



ONCE UPON A TIME...

Actress, mimic and raconteur, ESTELLE CONDRA, is forging a fine career for herself in America as a storyteller. She first started telling tales in Evaton, near Vereeniging ...

BY KENNETH ENGLADE

SHE was a most extraordinary child, a blue-eyed, blonde, boere-meisie, who lived in a small town called Evaton, near Vereeniging. Estelle's father 'Ferry' Ferreira owned a grocery store and her mother Kate ran a small hotel.

To Estelle the most wonderful thing in the world was to escape from her chores and to travel, in her mind, to another time and another place where she could become a warrior, a lion, a bride-to-be, a village chieftain or a young herdsboy with a magical cow. Her day only really came alive when she could persuade her nannie, a SoSotho, to come out into the warm sunshine. 'Sitt! Sitt, kleinmies,' she would say, settling

down on the stoep of her cottage and plunging her gnarled, callused feet into a tub of hot water. 'Eendag was daar 'n wolf en 'n jakkals, Oom Wolf en Neef Jakkals...' and she would be off, spinning a tale about the mischievous Cousin Jackal and the hapless Uncle Wolf.

Just when she was getting to the stage of knowing every wolf and jackal story her nannie could remember or create, and could recite them herself backwards as well as forwards, another storyteller came into Estelle's life. A Dutchman, Van Broek le Veen, a book-keeper by trade, was hired by her parents to help straighten out the increasingly complicated accounts of their two businesses. Broeksie

(as the children called him) lived with the Ferraires and took his meals with the family. After dinner, when the table had been cleared and the dishes washed, Broeksie would become the centre of attention, spinning tales about a land and people thousands of kilometres from the veld and Estelle's Afrikaner neighbours. 'From Broeksie I first heard the stories of Hans Christian Andersen,' Estelle Condra (née Ferreira) says today with a nostalgic, faraway look in her eyes.

While most people measure their lives in years, Estelle measures hers in plateaux of the expansion of her imagination. In her family, storytelling was as much a part of everyday life as eating or sleeping.

MAIN PHOTOGRAPH, LEFT: Estelle Condra: 'There was never any question in my mind about what I was going to do when I grew up. I knew I was going to be a storyteller.'

BELOW: Estelle and David Condra, an American engineer, met while he was working in Johannesburg. They now live in Nashville in the United States where David has a wholesale computer business.



LEFT: In July, Estelle was one of the performers chosen to appear at the Julliard Theatre in New York's famed Lincoln Center.

BELOW: Estelle relaxes after waterskiing on Old Hickory Lake, just outside Nashville, Tennessee. She and David were married in the Condra family home, a modified Old South mansion on the shores of the lake.



