

# Arts & Entertainment

## UNL grad finds success in TV work

By Deb Pederson  
Senior Reporter

Gail Rock, who graduated from UNL in 1961, was one of the first radio and television students at the university.

Rock, now a television producer and freelance writer, came back to Lincoln Sunday for a presentation of one of her television works, "The House Without A Christmas Tree," at Bennett Martin Public Library.

When she was at UNL, radio and television was in the speech department, Rock said. Now it's called Broadcasting and is in the College of Journalism.

"We had to go work in the field and build sets for plays and do all kinds of weird things that had anything to do with what we wanted to do," Rock said. "But we were part of the speech department so we had to take phonetics and all kinds of odd courses in the speech department."

"The only thing I can say it did for me was teach me how to use a ratchet, a screwdriver and a power saw, and it got rid of a lot of my Nebraska accent," she said.

When she graduated, Rock said

she went to New York intending to work in television. She got a job at NBC working as a secretary for the "Today" show.

"It was a great experience," Rock said. "It was a great education. We traveled all over the world on story assignments. We did a lot of arts and entertainment, news events, current events. So it was like another four years of college in a way."

After four years with NBC, Rock joined the writing staff at Fairchild Publications, which puts out a number of trade papers including Women's World Daily, a fashion trade journal.

Rock said she worked for one of the other journals and then went to Women's World Daily when she became a television and movie critic.

"Once I became a TV critic and a movie critic, I really thought, I'm reviewing all this junk," Rock said. "I mean, I can write that well. These people are making thousands and thousands of dollars. Why am I working on this newspaper making \$200 a week or whatever I was making. I should just quit and write scripts. So I did."

That same year, 1972, she wrote

"The House Without a Christmas Tree," which was turned into a CBS holiday special and became a success.

The story was based in the 1940s in a small Nebraska town and centered around the relationship between a 10-year-old girl named Addie and her father, Rock said. The father didn't want to have a Christmas tree because it reminded him of his wife who died one Christmas. But Addie wanted to have a tree.

"The House Without A Christmas Tree," which she also wrote as a book, and three subsequent shows and books, "The Thanksgiving Treasure," "The Easter Promise" and "Addie and the King of Hearts," are all based on her childhood in Valley, Rock said. Valley is between Fremont and Omaha.

Rock said she worried about whether "The House Without a Christmas Tree" would bother the people in her hometown. But she fictionalized the story and wrote it anyway.

Since writing the holiday specials, which have been bought by the Disney Channel, Rock said she has developed a lot of half-hour television situation-comedies and

dramas. She said she sometimes works with her partner, Dick Arlett, who she met while working for the "Today" show.

Rock said they just finished a thirteen-part series on windsurfing that will appear in syndication in January.

Her current projects include a couple of situation comedies that Rock and Arlett have presented to Ted Turner's SuperStation and a possible men's pageant called "Man of the 80s," which would feature tuxedo, talent and athletic competitions, Rock said.

Rock compared freelance writing to throwing paper airplanes out of a window.

"You just throw a bunch out and someone will pick up one of them," she said.

Freelancing takes a great deal of self-discipline, she said.

"It's very hard, very scary and very uncertain," she said. "You have to save your money because there are long dry spells between working."

Being single makes it easier because one doesn't have to worry about providing for a

family, she said.

"You have to be sure of yourself," Rock said. "You have to be able to accept rejection constantly. About 99 percent of your stuff is rejected and it's nothing personal. It's just that you didn't have exactly what was needed."

Rock said she found living in New York to be a necessity in order to make the connections and learn the ropes.

While she loved living and working in New York, she said she found her work taking her to Los Angeles for long periods of time. So she finally moved to Los Angeles and she said she loves the lifestyle there.

Her advice to aspiring freelancers is "train yourself to look at things."

She also suggested watching a series on television for a while and then trying to write some episodes for it.

Her rule-of-thumb for developing a series is that she has to have at least 12 episodes. If she can't think up 12 story lines, there isn't a series, Rock said.

"I think everyone has the ability," Rock said. "You just have to open the creative channel."



Rock

David Creamer/Daily Nebraskan

## Trudeau book worth reading, not buying

By Bill Allen  
Senior Editor

To begin with, Gary Trudeau's latest paperback is not worth the \$9.95 asking price, but I'll say more about that later, and it might change your mind.

### Book Review

Trudeau, as I assume you all know, is a political satirist who is famous and infamous for his Doonesbury comic strip that is published in newspapers nationwide.

His latest effort, "Check Your Egos at the Door," follows the same format of his previous works. Each page is an enlarged version of a strip that already appeared in the newspaper.

That's where I have trouble with this book, and many of his latest ones. I read the newspapers regularly and so I have already seen these cartoons. It took me only a half hour to go through the entire book.

So you say, but I haven't seen these cartoons and I am a Trudeau fan. Should I buy it?

Well, maybe. It depends on how big a Trudeau fan you are. If you have an entire collection, sure you're going to buy it. Otherwise, he has done better stuff.

This book, as a whole is just too single event-topical and doesn't make enough sweeping satirical statements about society to warrant keeping around as a voice for our times, as some of Trudeau's other works have.

In that sense, you would probably be better off spending a little more money and buying one of his chronicles, like

"The Doonesbury Chronicles." That's a good one for college students. And it has the longer cartoons, like the ones in the Sunday papers. The cartoons in this book are just the little four panel newspaper ones.

The topics satirized in this book are the "Jack Gains in space" panels, the U.S.A. for Africa video, farm problems, Baby Doc hospital, the homeless, and father's responsibility in raising children, to name a few.

Good stuff, yeah, but Trudeau just didn't go far enough with the satire on many of these. He made good points, but just as I would get into something he would switch to the next subject, leaving me hanging.

The best combination of laughs and thought in the book involved the issue of press coverage of the subway vigilante.

A reporter breaks into Michael Doonesbury's house and demands an interview. Doonesbury is the subway hero. The reporter asked him if he has a gun and Doonesbury says, "No, but if you reporters don't stay out of my house I'm seriously considering getting one." The headline in the next paper then read "I'll Kill Again," by Subway Hero.

Doonesbury is at his best when he can tie humor and an issue together well, and that is strained a bit in this collection.

But, all the profits of this book go to the United Support of Artists for Africa campaign to aid people currently suffering from hunger and disease in Africa and the United States.

It makes a good comment about Trudeau, too. Even though he satirized the "We Are The World Video" in this book, he is contributing to its purpose. For that reason you may want to buy the book.



Courtesy Holt, Rinehart and Winston

## International wars topic of NETV series on tonight

"War: A Commentary by Gwynne Dyer," premiering tonight at 8 p.m. on NETV, takes viewers on a trek through two centuries of world military history.

From the Napoleonic Wars to the Falkland Islands War and the ongoing Middle East conflict, Canadian journalist Gwynne Dyer charts the political ideals, military strategies, methods of conquest and price that has been paid for the spoils of war.

Shot on location in 10 different countries — including the United States and the Soviet Union — the series features interviews with both the obscure and the famous — from young recruits to eminent military generals, historians and philosophers — who provide first-hand perspectives on the nature of and rationale for war.

In the first episode, "The Road to Total War," Dyer begins his survey of the history of conflict with the Napoleonic era, following the escalation of warfare through the decades to one of history's most horrifying moments, when the first atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima.

In later episodes, Dyer profiles the men who compose the hierarchy of war: from green recruits transformed into competent soldiers, to career officers nurturing the attitudes and organization that make battle possible, to government officials acting on behalf of their citizens.

The series also documents NATO's war games in central Europe, where the players recognize how quickly a conventional war could transform into an all-out nuclear exchange. Dyer then traces the development of the arms race, from Hiroshima to the nuclear stalemate that exists today.