

Mary MacDougal Axelson and her three year old daughter, Mary Ivonne, now of New York City, formerly of Norman and Sapulpa. Mary Ivonne was Mrs Axelson's inspiration for the writing of the play "Birth" which was produced on Broadway last spring and later as a movie, "Life Begins," by Warner Brothers. Mrs Axelson is the wife of Ivar Axelson, formerly in the college of business administration at the university and who is now on the faculty at New York City university



The play begins

BY SALLYE LITTLE BRANDT

“WELL now let's see, I was born the year my mother began work on her first play, that would be 1929 wouldn't it?”

Thus Mary Ivonne Axelson, daughter of Mary MacDougal Axelson, Oklahoma poetess from Sapulpa, and Ivar Axelson, former professor in the school of business administration here and now on the faculty at New York City university, may someday count her age.

For Mary McDougal Axelson, energetic, keen, imaginative, thrilled and awed as deeply as any woman has ever been over the birth of her first baby, nevertheless gave birth to a brilliant idea at the time when most women are completely engrossed in the business of learning to be a mother.

There has been another interesting impetus at home for Mrs Axelson's play-writing. Her husband has always made the theater his hobby. Being engaged in the teaching profession and the business of teaching business to the future Henry Fords and Andrew Mellons of the country only his closest friends have ever known or would suspect this interest.

“But Ivar has always been interested in the theater. He loves it from every angle and spends and always has spent many many evenings at theatrical entertainments whenever possible. He talks theater around home the way some men talk golf,” Mrs Axelson said.

Her first play “Birth” was acclaimed so highly by critics in New York where

it was shown both at Columbia and on Broadway last winter and then again in Hollywood where Warner Brothers made the play into a movie “Life Begins” that her future as a playwright has a splendid start toward success.

And Mary MacDougal Axelson, known to Oklahoma as a poetess from Sapulpa, she having published verses in a number of national magazines for a number of years, intends to write more plays and probably spend most of her writing time on plays, from now on.

Mary Ivonne is beyond the shadow of a doubt her mother's greatest interest. Play writing, as intensely interested as Mrs Axelson is in it, will always remain a side issue.

But Mary Ivonne will never be a side issue to her mother's writing.

In fact her mother was so anxious that this not happen that her writing methods when she began work on the play “Birth” were probably the most unusual any writer-mother has ever used.

Harriet Beecher Stowe writing “Uncle Tom's Cabin” while she washed the family dishes had nothing on Mary MacDougal Axelson.

Mrs Axelson visited in Norman this fall just before her very dear friend, May Frank Rhoades and Mr Rhoades left for their new home in Omaha. While making one of her flying trips to the home of another friend, her stay was so short and her friends so many that all her visits were rushed and hurried and bubbled with enthusiastic answers to all the

questions hurled at her about the behind-the-scenes-story of a successful play, and during one of those afternoon visits she described her writing methods.

“I had always determined,” she explained in her somewhat decisive crisp manner of talking, “that I would never let my writing interfere with my relationship with my daughter. But I wanted to continue writing. And after my experience in the hospital at the time Mary Ivonne was born I was certain I had the idea for a great play.

“The drama that surrounds the beginning of life is a stupendous thing I discovered. It astounds me that no one has seen it before and written a play about it. Everything is there that it takes to make a real drama.

“Well, my writing method now differs from what it started out to be but my first method will amuse you anyway,” she added with a flick of humor which seems to characterize her for she inevitably sees the humor of a situation.

“I started out to write at a large table with my baby on my lap. I kept a large stack of sharpened pencils in a heap at one side of the table and a pile of clean paper at the other. As my pencil moved in my hands the baby would reach for it. I slipped it into her hand, grabbed for another and went on writing. As soon as she saw that the pencil would not move for her the way it did for me she saw the new one I had and reached for it.

“I would give it to her and reach for

another and she would drop the first pencil to the floor. Soon the whole pile would be on the floor and I would have to stop and put them back on the table and let the rotation of pencils begin again.

"A good deal of the first draft of 'Birth' was written in this manner. But when I got to the polishing details I learned that I must concentrate and I changed my method.

"Now I write four hours a day. During that time the baby is taken for a walk to the park with her nurse or is napping. I can devote myself entirely to the writing for those four hours. Then when I am through I can devote myself entirely to the baby. This system is better for both me and for Mary Ivonne."

So much has been said about the play "Birth" that it is not necessary to go into detail describing it. Its success both on Broadway and in the movie has been acclaimed by critics everywhere.

The scenes for the entire play are laid in the maternity ward of a large hospital where one finds the mother who wanted a baby, the mother who did not want a baby, the mother who died giving birth to a baby, the night club hostess who gave birth to twins, the mother who had had so many the event was not too exciting for her; in other words the high, the low, the rich, the poor, the sad and the gay aspects of the great human drama, birth.

A few of the interesting "quotes"

from criticism of the play have been selected from the vast pile of reviews Mrs Axelson loaned *The Sooner Magazine* for perusal.

Birth is an unusual, beautiful play, a brave play—fascinating to any audience. The author is to be commended for treating so sensitively, so poetically—I almost said "sacredly"—so delicate a subject.

GUSTAV BLUM, Broadway Producer.

All my congratulations on your fine moving play. You have taken a great human experience and translated it into sure terms of the theater. . . . and I do not see how the play, just as it is, with a professional production, could fail to interest and excite every sort of American audience. I was on the edge of my chair from the minute the curtain rang up. . . .

STEPHEN VINCENT BENET,
Poet, Pulitzer Prize Winner.

And of the movie:

Life Begins is the kind of picture which ought to make Hollywood sit up and respect itself.

THORNTON DELEHANTY in the *New York Evening Post*.

. . . . A searching human document that will stir the heart and mind and soul of every man and woman that views it. . . . and send them away with renewed faith and interest in the Motion Pictures. . . .

PHIL M. DALY, *The Film Daily*.

These quotes were picked at random from a pile of others, each as encouraging to Mrs Axelson who wants to write more plays.

Mrs Axelson is the daughter of Mr and Mrs D. M. MacDougal of Sapulpa and the sister of Violet MacDougal, who has also made a name for herself as a poetess.

spending several years with the North Cheyenne tribe at Lame Deer, Montana, at the Tongue Ruler agency, she has developed an understanding and a love for the Indian.

One of the interesting things Miss Buntin has uncovered in her search is the census of the Sac and Fox Indians over a period of years. In 1846 they numbered well over 2000 and in 1868 there were but 693. As these censuses were compiled for the payment of money to the Indians it is thought they are authentic. This summer she visited the Cheyenne-Arapaho settlement at Concho, seven miles from El Reno. Here was found the outgoing mail files of that agency from 1870.

Letters from government authorities and famous Indians to station agents are being photographed and material collected by Miss Buntin is being used by historians of the state.

Mr Grant Foreman, director of research of the Oklahoma historical society says of Miss Buntin's work: "I have been surprised and gratified by her grasp of the historical significance of the material coming under her observation. She has shown a rare degree of initiative and a comprehension of the papers with which she is dealing that would be a credit to one long engaged in such work. I feel that the Oklahoma historical society will profit by the work being done by Miss Buntin."

Miss Buntin received the B. A. degree from Oklahoma College for Women at Chickasha and received the M. A. degree from the University of Oklahoma where she was pledged to Alpha Omicron Pi social fraternity.

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State history research student

BY SULA SALTSMAN

"GRIMY at times, but fascinating" is what Martha Buntin, '31M.A., says of her work as she takes down pack after pack of time-stained papers collected at various Indian stations throughout the state, sorting them on the floor of her basement-den and bringing to light a wealth of material on the history of Oklahoma.

Miss Buntin, employed as a research worker for the state historical society, is at the present time, working on Sac and Fox papers found in a barrel in the attic of the Sac-and-Fox fort, six miles from Stroud. Braving encounters with mice and digging down through debris, nests of mud-daubers and cobwebs, she found all the papers of the fort back to 1837, and a continuous record of correspondence since 1840.

In deep concentration while deciphering the queer and very small hand-writings of the various Indian agents and their correspondents, Miss Buntin often looks up with a bright, animated light in her eyes for these documents are such tangible records of the exciting days of Indian Territory that she sometimes forgets it is now past history. Her den in the basement of her father's home in Norman, furnished appropriately as a background for a collection of Indian relics, is conducive to such imaginative wanderings.

Her father, Mr J. A. Buntin, had been for thirty-nine years in the Indian service at the Kiowa agency, until his retirement last year. Playing with Indian children in Anadarko as a child and later

mander conducted inspections of the fifty-one R. O. T. C. units in the area.

In 1931, Major Malony was relieved and ordered to duty with the University of Oklahoma. He has had one successful year. He has practically leaped the hurdles of the second year and looks forward with a great deal of pleasure to a period of two more years here when 1931-33 has clicked off the calander.

Any one of the periods of service of the Major would make a complete story within itself, but the roamer is settled for awhile and you may hear of him later. But a busy man, with 1,084 basic students, 160 cadet officers, seven regular army officers and twenty one enlisted men to manage, has little time to talk, especially when the man doesn't like to talk about his own accomplishments.

MAJOR HARRY J. MALONY

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