

Curly Top and an American Princess

By Heather Hertzoff



This is my 9th grade biography research report for my Accelerated English class

4 March 2002

On April 23, 1928 a little star was born. In her future life as a movie actress, she would perform in forty motion pictures, fifty television shows, be number one at the box office, and possess the smile and talent that would bring the country out of the Depression. This all began when she was only three, but ended shortly at the age of twenty-one. As her movie career ended, her adult life began without her mother's guide. She began her family life as a housewife and later on she became a diplomat. She still is known today for her dimples and her title as the American Princess. This American Princess is Shirley Jane Temple (Temple).

Everyone has a role model figure to help guide them through their life and follow their examples. Mary Pickford was a role model for Gertrude Temple's image of her daughter, Shirley. She wanted Shirley to look just like her, so Gertrude began putting tight curls in her hair to create her famous ringlets. Gertrude was Shirley's key to success, her reminder to 'sparkle'. It all started with dance lessons at Ethel Meglin's Studio. Here, Shirley took lessons and was also discovered as a child star hiding behind the piano. Her first series was the *Baby Burlesks*, which soon led to bigger and better things, as she grew older. She then she made the transition to the motion pictures; her first long picture was *Red-Haired Alibi*. Making this movie seemed to be overwhelming for her, but this was only the beginning (Edwards).

For sixteen years Shirley Temple starred in movies. In her teenage years, her quality of acting and popularity had dramatically decreased. The public was not interested in a young adult star that was once a curly blond that "danced and sang into the hearts of America" (Churchill). They wanted that child back, to remind them of the good times while things were tough. During her slow-moving career, she had enrolled in the

Westlake School for Girls when she was twelve years old. In the spring of 1945, Shirley graduated from school and began her new life with her husband, John Agar. Her movie career ended with *A Kiss for Corliss* (Black).

John “Jack” Agar was the older brother of Joyce Agar, one of Shirley’s friends. The two of them met during one of Shirley’s swim parties. Jack later enlisted in the Navy Air Corps and received letters from his new friend. When he was home from the Army, he and the child star met very frequently; they soon fell in love.

Shirley: What’s a lawyer?
John Boles: Well, a lawyer
is a person who gets you out
of trouble.
Shirley: Oh my! I could use
one almost every day!

Shirley would indeed need a lawyer, like she mentions in the movie *Curly Top* (Black 429). It all began on September 19, 1945 at the Wilshire Methodist Church in California. Shirley and Jack’s wedding day was disastrous, which may have foreshadowed their marriage. Shortly after their daughter Linda Susan was born, Jack’s drinking habits became an every day problem for Shirley and her new family. Agar’s friends claimed that Shirley was the cause of his late hours returning from work and the different women that he had brought home. As his problems increased, Shirley left him and filed for divorce. The American Princess had taken full custody of their daughter and left Jack with nothing except his personal belongings. Half of their property belonged to Shirley and the other assets were left to Linda Susan. Shirley made sure that Jack had no part of their daughter’s life. Shirley’s fairy tale marriage had ended, but she was searching for a new potential husband. She wanted to find someone that would marry her for who she was and not for the image of the American Princess. In 1950, Shirley took a trip to

Hawaii and during her vacation she met the love of her life, Charles Black. Charles was everything that Shirley desired in a man with his handsome charm and his manly ways. After her divorce was final with Agar, Shirley was free to get married. On December 16, 1950 in California, all of her dreams came true. Her wedding had gone perfectly, including their exit from the ceremony. A member of the party had driven a similar automobile as the newlyweds, so the reporters would be distracted. The couple resided at a family friend's house for six days for their honeymoon. Their first son, Charles Jr., was born on April 28, 1952 and next came their youngest daughter, Lori, on April 9, 1954. When Shirley was 44 years old she was alarmed to find that she had breast cancer. She found out that part of the tumor was malignant and in the end, and she decided to have a mastectomy and have a prosthesis put in its place. She had low self-esteem because she felt unattractive when she looked at herself in the mirror. Shirley's strength returned in 1974 after she had been appointed ambassador to Ghana under Gerald Ford's presidency (Edwards).

Shirley Temple has accomplished so much in her life as a movie star, mother, and politician. She also won numerous awards including a miniature Oscar presented to her in 1935, which was replaced by a full-sized Oscar in 1985. She once said, "Please do not refer me as the former child star. I prefer to be identified with my present job or my work with the United Nations" (Edwards 310). 1969 was the year that she would become a United States Delegate to the United Nations. Seven years later, she became the first female United States Chief Protocol of the United States and then an officer for the United States Foreign Affairs Department. Later in 1989, Shirley became the United States Ambassador to the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic. Currently she is a part of

the Institute for International Studies at Stanford University, the Council on Foreign Relations, the Council of American Ambassadors, and the World Affairs Council. She also served on the United States Commission for UNESCO, the National Committee on United States - China Relations, the United Nations Association, the American-China Society, and the United States Citizen's Space Task Force (“ShirleyTempleFans.com”). When her brother George developed symptoms of multiple sclerosis around 19, she began raising funds for the National Multiple Sclerosis Society along with Senator John F. Kennedy, Grace Kelly, and Frank Sinatra (Edwards). This American Princess has accomplished so much, is there anything left for her to do?

There are so many quotes that one can take into consideration as their philosophy, or how they live their life. “My mother-in-law had an expression: ‘The happiest moment is now.’ I’ve learned to live by that,” are the exact words of the American Princess on her philosophy (Churchill). Shirley Temple Black considers every era to be the best time of her life, even through the bad times. When she ran for Congress, and did not win, she was still happy because she was able to have the experience and have fun while she was doing it.

Everyone in his or her lifetime have someone or something to look up to for guidance. Gertrude Temple saw the image of Mary Pickford in her daughter Shirley and she hoped that she would star in the pictures, just like Mary did. For Shirley it was Eleanor Roosevelt and Amelia Earhart. These two women helped give her drive and perseverance in her life (“ShirleyTempleFans.com”). Shirley is my role model. As a child star and diplomat she influenced millions, including myself. She shows that many accomplishments in life can be achieved if one dares to pursue their dreams. Shirley is a

symbol of the perfect life. Other people's image of the 'perfect life' is that everything in life is pure goodness and that evil will not touch them. My images of the 'perfect life' are the obstacles that one can overcome that will shape one into the person that they are today. Shirley was a star in her early years, but then struggled when she was a teenager and found great happiness when she fell in love with Jack Agar. Even though their marriage was headed for disaster, she still found the strength to be happy and come out on top. Finally, she found true love with her second husband, Charles Black, and is now living a life that made all of her dreams come true. When Shirley had breast cancer, she thought of the worst, but in the end everything slowly began to get better. She is a true survivor. In my short fourteen years of my life, I have been through a number of encounters. I have been able to move on from the bad incidents and put them in past, like Shirley did. In the movie *Curly Top*, Shirley sang 'When I Grow Up'. This song depicts her life. It begins with her as a child then she changes into a teenager going to the ball, like Cinderella. Afterward, she becomes a bride and then an elderly woman. Even though Shirley Temple is not number one at the box office today, she still is in my eyes.

Final Outline

I: Introduction

A: thesis statement

1. In 1928 an American Princess was born who became a child star at the age of five. This Princess is Shirley Temple.

II: Developed into Child Star

A: Relationship with mother

1. Wanted Shirley to be like Mary Pickford (silent movies)

B: Dance lessons

C: Started with *Baby Burlesks* series

D: Motion pictures

III: Troubles as an Adolescent

A: Went to school

B: Not successful in movies

1. Public not interested in a teenager; liked the child star

IV: First marriage and second marriage

A: First marriage to John Agar

1. Daughter (Linda Susan)
2. Alcoholism = divorce

B: Second marriage to Charles Black

1. Son (Charles Jr.) and Daughter (Lori)

C: Battle with Breast Cancer

V: Her philosophy

A: 'Happiest moment is now.'

B: Her accomplishments

1. Apart of Congress
2. Ambassador to Ghana and Czech Republic
3. Awards

VI: Conclusion

A: Shirley's role models

1. Eleanor Roosevelt
2. Amelia Earhart

B: Her Impact on world and me

1. Example of 'perfect life'
2. Can achieve anything

C: Movie *Curly Top*

1. Shirley's life is like song 'When I Grow Up'

D: Ending

1. 'Star in my eyes'

Works Cited

Black, Shirley Temple. Child Star. New York: McGraw-Hill Publishing Company, 1988.

Churchill, Bonnie. "Mom said, 'Sparkle Shirl.' She still does." The Christian Science Monitor. 11 December 1998.

Edwards, Anne. Shirley Temple: American Princess. New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1988.

"ShirleyTempleFans.Com." [Online] Available <http://www.shirleytemplefans.com>. 13 February 2002.