



# First woman to work in Attica Ranson directs inmates

by Tim Smith  
Staff Writer

Rebecca Ranson is a 31 year old playwright, producer and director. But unlike her colleagues, her audience and cast stand behind bars. Her work is with prisoners.

"My scripts deal intensely with basic human rights," Ranson said. "Prisoners interest me so because they are the most

neglected people I've ever met. When I walk into a room full of prisoners, I can feel the need."

A graduate of the University of Georgia, Ranson first worked handling case loads as a social worker. After a year she moved to Chapel Hill, where she eventually enrolled in the drama department. Her first contact with prisons came through a drug rehabilitation group from Hillsborough, who asked the drama department for some help with a play they were creating. Along with a co-worker, Juan Johnson, Ranson wrote and directed a play entitled *Wrong Horse to Ride*. Ranson became so involved with the prisoners she decided to write a play especially for the cast, *Fisheyes and Butterflies*. The play became successful and they performed it twenty times that summer. Lloyd Richards, head of the Eugene O'Neil Foundation, liked it and mentioned the play to a friend of his who was looking for someone to operate a drama workshop inside the New York prison system. Once offered, Ranson accepted the job immediately. Her first assignment was Attica State Prison, and she began working there last April.

"I was the first woman ever hired to work behind the walls in Attica," she said. The administration told her she wouldn't live a week.

"That first day I was pretty scared," Ranson said. "To begin with, I was white, southern and female. And those things aren't terribly popular with inmates from the ghetto. To them, I was an imported country bumpkin, who knew nothing of their problems. We did eventually close the gap, but it wasn't easy."

Closing the gap was a matter of solving problems, Ranson said. "Most of my classes were black and the

language they spoke was street talk, which of course I didn't know. Some of them couldn't even read and none of them had ever done a play before.

"We also had to struggle for control of the class. At Attica, the inmates are very political and they felt they should control the class. It took a long time before that finally broke down."

The administration was not always cooperative either, she said. "Because of the strenuous workouts I require before practice and because of the summer heat, I requested one more bath per week. My request was denied."

During one practice, she was to play the part of a woman, who was to be embraced. The guards saw it and she reprimanded by the superintendent for "messing around with the men." At another practice, her class took a "psychological journey," a means of bringing out emotions. When the officers saw it, she was reprimanded for "provoking hysteria."

Problems such as these, Ranson said, sometimes led to a blow-up. On the morning of a Christmas performance, two of her lead players were locked up in a shakedown. When she arrived, the group voted not to do the show. As showtime came, the M.C. told the inmate audience what had happened. As they listened, twenty guards with clubs in hand marched into the room. "My cast told me to get out of there right away before something happened, but I stayed."

Soon afterwards, the superintendent entered and demanded the show be put on. The prisoners refused to do so without the two men. Finally, the men were set free for the performance, but the tension in the show was still very high. "The show turned out awful."



Rebecca Ranson

Staff photo by Alice Boyle

Another time, she asked her class to do a short speech on what they felt was important to them. One inmate, who she called her "little revolutionary," stepped on stage and began to arouse the class in an editorial comment on Attica. The guards immediately jumped on stage and dragged him away. "I got so involved with that, that I went home that night ready to quit. So I wrote a long poem to him, explaining my feelings and he wrote one back. Since then I've used poems as a tool in our communications."

Ranson has learned something from the inmates, and she has her own opinions on prisons. "I don't think the prison system works. They say the prisoners are rehabilitated, but all they do is put them back on the street, at the same level they were before. For rehabilitation to work at all, the prisoners must be elevated."

Life is not easy for Rebecca Ranson. She travels between New York and Chapel Hill and often sees her husband only once a month. But it is the kind of work she likes and she says she'll keep it.

## Di Phi prestige low

by Elizabeth Respass  
Staff Writer

Being a Di or a Phi at UNC once meant honor, prestige and identification, but membership in either of the two literary societies now awards little recognition on campus.

Because of the societies' relative anonymity on campus, there is confusion as to their function. Is it another Greek fraternity? An art society? An honor society?

The 35 members of the present Di Phi Societies are interested in art, academics and debating and meet regularly to have discussions and debates as well as to hear speakers. The societies are the oldest literary group in the United States.

However, the present ties are but a skeleton of what the societies once were. At one time, anyone with ambition joined either the Dialectic or Philanthropic Societies to learn debating skills, Parliamentary procedure and to indulge in academic discussions.

Through the 180 year history of the societies, these values have been given less importance by the UNC campus. The intervention of wars, the creation of alternate campus activities such as sports and the challenge to traditional institutions has resulted in reduced membership and prestige.

The two literary societies have produced an impressive list of alumni which reads like

an index to a UNC campus map. Every building on campus which honors an alumni, except Chase Cafeteria, is named for either a Di or a Phi.

President James K. Polk, Thomas Wolfe, Vice President William R. King, 11 North Carolina Governors and 11 U. S. senators learned some of their skills in the chambers of the two societies.

Remnants of the societies' glory remain as inspiration for the present members. The societies are safekeepers of a valuable portrait collection which is the largest privately owned art collection in North Carolina. Most of these portraits, by such artists as Charles Wilson Peale, Thomas Sully and Eastman Johnson, hang in the Di Phi's chamber rooms in New West and New East.

The Di Phi Societies can claim much of UNC history. They are responsible for the Honor Code established in 1876 and for the collection of books which began Wilson Library. Their members formed the nucleus for student government at UNC and for the Honor Court.

The Dialectic Society (Di Society) was formally established as a debating society in 1796, approximately one year after UNC opened. The Philanthropic Society (Phi Society) was soon established to provide an alternate organization for those of different political persuasions.

To prevent bitter competition and rivalry, an imaginary line was drawn through Raleigh and those born east of the line belonged to the Di Society and those born to the West belonged to the Phi Society. Out-of-state students and anyone born in Orange County were allowed to choose between the societies. The tradition continues today although the line now passes through the Old Well.

The societies prospered through much of the periods prior to the Civil War. As their membership expanded, they moved their quarters from the top of South Building to the newly constructed north wings of Old East and Old West in 1848.

The attraction of new chambers in New West and New East, which had been completed just prior to the Civil War, soon helped the membership drive. The late 1800's was a period of prosperity for the two societies.

But the history of the Di Phi Societies in the 20th Century is one of diminished glory. The chambers were allowed to deteriorate and when renovation finally occurred in 1947 it only caused disruption in the meeting place and more loss of members.

In 1959 the two societies joined and had a total of five members. It has been an uphill struggle since that time.

## Theatre

Henrik Ibsen's *Peer Gynt Show*, a production of the Carolina Playmakers, opens at 8 p.m. today in the Graham Memorial Lounge Theatre. Not on the Playmakers' Six-Play Season Ticket Plan, *Peer Gynt* has been substituted for the previously announced seventh production.

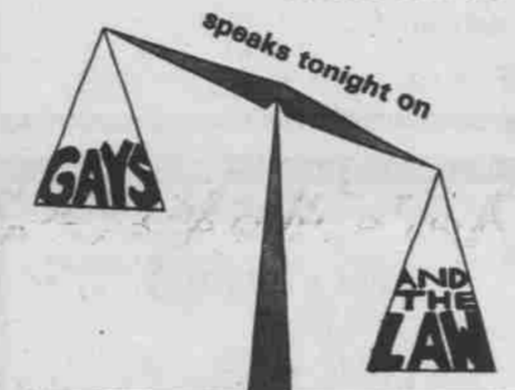
Dallas Greer will star as Peer Gynt in this musical portrayal of Ibsen's rebel folk hero. The play runs through Sunday, March 23, and will reopen for four performances March 27-30.

Tickets can be purchased at 102 Graham Memorial or at Ledbetter-Pickard in downtown Chapel Hill.

The *Death and Life of Sneaky Fitch*, a farcical tragedy of the Old West, will be presented by Lab Theatre at 4 p.m. today and at 4 and 11 p.m. tomorrow in 06 Graham Memorial.

*Sneaky Fitch* is directed by Larry Lipton. David Weddington appears in the title role.

the eminent attorney  
**RON RUIS**



### GAYS & THE LAW

- police hassles
- housing and job discrimination
- laws regarding consensual sexual acts
- and more!!!

7:30 pm Carolina Union 213  
sponsored by  
Carolina Gay Association

## Play the Steak Pub Game.



Pick up this friendly little bumper sticker at the Steak Pub Restaurant. There's no charge for it and you're not obligated to stay and eat with us. Put it on your car's bumper and drive around with it just as you normally do. That's all there is to it!

The winners will be chosen randomly, by license plate numbers, from among the cars that display the Steak Pub stickers. The first winner will be announced on Feb. 25. Then every Tuesday for six consecutive weeks winners will be chosen, ending with the selection of a grand prize winner. Everyone is eligible (except Steak Pub employees). But remember, in order to be chosen a winner, your car must be wearing a Steak Pub bumper sticker. Read the Tar Heel regularly to keep up with the announcements. And now, about the prizes —

## Win these exciting prizes (wow!):

**6** Winners will receive  
**Dinner for Two**  
at the Steak Pub

one night per week (through April 30).

It's all FREE!  
And you can choose the nights for your free dinners.



**1** GRAND PRIZE Winner will receive a  
**Trip for Two**  
to Nassau.

4 days and 3 nights. and it's all FREE,

compliments of the Steak Pub. Bon Voyage!



**STUDENT STORES** presents:

# Spring things

Rugby V-neck \$799

Crew \$599

Tank \$299

rugby stripes in carolina blue & white

**PEANUTS**

WHY DO WE ALWAYS HAVE TO LOSE THE FIRST GAME OF THE SEASON?

HEY, MANAGER, I KNEW YOU'D BE FEELING BAD SO I BROUGHT YOU A CUP OF TEA

A CUP OF TEA? OH, AND HERE'S THE BALL, TOO...

\* SIGH \*

**DOONESBURY**

HENRY, ON JUNE 27, 1970, IN REFERRING TO CHILE, YOU SAID "I DON'T SEE WHY WE NEED TO STAND BY AND WATCH A COUNTRY GO COMMUNIST DUE TO THE IRRESPONSIBILITY OF ITS OWN PEOPLE!"

WELL, OF COURSE, AS HISTORY HAS ALREADY RECORDED, YOU DIDN'T STAND BY! THREE YEARS LATER, A PRO-AMERICAN GOVERNMENT WAS BACK IN THE SADDLE!

WHO WAS BEHIND IT? WELL, THE CIA, OF COURSE, BUT ALSO FOUR FUNKY FASCISTS—AND GREAT GUYS TO BOOT—YES, ALL THE WAY FROM SANTIAGO—THE CHILEAN GENERALS!!

VIVA COCA-COLA! HENRY! LOVE PISA, AMIGO? UH, HI, GUTS.