



## KANSAS LEGEND BIOGRAPHY

### William Inge (1913-1973)

An American playwright and novelist, William Inge never forgot the things he learned growing up in a small town in Kansas. Inge was born in 1913 in Independence, Kan., where he grew up with his parents and four siblings. At a very young age, Inge became enthralled with the theater. As a member of a local Boy Scout troop, he and the other troop members were often asked to stay after their troop meetings at the Memorial Hall, a 2,000-seat theater that offered many productions a place to stop in between performances in Kansas City and Tulsa.



Inge graduated from Independence High School and attended Independence Junior College. In 1935, Inge graduated from the University of Kansas with a Bachelor of Arts degree in speech and drama. When offered a scholarship from George Peabody College for Teachers, Inge moved to Nashville, Tenn., to pursue a master's degree but eventually dropped out. He returned home to Kansas and, in his own words, "began to flounder."

After a summer working on the state highway system, time spent as a news announcer in Wichita, and a year teaching high school in Columbus, Inge returned to George Peabody and completed a Master of Arts degree. From 1938-1943, Inge taught at Stephens College in Columbia, Mo., until he moved to St. Louis where he got a job as a drama critic for the St. Louis Star-Times. It was this job that would change Inge's life forever and propel him to follow his dream of writing for Broadway.



During his days at the paper, Inge met Tennessee Williams and was asked to accompany her to Chicago for a viewing of her play "The Glass Menagerie." Inge was so inspired by the play that he felt compelled to begin writing plays on his own. In just three months, he wrote "Farther Off From Heaven," which Williams recommended for production. He returned to teaching at Washington University in St. Louis where he then wrote "Come Back, Little Sheba." The play was so well received, Inge was named most promising playwright of the season in 1950.

In 1953, Inge's play "Picnic" debuted. The story's characters were derived from school-teachers he had known growing up in his hometown. "Picnic" had a successful run on Broadway, and Inge received a Pulitzer Prize for this work. He followed with "Bus Stop" and "The Dark at the Top of the Stairs." All of these works were later made into major movies.



In 1959, Inge's "A Loss of Roses" closed after just three weeks, and Inge was devastated. However, he bounced back and wrote his first screenplay, "Splendor in the Grass," for which he received an Academy Award. "Natural Affection" and "Where's Daddy?" were Inge's last two plays, and both flopped. Inge moved to California and went back to teaching, this time at the University of California. He spent his last years writing two novels: "Good Luck, Miss Wyckoff" (1970) and "My Son is a Splendid Driver" (1971). Convinced that he could no longer write and suffering from a deep depression, Inge took his own life in 1973.

