

Melissa Sue carves a new career

It was one of the happiest moments of Melissa Sue Anderson's life. There she was, on a day close to her own eighteenth birthday last year, playing the most grisly dramatic scene of her life, the birthday party of the character, Virginia, in the film, *Happy Birthday To Me*.

Surrounded by corpses of all her classmates who had disappeared in a sinister way in the script, Virginia was finally finding out the answer to the question that had haunted her for a long time: was she a victim, facing death at the hands of a murderess or was she herself that scheming murderess?

What a departure for the sweet, sympathetic blind Mary Ingalls of *Little House On The Prairie*!

"I'm sure," Melissa was asked, "that a horror film wasn't your main choice. Do you have another film in mind that you'd really like to do?"

"Oh, but you're wrong," answered Melissa, blue eyes flashing, but still looking more like innocent-faced Mary than evil Virginia in simple white and brown blouse and brown pants that emphasized her lithe figure.

"Happy Birthday was my main choice for my first film. My agent asked what features I'd like to do. I said, 'I'd like a horror movie.' I wanted a complete change from *Little House* so being cast as a murderess was exactly what I wanted then, and playing that last scene was a lot of fun for me.

"It was a challenge to me to underplay my role, so it wouldn't be laughable. A lot of people tell me I don't stand out, but that's because I underplay things.

"Naturally in a horror film, with all the screams and the blood, you don't want to make it funny. You want people to believe it, even though it's larger than life.

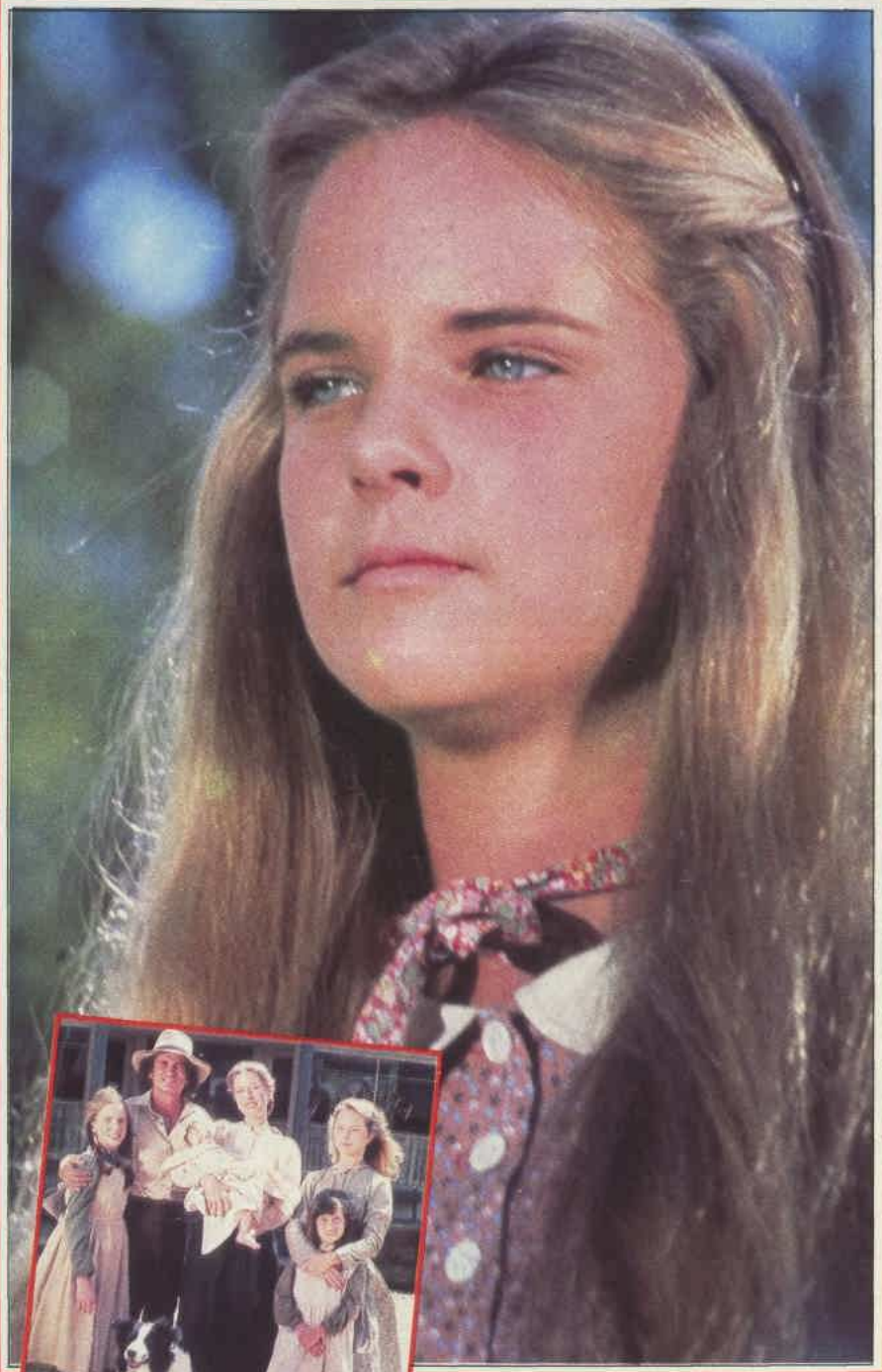
"Now I'd like to do something lighter — perhaps a romantic love story. I've already done a light TV movie, *Advice To The Lovelorn*, with Cloris Leachman."

Many people thought that she had given up *Little House* completely to make her motion picture debut. "No," she said, "I haven't left the series yet.

"I'll be doing three shows next season. This will be our eighth year — and I imagine our last one. But whether they go on or not, I'll depart after doing those three shows. I haven't done as much on *Little House* since Mary went blind. As a blind woman there isn't that much for my character to do; that's why I'm leaving.

"But I'll never forget all that *Little House* has meant to me. After I did the pilot I was elated. It was the biggest thing I'd ever done until then.

"I had counted my lines in the two-



Melissa Sue Anderson as Mary Ingalls in *Little House On The Prairie*, and with the Prairie folks she's leaving.

hour pilot and there were 72! Maybe some of the lines were just, 'Yes, ma,' 'No, ma,' 'OK, pa,' but whatever they were, that was more than I'd ever had before.

"I didn't think the pilot would lead to a series, but I thought it would be a stepping stone to something else. Till then no one had given me a chance to show that I could act. I'd had small roles in *Shaft* and *The Brady Bunch* but nothing as important as the role of Mary Ingalls.

"Until I could prove that I was a good actress no one would bother to write a part for me. Finally *Little House* gave me

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