

All natural performers

Nornic studio nurtures young actors

By PAUL DORSEY
Herald staff writer

All children are natural actors, but whether or not they develop the talents borne of youthful imagination and freedom is a direct result of the kind of encouragement they receive in reaching maturity both on and off the stage.

Upon this premise, Georgetown residents Enid Williams and Bev Nicholas, both of whom made their stage debut at early ages, founded the Nornic Studio of performing arts, which completed its first season with a student's presentation this past weekend.

Since its inception last Sep-

tember, Nornic Studio has introduced more than 30 youngsters to the basic skills of the theatre, from make-up and writing to song and dance. The season's achievements have delighted the studio's founders, who admit that the school's curriculum and direction during the first year was largely experimental.

WEEKLY SESSIONS

Children who signed on for the weekly sessions at Knox Presbyterian church on Main Street displayed an eagerness to learn, improvise and create that surprised their instructors. In one or two cases, youngsters who were seriously

limited in their performances by shyness and stage fright when they first joined the studio have blossomed into outgoing, promising young actors.

Mrs. Williams, who can claim extensive musical training in a number of amateur and semi-professional companies between here and her native Montreal, and Mr. Nicholas, who has been involved in live theatre in Britain and Canada for the past 30 years, are agreed that stage talent is an inheritance of birth.

Once that natural talent is identified, though, they believe it must be encouraged and

developed to maturity before it can be adequately reflected on stage. Although no applicants are turned away at the Nornic Studio, Mrs. Williams and Mr. Nicholas are in a position to assess their students' acting talents and monitor their development over the semester. Those who demonstrate no real talent for the stage, and those whose talents appear to lie in other creative fields, are frankly advised of their instructors' evaluation and directed toward more appropriate areas of involvement.

Report cards are among the few structured aspects of instruction at the Nornic Studio.

The regular evaluations are designed to keep parents of the students informed as to their child's progress, but deal extensively with developing personality traits as they relate to the performing arts.

CAN BE GUIDED

"You can't be taught to act," Mr. Nicholas asserts. "But you can be guided and developed, and natural talent is a major factor here. If it's not in you - that desire and drive - then you may have difficulty with the performing arts."

The studio's junior students, aged seven to 13 years and the seniors, ages 13 and up, are encouraged to address their instructors by their first names, a factor which Mrs. Williams and Mr. Nicholas believe promotes self-respect and camaraderie.

While instruction in the various aspects of theatre arts remain preliminary, only touching upon the foundation of stage skills, the Nornic Studio covers a lot of ground which theatre courses in the public and high schools do not. In many instances, Mrs. Williams notes, the Nornic students are seeking to extend the instruction they received in the schools.

Where Nornic Studio's curriculum structure is somewhat more flexible than in the schools is in the instructors' willingness to allow students ample opportunity to demonstrate their individual talents, improvise, and jointly discuss and share their ideas.

Improvisational work at the studio has been very successful and made up a large portion of Saturday's presentation at Knox church hall, where students of all ages performed a variety of theatrical productions - some of them self-written - for parents, friends and guests.

The experimental nature of the studio's first two semesters has given Mrs. Williams and Mr. Nicholas a good idea of what direction their curriculum should take when courses begin again in the fall. Both agree it's "marvellous" that all of their students are eagerly awaiting another semester so they can continue the work they began this year.

OWN PROJECTS

Not only are the students attending classes at the studio of their own accord rather than by their parents' wishes, Mr. Nicholas says, but they become fiercely involved in their own projects, get annoyed with themselves when things don't work out as they'd hoped, and become jubilant when a scene or song is successful.

Nornic Studio derives its name from syllables in Mrs. Williams' middle name, No-reen and Mr. Nicholas last name. The idea for starting a young-people's theatre workshop was first discussed several years ago after Mrs. Williams and Mr. Nicholas became acquainted through their amateur theatre work in Brampton. Having realized their idea after moving to Georgetown about two years ago, the two veterans of the stage now feel that the purpose being fulfilled by Nornic Studio is a far greater one than simply basic training for potentially gifted youngsters.

Having served as a member of many professional and amateur theatre groups in his native Wales, in England and in Canada, Mr. Nicholas bears convincing witness to the importance of community theatre within the ascending structure of the performing arts. As is much more apparent in Britain, where the Little Theatre movement enjoys a far wider base and appeal, community theatre is the "backbone" of the professional theatre, he says.

Feeding the amateur theatre in all its small community manifestations across Canada and Britain, meanwhile, are the young people's theatres and workshop groups like the Nornic Studio. Both the children's theatre and its adult amateur counterpart are "filling a sad gap in our local culture," Mrs. Williams observes, speculating that Nornic Studio itself will directly benefit the work of the Georgetown Little Theatre and other amateur groups in the area in years to come.

THEATRE ALIVE

Ultimately, it is the amateur groups that keep the professional theatre alive, she says. Local cultural groups are appearing to meet every interest among the community's crafts-oriented people, and finally creating a balance with the town's many sports-orient-



Sharon Laughlin, left, and Kim Macdonald demonstrated one of the dances they choreographed for the show put on by Nornic Studios Saturday afternoon for parents of students who have been studying, singing, acting and other forms of expression with the studio. (Herald photo by Lori Taylor)

HALTON'S PEOPLE

Friendly atmosphere important at lodge

By MAGGIE HANNAH
Herald staff writer

A friendly, homey atmosphere where they can feel secure is a most important part of providing a home for the aged in the opinion of Mapleview Lodge owner Joan Waldie.

Mrs. Waldie says the 11 years she has spent caring for elderly people has been a wonderful experience. When she took over the big farm house on the townline between Erin and Halton Hills just north of Acton she had a dream and a lot of faith and not much else. Experience has taught her to cope with a lot of things she didn't know how to handle when she first opened the lodge.

ENJOY THINGS

One of the keys to keeping her residents happy is letting them do the things they enjoy, like setting the table or baking, she says.

"We have one lady who loves to set the table so that's her job every day," she explains. "Another one likes to clear things away. Some of them still like to bake and I consult them about recipes and things when we're pickling or freezing for the group. It takes so little to make them feel part of the place and it does so much to make them feel secure and content."

Food is a big part of the expense to running a place like the lodge but Mrs. Waldie doesn't believe in using prepared or processed foods if she can avoid it. As a result she picks fruit and vegetables and puts them in the freezer at the lodge. She also buys meat by the half carcass and has milk delivered to the door.

"It might cost a little more but I just can't see these old people having anything less than the best," she says. "They deserve it."

Mrs. Waldie was born in Norval and lived in Ashgrove, Speyside and Acton as she was growing up. She and her husband, Wilfred, moved to a farm on the south side of the townline 28 years ago.

While her elder son and daughter were growing up Mrs. Waldie took in children from the Children's Aid Society to keep them company. In a 10 year period she had 68 foster children including twins. She also had a few unmarried mothers staying with her at various times.

KEEP IN TOUCH

"There are a lot of them that I've never heard from," she says, "but others keep in touch. Having those kids enriched my life and taught me a lot."

Her elder children are all on their own now. David is a cabinet maker for a boat builder in Collingwood, Lynn is a secretary in Acton, and Duncan works at Indusmin. Lillian, 13, is a student at McKenzie-Smith Middle School in Acton. Mrs. Waldie's husband died in November after a lengthy illness.

It was while her children were still small that she decided to go into nursing. She looked into the Quo Vadis school in Toronto but decided against it when her brother, a doctor in North Bay, warned her she'd kill herself looking after her family, including the foster children, and taking her nursing degree in two years.

Instead she went to The School of Practical Nursing in Toronto and came out with qualifications equal to that of a registered nursing assistant in 1965.

She began working in the obstetrical ward of Georgetown hospital when it opened



Joan Waldie, owner of Mapleview Lodge, watches Ada Mae Lambert, 14, set the table for the resident's evening meal. Mrs. Lambert came to the lodge from her home in Rockwood but Mrs. Waldie gets inquiries from as far away as Parry Sound and Toronto as well as from all over Halton and Wellington counties. (Herald photo)

and stayed there until 1968. She worked the night shift steadily. She also worked in the surgical ward at St. Joseph's hospital in Guelph for a short time.

It was while she in the hospital that she began thinking of setting up a nursing home.

SOME PLACE

"I saw so many old people who weren't really fit to go home on their own any more but they weren't bad enough for a chronic care hospital," she explains. "I wished I had some place I could offer them where they could have the help they needed but the freedom to go on doing the things they were able to do, like washing the dishes or setting the table."

New approaches to geriatric care seem to indicate that Mrs. Waldie's idea of sustaining residents' previous interests is a good idea. One of her residents brought her canary when she came to the lodge. Another woman likes plants. One resident, Martha Jackson loves hockey and is a Daryl Sittler fan. For her 97th birthday her present was a trip to Maple Leaf Gardens to see the Leafs practise and meet some of the players in person including Mrs. Sittler.

Mrs. Waldie has two full time people, one who works days and one who works evenings. There are also two part time women who work nights on weekends, and another through the week.

She also gives the volunteers from Acton High School plenty of praise, saying that the elderly residents enjoy their visits whether they are accompanying them on walks or playing cards with them or just laughing and joking as young people do.

"She is always glad to see

groups come to visit. Mrs. Waldie says, and adds that a nearby church group is interested in forming a support group to help take residents shopping and transport them to various activities. This would be very useful, she says, if it can be arranged since it takes a good deal of organizing to get residents out for appointments or just shopping for all the odd things they find they need. She also likes to see her residents get to fall fairs and similar affairs.

At present Mrs. Waldie has 11 residents but she expects more to arrive in the next couple of months. Right now all her residents are female but she has had several couples and she hopes that one day she can put an addition to the house so that she can have room for some men. One couple even celebrated their diamond wedding anniversary from the lodge.

Her residents come from referrals from hospitals, doctors, families and sometimes prospective residents call up themselves to make inquiries.

"It seems to be very hard for families to communicate with their elderly members when it comes time for them to give up their homes and go into some type of care," she says. "I interview them and invite them to come and see the place before they make any decision. The feeling of security and complete happiness is so important to them."

Over the years 15 or 16 residents have died at the lodge. Mrs. Waldie says she doesn't send her residents to other homes as they become incapacitated unless they need surgery or oxygen or long, long term nursing. While it might be easier on her if she did this she won't give them up and

upset them if she can avoid it. "I keep them right to the end," she says. "One couple I had, the husband died first and his wife was with him all the time holding his hand. Then when she died we stayed with her. It's very depressing at the time but you get over it."

Mrs. Waldie says she has learned over the past few years that she must take breaks and get away from her job every once in a while.

"When I was on the farm and the kids were small I used to work until I was exhausted," she says. "I've learned the art of survival. You need a diversion, some sort of a hobby. It's essential to your mental health to learn to relax."

"My home is my hobby," she says. "We just built our home and I'm still landscaping it and we've put in a pond. I love gardening and reading. Lillian and I go cross country skiing at Terra Cotta and we just took swimming lessons together."

Mrs. Waldie says she is "just getting back into focus" after her husband's death. Her nursing home was begun on a dream and a lot of faith and prayer and perhaps one day she will get her expansion the same way.

Her dream home won't have to be big or very profit making. It just has to be homey, and friendly, well-organized and well run.

She considers herself to be basically an emotional person rather than one who deals well with figures. As a result she relies on her accountant to keep her books straight and her lawyer to advise her in business matters and keeps her prayer line open for the financial assistance she'll need to make the changes she would like to see at Mapleview Lodge.

ed groups.

"The best communities in Canada are those that have a balance between the different types of social activities," Mrs. Williams says.

Through the Nornic Studio and the Halton Hills Arts Council, Mrs. Williams has been involved in discussions about the theatre and cultural centre proposed for development in Georgetown. Like her colleagues in virtually all of the arts and crafts groups in the community, she feels that such a facility is sadly lacking.

She points out with pleasure that most of the cultural organizations in town are now "in high gear" in their own efforts to make the theatre and cultural centre a reality. The matter is now the subject of an ongoing feasibility study launched by town council the Rotary Club and the organizations themselves.

Mrs. Williams began voice and choral training at her Montreal-area home at an early age. She made her stage debut at age nine, took her first lead role at age 15, and spent about ten years touring the Montreal area with a young people's semi-professional concert group in which she was one of eight featured soloists.

DEEPLY INVOLVED

After a seven-year break, Mrs. Williams returned to music and the stage in a

production of Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Gondoliers*. She has since been deeply involved in the administrative aspects of musical theatre and has been a founding member of the three different musical companies in the Montreal and Brampton areas.

A mother of five children, she is employed as an instructor at Brampton's Tiny Tim Developmental School, which integrates mentally retarded youngsters with those who are normally adjusted. Nornic Studio will be presenting a benefit performance in mid-April or May, from which all proceeds will go to the Tiny Tim School.

Mr. Nicholas arrived in Canada six years ago after what was already a lengthy career in the theatres of Britain. He first came to Canada as a performer with the Elizabethan Players when the troupe performed at Lester B. Pearson Theatre and decided to remain in Canada.

From small beginnings at the age of 12, Mr. Nicholas went on to acting stints with various repertory companies, including those in Belgrave, Swansea and Coventry, did some radio and television work and began directing theatrical performances in 1963.

Upon his arrival in Ontario, he found living quarters with two old friends from England, Ron and Betty Hill of Georgetown and wasted no time in signing on with the Georgetown Little Theatre. Mr. Hill and Mr. Nicholas have appeared together in many Little Theatre productions since then, most recently teaming up to depict a pair of ancient Greek warriors in last fall's *The Rape of the Bell*.

TEACHES MUSIC

Mr. Nicholas now handles much of the instruction at Nornic Studio, while Mrs. Williams teaches the musical sessions and serves as the school's administrator. Assisting them in their teaching duties are several friends and associates from outside town who are invited to the studio for workshop sessions on specific topics.

Anticipating an increase in the studio's registration next season, Mrs. Williams and Mr. Nicholas are planning to step up their tutoring programme so that more workshops will be directed by professionals.

Plans for the future also include a separate branch of the studio possibly opening in Bramalea and a series of workshops for adults in the fall. On Apr. 21, the studio will play host to Fred Thury, a well-known professional acting tutor in Ontario who adjudicated the Georgetown Little Theatre's recent production of *When We Are Married* for the Central Ontario Drama Festival.

Mr. Thury, who is well known locally as a former director of the Little Theatre will coach adults and youngsters on acting techniques and exploration. His workshop at the Nornic Studio is designed for a cross-section of acting talents so that those with extensive past experience on the stage will get as much out of it as will beginners. Mrs. Williams points out that only 30 people will be accepted for the workshop and thus advises those interested to apply now.

ADULT WORKSHOPS

April may also see a series of adult workshops, depending on the interest shown. Although workshops are normally held Saturdays all day, Mrs. Williams notes that many adults have trouble attending during weekends.

Registration fees for young people's courses at Nornic Studio are \$50 for juniors and \$60 for seniors. Classes run for two hours on Saturdays at the Knox church, although the courses themselves increasingly involve field trips for students to theatrical productions in and outside town and other activities extending beyond the usual times.

Nornic Studio is a registered member of Theatre Ontario and the Association of Community Theatres.



Bev Nicholas