

Local girl has role in Sally Field film

By GIGI SHAMSY
Reporter

Gennie James wants to be an Aggie when she grows up. But this is a far cry from the instant film stardom the 8-year-old Navasota girl now has from the movie "Places in the Heart."

Gennie said she hasn't considered other universities. Leaning forward on the edge of her chair, she said she cannot wait to visit A&M and eat in Sbis Dining Hall.

She has a hard time sitting still and her spunk and charisma spread to those around her.

"I love math, science, and my second grade homeroom teacher, but don't ask me about reading," Gennie said. "Of course I want to be an actress, but at A&M I'll learn to be a teacher," she said with crossed fingers, "just so I'll always have a job to turn to."

Her mother and father are pleased with this goal. They said Gennie's grandfather, a former student, will pay for Gennie's education at A&M.

Her movie career started when John James, Gennie's father,

spotted an ad in The Eagle for a children's audition call for a Waxahachie-based movie. The ad said the movie would be called "The Texas Story" and would be directed by Robert Benton, the director of "Kramer vs. Kramer."

James, a counselor for the Texas prison system, said he thought he would take Gennie to the audition in Houston just for the fun of it.

Sally James, a clerk for the prison system, said the family laughed all the way to the first au-

dition in Houston, where 800 girls showed up to try for the part of Sally Field's daughter, Possum. But they didn't laugh long.

The number of young actresses narrowed to 30 by the third audition in Dallas, she said, and Gennie was one of them.

Sally James said the fourth audition in Waxahachie wiped away her parents' laughs and brought on serious thoughts for the future.

Gennie's mother said she sat motionless with the letter from the director's office stating her daughter's contract terms for "Places in the Heart." The letter also said the director felt lucky to have discovered actress Gennie James.

Gennie, however, was passive about her launch to fame and fortune. The auditions were easy, effortless and fun, she said.

Gennie, sporting a brunette, cropped hairstyle and a face full of freckles, said she was excited about her acceptance to play Possum. Gennie looks like she belongs on the set of "Little House on the Prairie."

In some ways, Gennie is a typical 8-year-old. She said she'll be a punk rocker for Halloween, she adores any food with sugar in it, she wants a Cabbage Patch Doll and twistie beads for Christmas, and she fights occasionally with her 2-year-old brother, Johnny.

But not every 8-year-old is chummy with Sally Fields. They filmed the movie together from September 1983 to December 1983.

"Sally gave me this engraved silver heart necklace for



Gennie James

Christmas last year," Gennie said proudly.

Gennie said she can't put her finger on her favorite memory of the filming.

"I don't know," she said. "I can't do that one. Everything was so easy and fun. It's hard to choose just one favorite part."

She said some of her best memories are fun times with 12-year-old co-star Yankton "Yank" Hatten; filling a wall with cast pictures; staying with her grandmother in a Waxahachie duplex during filming; and shooting and re-shooting a shelved carnival scene until 4 a.m.

Gennie said that filming sometimes would get boring and she

and Yank would run away from the set for a quick recess. Then Sally Field would lay down the law and demand that the two get back to work.

Gennie said she is now an expert on talking about being a "movie star" and acting with Sally Field. Classmates gave her a party and a card that read "Don't forget us, Gennie, when you're rich and famous."

Sally James said she is happy that the sudden attention to Gennie has left her a normal child who still cares about school.

"Above all else, we don't want to be split up as a family," she said.

Employees accused of child abuse

United Press International

ARLINGTON — The Texas Department of Human Resources will begin today questioning employees of a day-care center where children allegedly were sexually molested and forced to fondle the private parts of their teachers, state officials said.

The president of the day-care chain said he had placed four of the 11 La Petite Academy employees on leaves of absence pending the investigation. The four female employees, who were implicated by children who were interviewed by state investigators, have denied the allegations.

The DHR received complaints last week that at least 15 children at the center were being sexually abused, said Nancy DeWees, program director for the DHR's child protective services branch.

The children allegedly were told to take their clothes off and dance in circles, officials said. They also allegedly were required to fondle each other's private parts and to touch the private parts of their teachers.

The children reportedly were threatened with reprisals if they told their parents about the incidents, DeWees said.

Police said no criminal charges had been filed against the center, but officers have been asked to join DHR officials in questioning employees on Monday.

"At this point there are enough allegations to consider the possibility of criminal allegations," DeWees said.

State officials said there were no immediate plans to close the center, but results of the investigation will be turned over to the DHR's day-care licensing division, which could close the center if necessary.

Although the investigation is in the early stages, officials said the allegations involve more children and more employees than any previous probe at a licensed day-care center in Texas.

About 130 children are enrolled at the center, DeWees said.

"Nobody's more concerned about this than we are," said Jack Brozman, president of the Kansas City Mo., La Petite chain. "We are going to thoroughly investigate this."

DeWees said caseworkers believe the abuse had taken place for several months at the year-old facility.

The investigation began last week when the mother of a 3-year-old child told police she suspected her child had been sexually abused at the center. Police referred her to DHR caseworkers, who began interviewing the children.

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Educators discuss status of Texas teaching

By DEENA ELLIOTT
Reporter

The national education process needs "hard, strong leadership," said Richard Wallace, member of the National Commission on Excellence in Education. "Leadership is crucial."

Wallace presented a national perspective on education in a symposium on the status of science and mathematics education in Texas at the Rudder Center Forum on Friday.

Two other speakers presented views on the situation in Texas and the purpose of the education reform bill.

Wallace said more money will not

solve the problems nor will longer school days or longer school years. He said much is right, but much can still be done.

The purpose of the commission, Wallace said, is to examine how schools are using their time. Of the six hours of school time recommended, high school students are averaging only 4 1/2, he said.

Co-curricular activities can be justified as being good for the students.

"But is missing school good for them?" Wallace questioned. He suggested using those six hours of school in the classroom.

Katherine Mays, president of the Texas Science Supervisors Association, said Texas schools are not pre-

paring the students to be productive citizens in society and "outcries are falling on deaf ears."

Mays, who teaches chemistry and physics at Bay City High School, said Texas education leaders have "failed in their responsibility ... to excel to excellence."

The education reform bill passed by the 68th Texas Legislature is being fought by the people who should be giving support to the bill, Mays said.

Dean C. Corrigan, dean of the College of Education at A&M and a member of the governor's select committee on public education, said the key element in the bill is insuring the quality of teachers.

Corrigan said the number of teachers has declined 53 percent in 10 years. About 63 institutions are available and 8,500 students who are qualified to teach, but 85 percent do not pursue a career.

A 64 percent national decline in science teachers has occurred, Corrigan said.

During the question and comment time immediately after the presentations, one teacher from A&M Consolidated said she sees several positive areas: their extra curricular activities are on weekends and do not use classroom time; the school's coaches are also good instructors; and the grade of 70 as passing, specified by the reform bill, "is working".

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