

## Ed Asner hopes to color ratings 'Rosie' on CBS

### Young Lisa Rieffel sees expanded role

By Dan Rice

The appeal for higher ratings may be the most trying aspect of "The Trials of Rosie O'Neill," but the defense has not rested. Thursday, Sept. 12, is the appointed date for the fall premiere of the CBS drama, and the cast and crew have been hard at work all summer to ensure their second season summons enough viewers to deliver a positive verdict.

Sharon Gless, a two-time Emmy winner for "Cagney & Lacey," returns as Rosie O'Neill, a corporate lawyer who becomes a public defender after a difficult divorce from her husband and his law firm. Her series, which is produced by her real-life husband, Barney Rosenzweig, has won critical acclaim for the reality of its situations and portrayals, but its Thursday night time-slot puts it up against NBC's Cheers, the leader of the pack.

When Rosie went into summer repeats, the show dropped even further behind in the ratings, prompting talk of cancellation.

The call went out for a hired gun, an actor with more Emmys than anyone and a glare that could reduce Mary Tyler Moore to tears. Yes, none other than dramatic heavyweight Ed Asner, two-term president of the Screen Actors Guild and outspoken stalwart of liberal political causes.

Asner comes on board to play Walter Kovatch, a bigoted ex-cop who ended his 35-year police career after arresting his son for selling drugs. Hard-posed Kovatch had always believed the public defender's office to be his nemesis, but is persuaded to join Rosie's team as an investigator. Asner reports, "His chemistry is working well" on the set, but character-wise, we viewers know we're in for an explosive personality conflict. He is proud his new series "Isn't Sugarcade?" and presents life as it really is, this is from a man who tells it like it is.

After having successfully transferred his popular Lou Grant character from a comedy to a dramatic series, CBS canceled Lou Grant amid controversy that Asner was perhaps using his fictional-newsman credibility to further his own political causes. Rather than let

his spirit be broken, Asner continued his campaigns, even joining a boycott against Maxwell House (which buys El Salvadoran coffee), bringing threats from their parent corporation, the ultrapowerful TV sponsor Procter & Gamble. CBS has forgiven him, proving that when the chips are down, a man's worth is undeniable.

Another change in the series involves an expanded role for Rosie's former stepdaughter Kim Ginty (Lisa Rieffel). In a forthcoming episode, Kim moves in with Rosie, thereby further exploring their relationship and giving Rosie more stress to talk over with her shrink. At age 18, Rieffel is already a veteran of Broadway and films, as well as other TV series, and says she loves the work.

"I wake up at five, work a 10½ hour day, and come home and just sleep and get ready for tomorrow. It's so cool!"

In the fall, Rosie O'Neill will still face off against Cheers, but it will also serve as the lead-in to Nielsen favorite "Knots Landing." With a one-two punch like that, CBS may well win Thursday night after all.

## FAMILY FAIR

### PBS takes a week-long look at education

By Sherry Jones

PBS is dedicating the first week of September to a critical look at education in America. Related programming begins Sunday, Sept. 1, with an encore airing of *Stand and Deliver*, the 1987 film starring Edward James Olmos as a barrio-school math teacher in East Los Angeles who turns his students into winners. Lou Diamond Phillips co-stars in the fact-based *American Playhouse* presentation.

On Tuesday, Sept. 3, PBS answers the question "Who Will Teach for America?" chronicling the experiences of the first Teach for America recruits as they enter classrooms in inner-city and rural school districts.

Wednesday, Sept. 4, offers *Math... Who Needs It?* with Bill Cosby, Tim Gatt and Paul Rodriguez explaining everyday uses for math. The entertaining hour is aimed at both students and parents. The following hour, *Learning in America: Schools That Work*, focuses on nontraditional approaches to education.

The decisions that teachers, principals, administrators and government officials grapple with every day are brought under scrutiny in a Fred Friendly special, *America's Schools: Who Cares a Damn?*, a panel discussion airing Thursday, Sept. 5.

Back-to-School week concludes on Friday, Sept. 6, as Michael Kinsley moderates *Firing Line Debate*, asking if freedom of thought is in danger on American campuses.

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