

'TLC' important to area publishers

By CAROL BAGLEY

AMERICAN Staff Writer

Rejection is part of the game. And Alec Clayton knows that free-lance writing isn't easy.

Maybe that's why the magazine he and wife Gabi now edit rates nationally in "Tender Loving Care" for handling budding writers with kid gloves.

The Hattiesburg-based *Mississippi Arts and Letters* is only three issues old, but already it ranks 97th in the top 100 fiction markets in North America.

Besides TLC, other rating factors were prestige, pay scale and number of short stories published, with *Redbook*, *Mademoiselle*, *McCalls*

and *Good Housekeeping* taking top honors. Number 97 out of 400 nominated is not discouraging to the Claytons.

"To us, it is fantastic," he said, "especially when you consider that most of the magazines listed were old timers like *Redbook* and *Playboy* and the prestigious *Sewanee Review*, which followed us in the number 100 position.

"We began publication last December, and we're just beginning to become known in-state; yet we have received good reviews from editors and writers across the country, and now this," Clayton said. "We are overwhelmed with it all."

The attention drawn from the

rating may lure "some of the best in the country," he said, if they see the magazine as a good market.

Mississippi Arts still caters to beginning writers like Carol Bryan, who submitted her first story here and went on to win a national writing award. Biographical shorts introduce each contributor in the issue. "It's exciting to us to publish someone who's never been published before," Clayton said.

When the magazine was organized, the two decided at the beginning to make the relationship between writers and editors a personal thing. No form rejection letters. If a story needs revision, Clayton writes a personal note explaining the pro-

blem and invites the writer to resubmit.

The authors do write back, by the scores, often adding gratefully that such individual treatment is out of the ordinary. There are rejections, but the Claytons can sympathize; they let them down easily.

One major requirement is that stories have a Southern setting, whether deep South, southeast or west.

It seems ironic that the major theme for a Southern magazine would be fine arts and poetry, he said, but Mississippi has many well-known artists and writers. "The state is nationally thought devoid of culture," Mrs. Clayton said. "but per capita, we have more artists, writers and musicians that have become famous."

"We need to let those out of state know that it's not red-neck heaven," Clayton added.

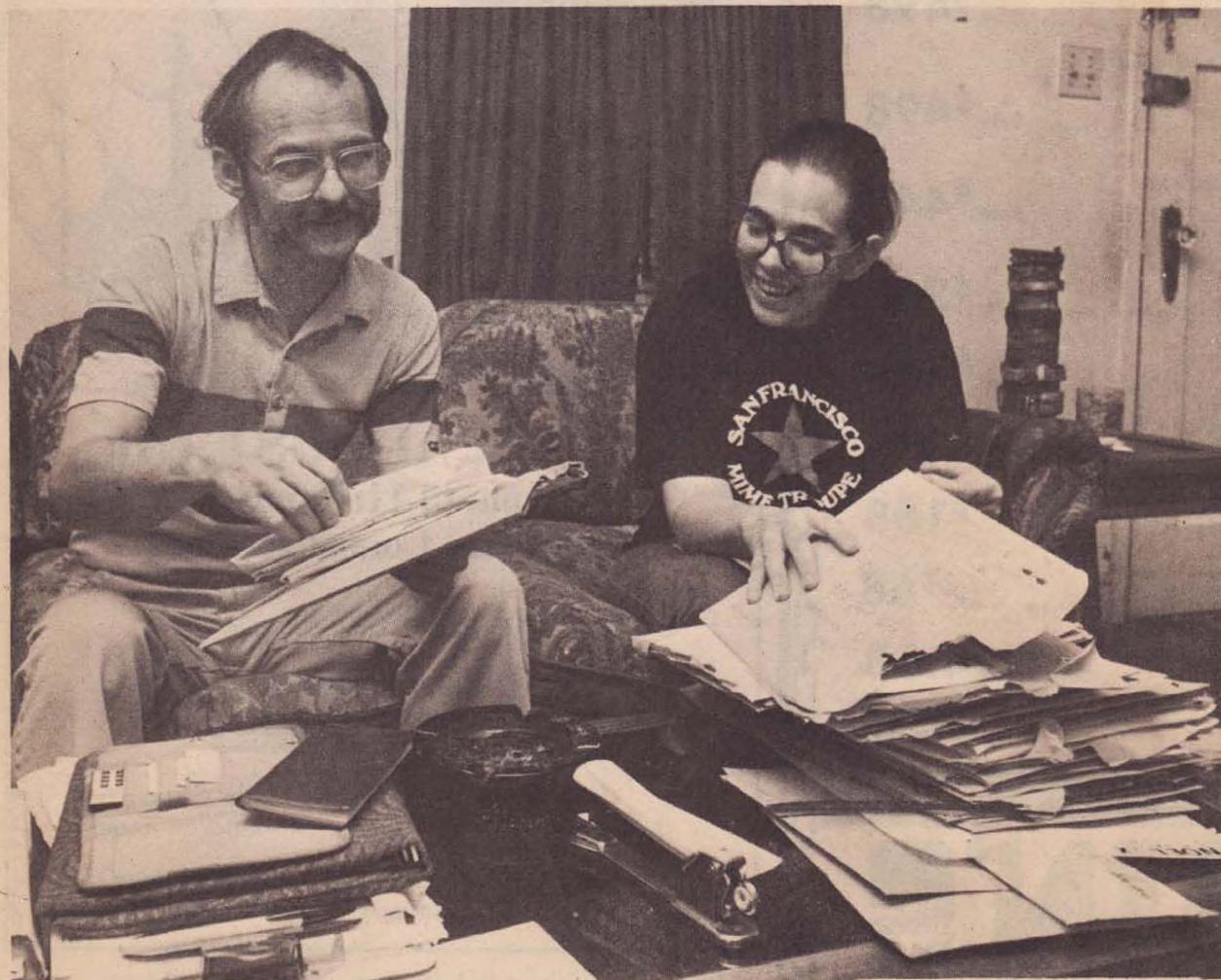
Clayton began his writing career as editor of a New York weekly newspaper, where he met his wife-to-be. She was a practical nurse reentering college in liberal arts when she began proofreading and composing ads for the paper.

The two were married and moved south, closer to Alec's hometown of Tupelo. They wanted to start a publication, but weren't sure what was needed in the area. After their weekly newspaper, *Persons*, fell through, the Claytons decided to review market studies.

The results were clear cut: specialize. "With *Persons*, we felt no one knew how to categorize us," she said. They dropped the general news format and acquired a new title. Response has been good. Subscriptions are building, even from out of state. Writers also are realizing that they can be published here, he said.

One ideal way for writers to enter the business is to study others' works, Clayton said. "Look at the stories and market guidelines. A good cover letter also makes it interesting. It helps us judge what we will read.

"My advice about the writing is to be honest and just tell the story. Don't try to show off with words," he said. "We emphasize story characters, plots and endings that feel like endings."



ALEC AND GABI Clayton, publisher and editor of Hattiesburg's *Mississippi Arts and Letters*, look through stories for the next edition. The

magazine was ranked nationally as a top fiction market by *Writer's Digest* for its individual dealings with and encouragement to its writers.

AMERICAN photo by Jerry Holt