

For Shirley Jones, Life Is Beautiful

Fourteen years, one month, and 21 days after Shirley Jones married actor Jack Cassidy, they at last went on their honeymoon.

I saw her at her New England-type home in Beverly Hills the afternoon before they took off for the Hawaiian Islands. Shirley, wearing striped levis and a tan shirt, had taken time out not only from packing but from preparing a birthday party for her oldest son, Shawn, now 12,

"Jack and I have gone away together before—when we worked on a show or when one of us joined the other on location for a film, a play, or a nightclub act. But this is the first time that we're going on a real vacation."

Shirley had completed 14 segments of her television show, "The Partridge Family," and was given a month off so that the writers could get ahead with the scripts. The show deals with a widow, played by Shirley, who inadvertently makes a pop-rock tape with her five offspring in their garage one night. It becomes a surprise hit record, a fact which causes the family to disrupt its normal suburban life and take to the road in a mod-painted bus.

I've known Shirley since she shot to overnight prominence as Laurey in the movie version of "Oklahoma!" Only 21 years old at the time, she possessed a down-to-earth, American wholesome-

ness. She was surprisingly unaffected by all the fuss made over her and has retained her equilibrium throughout the ensuing years, during which she won an Oscar for her performance as Lulu Baines in "Elmer Gantry," garnered an Emmy nomination for her tv role in "Silent Night, Lonely Night," and starred in over 40 major television shows.

Shirley—named after Shirley Temple—was 12 when she started taking singing lessons. In 1953, when she and her parents vacationed in New York, she auditioned for agent Gus Schirmer who painted a rosy picture of how successful he could make her.

His confidence was justified. One week later, Shirley sang for Rodgers and Hammerstein and was promptly signed to a seven-year-contract and put in the chorus of "South Pacific." Six months later she played the title role in the Chicago company of "Me and Juliet," and four months after that, won the lead in her first film, "Oklahoma!"

While her parents supported Shirley's professional ambitions, they were opposed to her involvement with suave, sophisticated Jack Cassidy. After all, he was married, although separated, and had a child. "Besides that, he was an actor!" explained Shirley. They'd met when Shirley signed to tour with the stage presentation of "Oklahoma!" in Europe for six weeks. Jack played Curly. "At first, my folks felt that Jack



Shirley Jones and Jack Cassidy have a rare, successful Hollywood marriage.

was just an infatuation, but when they realized I'd really made up my mind, they didn't stand in my way."

From the beginning of their marriage, Shirley let Jack be the head of the family. "Of course, I've always been independent because of my profession," she added. "But I like knowing that Jack is there to make decisions."

The Cassidys have three sons—Shawn, 12, Patrick, eight, and Ryan, four. Jack also has a son, David, 20, by his first wife.

Among the potential problems Shirley faced, her relationship with her stepson, David Cassidy, could have been the most difficult. Here, too, Shirley's common sense prevailed. "He used to live with his mother and, except for weekends, we didn't see that much of him. Now he has his own

apartment. But we've become friends and have mutual respect."

It was quite by accident that Shirley and David ended up playing mother and son in "The Partridge Family." "He has his own agent and didn't even know I was set for the lead. Nor did the producer realize he was Jack's son until after he read so well that he wanted to test David for the part. Then he told me he was considering David for the role of my son. He asked me how I felt about it. I said, 'Great! I am crazy about him. He's very talented.' Then he went back to David and told him, 'Your stepmother is going to play the lead. How do you feel about that?' And he replied, 'I think it's great!'"

But that's not surprising. Beautifully is how things have been working out for Shirley Jones for many years.

—PEER J. OPPENHEIMER