

# Magic Word for Hollywood

And the word is "Oklahoma" if the evidence picked up by the author on a recent trip is an indication. She reports on the success stories of O. U.-trained professional writers.

By GRACE WHATELY SLAUGHTER, '18ba

**W**ANT TO KNOW a magic word? OKLAHOMA!

Want to know where it works? HOLLYWOOD!

Yes, it's true, if you want the red carpet treatment in the inner circles of the Hollywood movie industry, just let them know you're from Oklahoma. You'll get it, for "Oklahoma" is the magic password. It works instantly, and it begins like this:

"Did you say you're from *Oklahoma*?" At your nod the next question is, "And I suppose you're a writer?" When you start to answer, "Well, sort of. I—" you're interrupted with the eager query, "Did you go to the university that has *that* writing school? The school that turns out all the writers?"

By now you're almost afraid to admit you graduated from O. U., much less that you took *that* writing course, for fear they'll expect you to sit right down and dash off a bestseller novel with movie possibilities.

To fellow Oklahomans this must sound like a giant exaggeration. Instead, it's the honest truth. At least it's what happens when you meet the men who buy the material for movies and TV, for they're the ones who know where it comes from.

They're the boys who paid Oklahoma's Bill Brinkley, '40journ, a reported \$400,000 for his bestseller *Don't Go Near the Water*, and who are producing the late Ross Lockridge's *Raintree County*. They remember that Ross Lockridge was an Oklahoman, as was also the late Thomas Heggen of *Mr. Roberts* fame. They know, too, that they don't have to wait long between the last successful Louis L'Amour-written movie until they'll have another in the making. Louie is Oklahoma's most prolific writer of novels, short stories and teleplays. Already he has sold eight of his novels to the movies and the ninth is in the making. His latest box office hit was *The Burning Hills*; a former one was *Hondo*.

Recently Dale Robertson, movie and television actor from Oklahoma City, starred in the teleplay *Flowers for Jenny*, written by L'Amour. Both young men enjoyed the coincidence because not only do they have movies and TV in common, they also have

Oklahoma sports-circle affairs to discuss, each having attained prominence in state boxing events.

Dale, a man of many talents, has found time on the side from his acting career to study law at U.C.L.A., to take a two-year course at a studio nightschool in editing and cutting and another in directing, and now is engaged in collaborating with O. U.'s Professor Foster Harris, '25ba, in the writing of movie and TV scripts. Dale has already sold some of his own scenarios and teleplays, at least two of which have been produced.

Recent sales to movies of stories and books by former students of the creative writing school at O. U. have been made by Bill Gulick, who has sold three books to movie studios, the latest a *Saturday Evening Post* serial called *The Texan*; Clifton Adams, *The Desperado* and *Gambling Man*; Al Dewlen, *The Night of the Tiger*, and Bill Scott, *Hunger Mountain*.

Also included in the group is Mary Agnes Thompson, whose story in *Good Housekeeping* titled "A Call from Mitch Miller" was bought by Paramount Studios to film under the title *Lonesome Cowboy*, starring Elvis Presley (though at the time Miss Thompson wrote the story, neither she nor the country in general had ever heard of the rock-and-roll sensation!). Mary Agnes' *Cosmopolitan Magazine* story, "Southwest Quarter," was bought by a TV company, so it would seem that young lady is more than "on her way."

If I were now in Norman and with access to the files of the writing school instead of in Hollywood hearing about prominent Oklahomans, then I'd probably find that I had overlooked dozens of successful writers. However, one recent sale reported by correspondence is that of Bob Duncan, author of *The Dicky Bird Was Singing*. He has also sold an hour-long teleplay to the Theatre Guild for presentation on the United States Steel Hour.

Other Oklahomans in Hollywood encountered by this writer to date include the following:

Jerry Janger, Oklahoma City, has returned from Army duty to resume his con-

tract with Columbia Pictures and currently is starring in *Rumble on the Docks*.

Minnaleta White, '17ba, about whom Robert Talley of the O. U. School of Journalism wrote a story in the *Sooner Magazine*, was formerly head of the voice department of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. She is now a free-lance voice teacher in Hollywood and numbers many Oklahomans among her students, all of whom affectionately call her "Teach."

Four Oklahoma students encountered at "Teach's" are Dick Beavers, Oklahoma City and Hollis; Frank Blackwell; Carl Jelly, and Don Chastain.

Beavers opened in a new television show with Tennessee Ernie Ford. He was chosen from more than 500 male singers who auditioned for group and solo work in The Voices of Walter Schumann on TV, as well as for concert work with the group. Dick, who recently sang the role of Lucas in *The Student Prince* at the Greek Theater in Hollywood, broke into the song-writing game with the release of a new inspirational number entitled "There's Never a Prayer Unanswered," recorded by Jane Froman.

Blackwell, who has obtained his master's degree in music from U.C.L.A., is being groomed by Mrs. White for a tenor role with the Metropolitan Opera Company. He shares an apartment with another former O.U. student, Jelly, who also holds two music degrees and now is teaching music in a Los Angeles high school. Chastain, once at O.U., does solo work at the Moulin Rouge in Hollywood.

Listening to the beautiful voices of these Oklahomans being trained by an Oklahoman, one wishes that some of our successful state writers would team up with Ralph Blaine, formerly of Broken Arrow, one of the finest composers of movie and Broadway musicals, to turn out another *Oklahoma!* featuring these new young singers. For, lest we forget, it did take an Oklahoman, the late Lynn Riggs, to write that smash hit in its original Broadway play form, *Green Grow the Lilacs*.

Under consideration at the moment by

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ployee of Be-Mac Transport Company, Inc., Oklahoma City.

R. Jerry Johnson, '56, Uvalde, Texas, recently completed a week's orientation in Newton, Iowa, for the Maytag Company. He now is city sales representative for the firm's St. Louis, Missouri, branch. The branch territory includes southern Illinois, eastern Missouri and northeast Arkansas.

Lieut. (jg) Thomas Richard McCalla and Mrs. McCalla (the former Shirley Howard, '56fa) now live in Naples, Italy, where he is on shore duty with NATO headquarters.

Ensign Paul A. Tucker, '56eng, now is stationed at Port Mugu, Naval Air Missiles Testing Center, in California.

Lieut. Tommy L. Walker, '56bus, Oklahoma City, has graduated from a ranger course at the Army's Infantry School, Fort Benning, Georgia. Walker entered service last July.

BIRTH: Paul E. Leftwich, '56m.ed, and Mrs. Leftwich (the former Nancy Gambill, '49-'51), Oklahoma City, have chosen the name Paul Scott for their son born March 8 in Wesley Hospital, Oklahoma City. They also have a daughter, Kathryn Sue, 13 months.

## HORIZONS OF GREATNESS

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These are but examples of the many accomplishments made possible by friends of the University through their generous gifts. There are many other examples which would perhaps be just as impressive and we hope there will be many more in the future.

The University of Oklahoma enjoys a unique position among educational institutions of the Southwest. Because of its stable and intelligent administration the University has been able to demonstrate a capacity for leadership that few institutions can match. President George L. Cross has held his position since 1944 and his administration has been unparalleled by any other institution in the region for the successful recognition and treatment of educational problems.

As a young institution, this University has vigor and a fresh approach to education that cannot be matched by many. We have the resourcefulness and leadership to innovate, experiment and pioneer; hence to set the standards of quality and service in education in the Southwest that vitalize its impact on our free society.

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major movie studios are two other popular books by Oklahomans, *The Reluctant Angel* by Ellen Reaves Hall, and *The River Witch* by Marjorie McIntyre. Both authors studied in O. U.'s writing school.

When a movie producer and a television director each asked this writer to tell them seriously what it is that the O. U. creative writing school has that makes for its phenomenal success, the answer was easy. It has its founders, Dr. Walter S. Campbell and Professor Foster Harris, who not only have thoroughly mastered the craft of writing, but who understand so well what people like to read and editors wish to buy that they can say with assurance:

"We may not teach you how to write, but we'll teach you how to sell!"

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