne Frank" meant nothing to "Sylvester" director Tim Hunter.

"He was even more reluctant (to hire me) because of my TV background. It was the same old TV vs. films attitude that exists in Hollywood. If you've been on television, everybody in films thinks you're no good. Besides, they wanted to discover someone for this film. And I had already been discovered." The early reviews of "Sylvester" have been mixed for the film, which relies heavily on cliches, but generally positive for Gilbert's performance.

"I'm very happy with them," she said. "But I've never gotten personally bad reviews myself. I'm very pleased with the film, all in all. So I really don't care what people say. I think my performance is fine. The film is genuine and nice. It has its problems, of course, but all films

have their problems.``

When it was suggested that she must be gratified at the prospect of being taken seriously as a screen actress, she looked up quickly from her tortilla soup.

``I've always been taken seriously as an actress, even on the TV series.

But, yes, critical acclaim is important to me because I do want to be an actress.``

Although she attempts a certain sophistication and independence, Gilbert said she was not hesitant to play a character younger than she is.

``Charlie is a very mature person and has assumed a great many responsibilities. She is very much an adult and still very much a child.

That's sort of the way I feel. But now I'd like to age a little, so I can play older characters. I think I'd like to do a romantic comedy.``

Gilbert seems perfectly capable of taking care of herself, but making a first film can be an unnerving experience. She credits Martin Jurow, a Dallas producer, with being her ``support system.``

``Marty is the one who pushed everyone into hiring me. Everybody was reluctant but him. He said, `I want that girl, and he got me. And he was right there with me all through the picture, offering help and protection.``

She pronounced her co-star, 64-year-old Farnsworth, a ``brilliant actor.

He called me `Little Peanut.` He said that's what I looked like on top of that big horse, a little peanut.``

Gilbert didn't care for the horse, however: ``I don't trust horses. They're not very intelligent.``

Future film plans for Gilbert contain ``nothing definite. I just want to continue working and showing my versatility. Maybe I'll try directing.``

To Michael Landon, who was the creator, star, writer, director and executive producer of ``Little House On the Prairie,`` she gives credit for ``forming`` her as an actress.

``He taught me my professional attitude toward my career. But the series got difficult during the last few years. I wanted to go on to other parts. But I stayed, because I played the uplifting one in the family. . .I've got to make a phone call now.``

Caption: PHOTO

PHOTO: Gilbert in TV's ``Family Secrets.``

Edition: SPORTS FINAL

Section: FRIDAY

Page: I

Index Terms: BIOGRAPHY ; MELISSA GILBERT

Record Number: CTR8501210508

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