

**NELLIE BLY  
BAKER  
O'BRYAN  
1895-1983**



**FROM  
HOLLYWOOD  
TO THE  
OUTDOORS**

Nellie Bly Baker was a silent-era actress who started her career by accident and worked in a dozen silent films, including the controversial *The Red Kimono*. She later got bored in Hollywood and left for an outdoorsy life in the Sierras. She would document her amazing life in a book.

Baker was born in Yukon, Oklahoma Territory in September 1895. Her parents had arrived in Indian Territory in the late 1880s and moved west after the Unassigned Lands opened in 1889. By 1903 the family had relocated to Wagoner County, where she was raised.

Nellie followed her sister to Hollywood in 1917, where they both worked for a movie studio. She attended the California School for Movie Operators and became California's first woman to be licensed as a film projectionist. In 1919 Baker married John Henderson O'Bryan, a film technician.

While working as a secretary at Charlie Chaplin's First National Studio, he gave her uncredited roles in *The Kid* (1921) as the slum nurse and *A Woman of Paris* (1923) as a masseuse. Though the roles were small, working alongside Chaplin was good publicity as other film companies offered her roles. Director-producer Constance Talmadge put Baker in *The Goldfish* (1923), a love story where each lover presents a goldfish to the other if they decide to part ways.

Baker had a minor role in the controversial film *The Red Kimono* (1925), a real story about prostitution. It was one of the few independent films written and produced by women. In the 1920s, the film was banned in Chicago and became the target of an unsuccessful California lawsuit for defamation seeking an injunction to prohibit its public viewing.

In 1926, Baker was cast in *The Salvation Hunters*, directed by Josef von Sternberg, who was later invited by Chaplin to work in his film studio. He would direct Marlene Dietrich in *The Blue Angel* (1930) and be nominated for Best Director for *Morocco* (1930) and *Shanghai Express* (1932).

Baker played a maid in *The Snob* (1924), about a married couple who part ways when the husband becomes consumed by status and money; *Breakfast at Sunrise* (1927); *Love and the Devil* (1929); and *The Bishop Murder Case* (1930), a black-and-white detective film about solving a murder by "the bishop". She wasn't a star, but work was steady and the pay was good. She had made it in Hollywood. Her last films were *The Painted Angel* (1929) and *Sadie McKee* (1934).

By 1939, Tinsel Town had lost its luster so she left for the rugged Sierra. She bought the ramshackle remains of a remote mining camp named Lundy near Mono Lake. Eventually she constructed four more cabins, a store, and a restaurant and christened her place the "Happy Landing Resort". She lived year-round in this remote, avalanche-prone canyon and became California's first licensed fishing and hiking guide.

Around 1956, she quit the resort and began building a local tourist attraction called *Upside Down House* near Lee Vining. Taking inspiration from two of her favorite children's stories – *Upside Down Land* and *The Upsidedownians* – she completed the house with a bed, kitchen and chest of drawers all stuck to the roof.

In later life, she wrote about her personal adventures from a fascinating life. She died at Lone Pine in October 1983 at age 91. Her book "*Nellie of Lundy: From Hollywood to the High Sierra*" was published in 2016.