

HOME AT LAST

THE DAYS AND NIGHTS OF MOLLY DODD

An angst-ridden heroine has come back to life on a new channel and in the city to which she belongs.

By Joseph L. Streich

The *Days and Nights of Molly Dodd* has joined a select circle of TV shows—those canceled by the broadcast networks (in this case, NBC) and given a first-run second chance on cable.

"It's the best of all possible worlds," exults *Molly Dodd* Creator Jay Tarses, over his show's new home on the Lifetime basic-cable channel. "Lifetime came to me and said, 'We'd like you to make new episodes.' They've given us no lack of support, [and] without the horrendous [broadcast] network second-guessing.

"*Molly Dodd* is the most satisfying thing I've ever done," Tarses continues. "It's an opportunity to write what I want to, to work with wonderful actors and to shoot one-camera. I could do this series for a long time. NBC was never comfortable with us."

The move to cable was not the only traveling *Molly Dodd* has done this year; the show's production relocated from California to New York City's Kaufman Astoria Studios, across a river instead of a continent from its Manhattan setting.

"In California we shot in a warehouse on the east side of hell," Tarses recalls. "We had to do retakes because of airplane noise. Now, filming in a real studio, we don't have to bother with reshoots. Plus, we have more space onstage and access to genuine New York exteriors, which sure beats trying to create



Street corner dramedy: (Left to right) Creator/Producer/Director Jay Tarses, DP Steve Dubin, Sound Recordist Tom Nelson, First Assistant Camera Operator Steve Drellich, Gaffer Michael Barrow, First AD Kyle McCarthy and Second Grip Roger Kimpton.

a fake New York in California."

In what must be a first for cable production, Lifetime's version of *Molly Dodd* is more expensive than NBC's. Shot non-union in California, the show is now produced with a NABET crew at Kaufman Astoria. Also, the show employs a movie-style, single 35mm camera production

technique, with various program segments shot out of sequence—a style that in itself is a reason for a higher price tag. "It's very hard on Blair [Brown, who portrays Molly]," says Tarses. "Sometimes we're doing scenes from four different episodes in a single day, and she has to keep it all straight."

Molly Dodd's entire cast and creative crew has followed the show to New York, joined by new Coproducer Eric Overmyer. "Being in New York gives me the opportunity to work with Eric," notes Tarses. "Part of his job is to find new writers for *Molly*; not TV writers, but playwrights and journalists who

understand the show. Here in New York the writing is more simpatico with the way we shoot—we have no live audience and we're not a sitcom in any sense of the word. It's harder to find writers on the West Coast who realize that."

Tarses estimates that, in the show's first year, he wrote or rewrote most of the 26 episodes produced for NBC. This time around, he is overseeing and revising the work of outside writers following his story lines. Dan Scardino, the show's original director, has been joined by Steve Dubin, the director of photography who is now helping an occasional episode in addition to his DP duties.

While *Molly Dodd* has traveled east, editing still takes place in California. Leslie Dennis Bracken may be one of the only videotape editors cutting a TV series from the comfort of her own home, which is located in Camarillo, Calif. The show's 35mm footage is transferred to videotape for electronic editing and, at Bracken's, off-lined on an Ediflex system. Since the shows are shot in segments out of sequence, she edits them in chunks, and may be working on a number of episodes at once. Bracken adds that if the directors are in New York, she will send them a 3/4-inch viewing tape, and they will send back their notes. If they are in California, they usually go to her house and work on the off-line edit together. Once off-