



Photographs by Ted Kirk

## Romper Room real

The camera focuses on the colorful desk surrounded by six miniature chairs. Mr. Music awaits his cue in the sound booth and Miss Linda slides into place behind her Magic Mirror.

The floor director signals a two-second warning and the cameras start to roll as Miss Linda welcomes all her little friends out in TV-land to another Romper Room session.

But cut the camera, move off stage and what remains of the happy, smiling, ever-enthusiastic Miss Linda? A happy, smiling, ever-enthusiastic Linda Phipps.

It may seem to defy the laws of sweetness, but Linda Phipps—Miss Linda of Romper Room fame—is basically the same person both on and off camera.

Even though the 33-year-old star of KOLN-TV's daily children's feature says she separates work from her private life ("I never take work home; that's a separate part of my life"), effervescent Miss Linda qualities cannot help but carry over into Linda's private life.

"When I go to the grocery store, that's my favorite place, because I see a lot of my little friends," Linda said.

Perhaps the only place where the Miss Linda image is left behind in the make-believe world of the Do-Bee is at the Phipps' farm outside Lincoln. There, she is simply "mom" to five-year-old Jeff and two-year-old Sally, although her husband teasingly calls her "Miss Linda."

### *'Interaction between the children varies from subdued co-existence to mayhem.'*

"If somebody calls me 'Miss Linda', it simply goes over his (Jeff's) head," Linda said. "I don't have the patience at home that I have here," Linda explained from the cluttered surroundings of the basement office she shares with Leta Powell Drake, better known as Kalamity Kate.

The real setting at home is far removed from the indoor confines of Romper Room. The outdoor farm atmosphere brings out a whole new aspect of raising children. Linda said she doesn't work with categorized teaching methods, as she does at Romper Room. Instead, she relies on more spontaneous learning experiences.

Linda the mother and Linda the Romper Room star separate every morning when Linda leaves her two children in the care of a babysitter while she drives into town to film the show. She's back home by noon, the taping, daily mail and preparation for the next day's show all completed.

Going to work is like coming home to the eight-year Romper Room veteran. The people she works with are "just great," Linda says, but rivaling her praise for her co-workers are the real Romper Room stars—the four- and five-year-olds attending the hour-long school.

"My job is so simple," Linda said, smiling. "The kids help a lot—they make it fun. At that age they're so easy to please."

The bright lights and cameras distract the children during their first day of filming, Linda said, but it's short-lived.

"I'm amazed, by the second day it's no problem." Romper Room tots are on the show for two weeks, in order to cover a range of activities, Linda said. At the end of their two-week stint, the children are graduated, complete with diplomas signed by Mr. Do-Bee.

Two weeks ago, Romper Room switched from a live broadcast format to taped shows. That ended the show's 13-year history of live broadcasting and removed it from the ranks of the last five television stations in the nation still showing the syndicated program live.

"During that time (live broadcasting), a lot of funny things are said and you can't stop, you've got to go on," Linda said.

Romper Room bloopers could create another television show in themselves. Linda recalled one episode when she and the children were discussing house cleaning. One child's innocent comment about bugs in his house was enough to turn his mom green, Linda said, explaining that in such cases she usually steers the conversation into other, less embarrassing topics.

Romper Room and Miss Linda have weathered many flu seasons where the show's playroom has doubled as an impromptu bathroom. The children got sick on the set.

"We're the most flexible show on television," Linda said, adding that the show's mood depends on the children's whims. Interaction between the children varies from subdued co-existence to mayhem. Embarrassing or complacent, the show goes on.

Not even innocent Romper Room is exempt from the unpleasantness of life. Even those naughty words that no good little child should ever hear have slipped out during broadcasts.

"The ultimate surfaced last Tuesday," Linda said. "We were rhyming 'truck'. 'We just went on.'"

Other interesting behind-the-scenes episodes at Romper Room arise from Linda's love for animals. She explained that the show has at least one live animal on each week.

"The crew always tells me, 'Linda, if you bring in a horse or cow, you have to clean up after it,'" Linda said. Invariably, a visiting farm animal has left some sort of calling card, Linda said.

Alex the Lamb made a guest appearance on Romper Room and now he and his wife, Andrea, live on the Phipps' farm.

"I couldn't resist, so I bought them," Linda said. The two sheep were bottle fed by Linda and now are absolute "oreo freaks," she added.

One episode, Linda introduced the children to a live boa constrictor. While the