



Her hair is her own,

BOTH WORK WELL

FOR AMANDA BLAKE

OF 'GUNSMOKE'

but she got her name from the dictionary

To a viewing public wearily accustomed to the truth about toupees, swatches, hair dyes and age-reducing make-up, it may come as a spiritual uplift to know that Amanda Blake's red hair is both red and her own.

For the past two seasons, Amanda, who picked the name out of a dictionary, has been working in *Gunsmoke* as Kitty Russell, a girl who started out as a dance-hall hostess when the show first took to the air in the fall of 1955 and has since worked her way up to half-owner of the saloon.

"Kitty," Amanda says, is essentially a nice girl. After all, this is television. She is rather like Belle Watling-though if she has to be, but with a heart of gold"

Even though *Gunsmoke* is an adult Western and Amanda a strikingly pretty redhead, certain inviolable Western rules have been followed: she has kissed the hero. Jim Arness, only once in 78' episodes. "And that," she says wearily, "was in a commercial."

Amanda, born Beverly Louise Neill in Buffalo, NY, moved to California with her parents in 1943 and struck up a schoolgirl friendship with a movie producer's daughter. When the daughter later married and her husband took off for Harvard Law School, Amanda moved in with the bride as a house guest. "The husband," says

Amanda, "is now my lawyer, and it was the producer's wife who got me a contract at M-G-M "

Amanda suffered through the usual run of major studio contracts. Including three fruitless years at M-G-M and Columbia before finally discovering television. She made her first appearance in a *Fireside Theater* episode, "so old now that it's being rerun at 1:30 in the morning around here." She then fell in with a small group of actresses who were constantly being given parts in CBS shows, a situation which led the producer of *Gunsmoke* to consider her for the part of Kitty Russell.

"We met me during a My Favorite Husband rehearsal when I was a mess." Amanda explains "and went back to his office and crossed my name off the list. He hated me. But I guess I had a sixth sense about this thing. I just knew I was going to get the role so I lit out after it. I made the producer see me when I looked more like myself. And I got it."

Married and divorced ("I got my divorce in the morning and was back at work in the afternoon"), Amanda recently has bought a small one-bedroom house in the valley. "I am an undesirable so far as apartments are concerned," she explains. "Two boxers, four permanent cats and a stream of cat transients."