

Landon Happy with 'Little House'

(Michael Landon, who is chief protagonist of "Little House on the Prairie," NBC's hour-long Wednesday evening drama, tells how he became involved in the series in this exclusive story.)



Michael Landon

By MICHAEL LANDON
I have always believed that television drama should attempt to depict people as people.

All too often a script is filled with nothing but violence in an effort to disguise the fact that there is no real substance to the story; that the characters are nothing more than one dimensional and the script has no real beginning, middle or end.

Human relationships are based on credible situations stemming from how people think, what they do and where they live.

Television drama must be credible to be good. Our NBC series is based on the "Little House" books by Laura Ingalls Wilder, who tells the story of her life as she traveled with her family by covered wagon through Kansas, Minnesota and finally into the Dakota Territory.

When I was first exposed to the pilot concept for Little House on the Prairie I recognized an inherent quality in the story that set it apart from every other series concept I had considered. The Ingalls' story is a simple one, if you can call

the struggle to survive simple.

As head of a family of five, Charles Ingalls had to cope with the drought and famine that dispossessed many farmers in the 19th century and provide for his family at any cost, even if this meant leaving for weeks at a time in search of work elsewhere.

In adapting these books to television, it is important to remember that what is being depicted on the screen

is based on actual experiences and that back in the 19th century families lived from day to day with little or no security, and little if any money. Times were hard, but by the same token, the family unit was strong. Good times were had despite the anguish of an early frost or the loss of an acre's corn.

As I read through the series of books Laura Ingalls began publishing in

1932, I found them to be filled with human emotion; profiles in courage is an accurate description.

It is interesting to note that little mention was made of serious family conflicts, or the infant death of the Ingalls' only son, Charles Jr. This was, in all probability, too powerful an experience for Laura to write about. She consequently decided not to include it in the text of the story.

There were a great many things to be considered before I became involved with Little House but over and above the attention paid to historic detail, family relationships and character development, one overriding concern was to make the Ingalls family come alive in the hearts and minds of viewers across the country and establish a bond that would span a hundred years.

Karen Grassle plays my wife Caroline on the series, along with daughters Laura (Melissa Gilbert), Mary (Melissa Sue Anderson), and Carrie (Lindsey Sidney Green Bush).

Over the months we have established a rapport with one another that Laura Ingalls herself would have envied.

Shooting much of the NBC series on location, we have in many ways become a frontier family — experiencing the trials and rewards of working together as a family unit.

"Little House on the Prairie" reaches back to the roots and granite of America, to the people who carved a life for themselves in the wilderness.

On December 18, we are going to air a special two-hour episode of Little House, in which Ernest Borgnine will make a special guest

appearance. Charles and Laura Ingalls have a child — their first son — and I think you will find this episode to be one of the most moving and poignant of the series.

I am very enthusiastic about our Little House on the Prairie because it captures on film what once was and will never be again.

CBS News Correspondent Charles Kuralt recently took a film crew out to the Old Oregon Trail near Scottsbluff, Neb. He stopped by the gravesite of Rebecca Winters, a pioneer woman who died on her way West, back in 1852. She is buried alone beside a railroad track that had been re-routed to avoid disturbing her grave. Rebecca Winters was nearly in sight of Salt Lake City when she died.

Kuralt closed by saying, "There's not much to see here, but there's a lot to feel. We've been to the Great Tabernacle in Salt Lake City, to Sutter's Fort and the Golden Gate, and here's a piece of advice: If you want to feel the westward movement in your American bones, pass up those places and stand here on the Oregon Trail beside Rebecca Winters — and watch the trains go by."

Laura Ingalls could well have shared the fate of Rebecca Winters but Laura and her family made it through the worst of times and the best of times. If indeed you wish to feel that western movement in your American bones — I think you'll find it in the "Little House on the Prairie."

Soda Goes Metric

NEW YORK (AP) — The U.S. is a long way from adopting the metric system of measurement, but a major soft drink company is planning a radio-TV campaign it hopes will make consumers say, "Take me to your liter."

The firm, the Seven-Up Co. of St. Louis, Mo., says it plans to begin its broadcast and print advertising campaigns for liter and half-liter bottles of its product in 1975.

The company apparently is the first soft drink producer in the U.S. to take the metric step, according to officials at the National Soft Drink Association and the Glass Container Manufacturers' Institute, two major trade groups.

And the step will be limited at first.

The radio-TV ads extolling Seven-Up as the "leader in the liter" won't be the only kind set loose, says Lee Larkin, the company's director of public relations.

He says they'll just be one part of an overall campaign urging consumers to simply buy the drink, be it bottled by the liter or in traditional ounces, and that the liter phase-in will be gradual.

Larkin says bottled Seven-Up primarily is sold in units of 16 and 32 ounces. A half-liter will work out to 16.91

ounces and the liter to 33.82 ounces, he says, but he doubts there'll be a slight price rise to reflect the extra sip provided liter-lovers.

There are several reasons for giving the new measurement a tryout, says Larkin: "One is that we want to be the first to do it. The next is that it's a logical system of measurement.

"And three, it's going to come sooner or later."

Later is more probable, says William Sadd, president of the glass container association: "It's going to happen ...but there's been no industry-wide move that I know of for the soft drink industry to go metric at this time."

No legislation is pending

in Congress to make metric mandatory. If that ever happened, a call for a shot of booze — usually 1½ ounces — might someday come out in a "Gunsmoke" episode as:

"Say, Miss Kitty, give me 45 milliliters of red-eye."

Sad to say, the Seven-Up television ads for liters probably won't be much of a home study aid for grade school kids to whom hundreds of teachers across the U.S. now are trying to explain the metric system.

Larkin, who said he's seen one of the proposed TV ads, says "it doesn't go into depth," that is, explain the difference between the liter and the ounce. "It's not an instructional type of thing."

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