

## Shirley Temple: Child Actor and More

“True her position rested on publicity, not ancestry but she was as well known and beloved in her own country as Elizabeth and Margaret Rose were in theirs,” Anne Edwards stated in her book Shirley Temple: American Princess (11). Shirley Jane Temple was born in Santa Monica, California, to Gertrude and George Temple in 1928. Having had two boys, Sonny and Jack, Gertrude was happy to have a little girl. As soon as little Shirley was able to walk Gertrude Temple signed her up for dance lessons at Meglins Dance Studio. This is where little Shirley Temples career began. Shirley Temple was one of the greatest child actors of her time. Throughout her life she managed to open her heart and make a difference in the lives of all that know her.

Little Miss Temple’s mother, Gertrude Temple, had been born in Chicago, Illinois in 1893. A few years after Ralph, Gertrude’s younger brother, was born the family relocated to California (her father had been ill and the change in climate was to do him good). Since a young age Gertrude nurtured ambitions of becoming an actress or ballet dancer. Unfortunately, Gertrude never lived out that dream for herself. George Temple on the other hand was born in Fairview, Pennsylvania in 1888. Just as Gertrude missed out during her childhood by not being able to fulfill her dreams, George missed out on a childhood all together. First George Temple’s great aunt passed away, and then his father fell ill and passed on followed by his sister of tuberculosis. The string of deaths he faced as a child forced him into not having a normal childhood because he had to take care of the family in his father’s absence.

While trying to escape problems at home, Gertrude ran to George and they married when she was seventeen years old. Even after her two sons were born Gertrude

fantasized about being in the theatre. When the two boys started to grow up and showed no obvious interest in the theatre as much as Gertrude had shown, she decided that she wanted one last child, a girl. Being a firm believer in prenatal influence, Mrs. Temple spun phonograph records constantly in the house-she even went as far as attending dance recitals while pregnant. After Shirley Temple was born, Gertrude continued to introduce little Shirley to the new music of the day. By her eighth month, baby Shirley was swaying in her crib to the songs. By age one little Temple was walking and running, more so than her brothers had, and what was even more surprising was that she did it on her toes like a little ballerina. At age three Shirley was enrolled in dance at Ethel Meglins Studios.

Charles Lamont from Education Films Inc, showed up at Meglins Dance Studio to find twenty-five kids for a group of short films he was doing. Mrs. Temple had not seen the sign the previous week so as every other child was dressed their best all little Shirley had on was her normal dancing attire. Her and another young girl stood by the piano the entire time the other girls were auditioned. Just as Charlie (as he was fondly called by the young ones) was leaving he spotted Temple and her friend and asked them to come down and audition with him the next day. The following day Shirley went down and auditioned and got a role in the movie; she was to play in an adult role to mimic previous movies made. Any time Shirley went in front of the camera Mrs. Temple would whisper to her, “Sparkle, Shirley, Sparkle.” Little did she know that she would have the opportunity to say these words hundreds of more times in the years to come, and little did all the Temples know this would start the beginning of a movie career for their wonderfully talented Shirley.

When Baby Burlesks was canceled Temple moved on to bigger things. Not having a contract from a certain studio yet, she did different things for all the studios in the movie industry. Little Miss Temple did this until one night when she and her mother had gone to the theatre to see one of Shirley's short films. The two, mother and daughter, were on their way out as Jay Gorney, from Fox Film Company, was walking in. He spotted an adorable little girl singing and dancing while gazing at the posters on the wall. Against his better judgment he talked with Shirley about dancing in a major movie. After talking it over with Little Temple and her mother, they all decided Shirley would audition the following day in his office at the studio. Gertrude's ambitions for herself turned into hopes and dreams for her beloved Shirley.

Gorney agreed to hire Shirley Temple and put her under contract. George Temple became his daughter's financial manager and advisor with the family's attorneys name going down on all documents. Shirley's acting career flourished, and she starred in over fifty movies during her career. At home her brothers often called her "La Temple" because she was the breadwinner of the family; she was reported to have made five million for herself and thirty million for Fox and her parents (Moritz 38).

Upon the release of Temple's movies the public began to adore and idolize her. Mothers were curling their children's hair to give them the Temple look and dressing them in clothes that looked like what little Shirley wore in her movies. One admirer was quoted as saying, "...Our most exciting Christmas present was our Shirley Temple dolls, which we carried everywhere" (Edwards 63). Shirley Temple was Hollywood's biggest box office attraction from 1935 to 1938 and most popular star in 1934 and 1939 according to People Weekly (115). Shirley was so popular that despite the fact that

statuettes were not given to child actors they made little Temple an honorary statuette for all of her hard work in the movie industry.

Having made it to the top at such an early age little Temple began to go back down the ladder. It was inevitable for America's sweetheart to grow up. For years the public was told that she was a year younger than she really was, but at thirteen it just could not be done anymore. After a few unsuccessful movies in her teen years, the studio she was with dropped her and did not renew a contract. By age twenty-one Temple was fully retired from the movie industry (Shirley 458). After her fall from stardom, Shirley attended Westlake School for girls, a type of school Shirley had never known before because she had always been tutored on set. Her drop from stardom did not affect her nor did it affect the feeling of her fans towards her. In fact Anne Edwards stated that, "the President at the time, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, attributed Shirley with doing more for the country's morale during the depression than any other person" (342). Even to this day children still know who Shirley Temple is and still watch her movies even though as Brynn Ballenger suggested in an interview, "Feelings today towards Temple do not even compare to how people felt when Temple was first in the movies" (1). Temple was so hyped up by the media during her day that it has left a lasting impression on society for years to come.

Once graduated from Westlake, Temple married actor John Agar Jr. and had her first child, Linda Susan Agar; the marriage lasted two years before ending in divorce. After her divorce, Shirley met another man by the name of Charles A. Black. She married Charles and had two other children with him. Mr. Black's political involvement ignited Shirley's interest in politics and she too became involved. Shirley Temple started her

political career by speaking on public concerns and other world related issues. When Congressman Younger passed away she then ran for congressman. Shirley faced having to get the public to look at her and listen to her opinions on political issues rather than base their vote on her childhood success. Although she lost that race, Shirley kept up her political involvement and soon involved herself in many more community and world affairs.

Shirley Temple was part co-founder of the International Multiple Sclerosis Society (Vice-President). Temple became involved with the society because she wanted to help make a difference and help comfort those that had contracted the disease like her brother Sonny. When Temple met the doctor treating her brother's M.S she was quoted as saying that multiple sclerosis was "a disease poorly understood, cause and cure both unknown" (513). Shirley volunteered numerous hours of her time at hospitals wheeling patients out of the hospital and doing meal rounds with the nurse, never once looking for anything but self-satisfaction.

Seeing all that Shirley was doing and had done for society, President Nixon appointed her as a member of the United States delegation to the United Nations. Following her appointment as UN delegate, Temple became Ambassador to Ghana, handling many crises and political problems. Temple finished her role as Ambassador to Ghana and was then appointed as Ambassador to Czechoslovakia. Serving under three different presidents Temple was able to rid herself of the stereotype plaguing her career saying that she bought her offices or was given them out of pity; she proved her skills in more way than one. In fact as an ambassador she was quoted by Brad Lang in his, Tribute to Temple, as saying, "Ambassadors if they do it right, work about fourteen hour days"

(8). Shirley was willing to give up her life with her family for that period of time and dedicate herself to those that really needed help and guidance.

During her whole political run Temple found out a very disturbing fact that made her leave her work to go get checked up; Temple felt a lump in her chest. Not knowing how to share the results with her husband Charles, she started leaving articles about breast cancer all around the house. Once her family knew about her medical condition, Temple went in for a mastectomy. Temple was quoted as saying that, “I felt good before the operation and I felt good afterward” (Schindehette 63). While also trying to face the reality of having had a mastectomy to rid herself of cancer, Temple went public with the illness; she was the first woman and celebrity to go public with this information (Basinger 145). By doing so, Temple hoped to encourage other women to go through with the procedure because it saved lives and there was no reason a woman with breast cancer should not have it done.

Sixteen out of thirty people asked in a survey agreed that Temple has been a positive role model since her childhood days (Fitzgerald 1). Gary Nacca, who has been a Temple fan for years, signed a guest book saying that, “Shirley Temple’s ability as a child and her great accomplishments as an adult continue to inspire thousands” (5). Not only in her childhood but also in her whole life Temple has made herself a true role model that kids and adults can together look up to. “She has been able to blend her quick wit and style with warmth and grace to become one of our nation’s most respected diplomats (Lang 7). Throughout her life, Shirley Temple has proven to be one of the greatest people ever known, on and off of the screen. Her contributions to society have done nothing more than prove what one kindhearted person can do for the good of all.

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This was my final copy but my rough draft scored me a 94. It was my senior research paper and follows the current MLA Handbooks guidelines with 1 inch margins and everything.

I hope someone finds this useful, i know that i certainly looked all over for something like this. Enjoy!

Anita Fitzgerald