

SOONER SPOTLIGHT ● DORIS TRAVIS

From Follies Girl to OU Freshman

Doris Eaton Travis has made hundreds of "entrances" in her life. But the former child actress, Ziegfield Follies girl, television personality and Arthur Murray dance instructor still felt butterflies as she made her most recent entrance — as a University of Oklahoma freshman.

At age 77, Doris Travis moves among OU's other freshmen hardly noticed in her blue jeans and T-shirt. The only difference might be that she is a little more serious toward her studies, which for her fulfill a lifelong dream.

"It is like feeding a hunger," explains Mrs. Travis, whose formal education was cut short by her success as a child actress. "I always felt a lack of formal education, and inside I've desired it all my life. But I didn't do anything about it until now."

This semester she is enrolled in freshman-level philosophy and English composition classes at OU. "The philosophy course is opening a whole new world of thought on everything for me," she says. "And the writing practice I'm getting in my English course is helping me focus those thoughts."

One of seven children, Doris Eaton went into theater in Washington, D.C., at age 8 when a stock company with 40-week seasons sent out a call for children to perform in its production of "Mrs. Wiggs in the Cabbage Patch."

"Mama took five of us down to try out. They selected me, and my sisters Pearl and Mary," she says. "The next show as 'Seven Sisters,' and five of us Eatons played five of the sisters. The youngest sister was my younger brother!"

Shortly thereafter the entire Eaton family moved to New York. "We had played in 'The Blue Bird,' which the Shuberts in New York decided to send on the road. They got in touch with mother and asked us to come to New York. So we moved."

Doris, two of her sisters and her brother Charlie played in the road show, which traveled the country for five months with week-long stands

in larger cities and one-night stands in most small towns.

When Doris was 14, her older sister Pearl joined the Ziegfield Follies. "One day, I put on a long dress and went to rehearsals with her," she explains. The director asked her to try out as an understudy for Ann Pennington in the road show — a part she got.

"But I had to use a different name since it was not permitted to be in a musical show until you were 16," she laughs.

After three years in the Follies, she traveled to England to make a movie and then returned to the United States for more shows on Broadway. "Then I hit a low and became an assistant tap dance instructor in an Arthur Murray dance studio in New York," she recalls.

Another career had been launched which would span most of her working years and prove to be a successful enterprise. She joined her dance partner at Arthur Murray in opening a branch studio in Detroit in 1938 and eventually developed a Michigan franchise with 19 studios throughout the state. She danced on television for seven years with her students.

Then she met Paul Travis, one of her students. "It was strictly against the rules for an instructor to go out with a student, but I was an executive, and I broke the rule."

They were married, beginning a partnership that brought them to Oklahoma and eventually led Doris to OU's classrooms.

"In 1970, Paul sold his business; I sold the studios, and we came to Oklahoma," she says. The Traveses own a flourishing quarter horse ranch outside Norman. "Now we feel like real Okies, and our association with OU is a real value."

Her presence in the classroom has intrigued some of her more inquisitive fellow students. "I've been asked why I'm taking the courses. One young man wondered what I am getting out of it," she says. "Well, it's simply feeding my life."

—DONNA MURPHY



as a Ziegfield Girl . . .



. . . and as a Sooner coed.