

# Shirley Jones shaking plastic mom image

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## TV news

Shannon Jewell, editor

When actress Shirley Jones invited Dabney Coleman into her bedroom on "The 'Slap' Maxwell Story," she killed off the last remnants of the pristine mother who ruled "The Partridge Family" in the early 1970s.

Or at least she hopes she did.

"It's funny, the reaction," Jones said by phone. "A friend called yesterday and said, 'Shirley, in front of millions of people you pecked someone on your head? I never knew that "you" would do anything like that!"

Jones, who is almost 54, has been trying to dump her "Partridge Family" image since 1974, when the series ended its four-year run.

Although she won a 1960 Academy Award for playing a prostitute in "Elmer Gantry," "The Partridge Family" stamped her as the perfect (some might even say plastic), peaches-and-cream mother to six children.

In 1979 she played a similar role on the short-lived "Shirley" show.

Since then, however, Jones' TV career has been limited to occasional guest roles on shows such as "Hotel" and a lead role in "There Were Times, Dear," a public television drama about Alzheimer's disease.

She and her husband, Marty Ingels, will soon be doing a talk show about marriage for a new cable network.

But she has spent most of her time in recent years singing with symphony orchestras throughout the world, hoping to get another television series, but not having much luck.

"They weren't beating down my door," she said bluntly. "And the things I did get offered I wasn't happy with."

But "Slap' Maxwell" should change all that.

In her first appearance as Kitty Noland, Slap's high school

girlfriend, Jones was still beautiful. But age has softened her perfection, and Kitty has a depth that never touched the glossy Shirley Partridge character.

Kitty has renewed her friendship with Slap by taking him to a home-style restaurant for steak, and then taking him home to bed, ignoring his protests about what people would think.

"She's a down-to-earth Texas gal — really kind of an earth mother," Jones said. "She's very, very practical, but with a sense of humor. She's the one who keeps pulling Slap back into reality because he keeps going off into fantasy land."

Kitty also has set up a reunion between Slap and his father, who hadn't seen each other in 15 years. The elder Maxwell is confined to a nursing home in the Texas town where

Slap grew up and where Kitty still lives.

Slap will stay in Texas for a total of five episodes, Jones said, playing out his unique version of the old "you can't go home again" story.

Jones hopes that if the series ratings climb while she's on the show, the writers will bring her back regularly.

"I like the show that much and I like" Dabney Coleman, she said. "It's so rare you find somebody to work with where the communications and the rapport are so good.

"And the writing is unbelievable. It's not like a script; I feel like I'm doing an improvisation."

Jones also finds that working with the show's predominantly young crew is a refreshing antidote on days when she feels jaded about her profession.

"My favorite phrase is, 'The actor is always the last man on the totem pole, standing there with his hat in his hand, waiting to take orders,'" she said.

"It's probably the most frustrating thing about acting, and



SHIRLEY JONES

it's one of the reasons I never wanted my children to be in the business as actors."

But all three of her sons, plus her stepson, David Cassidy, are actors.

David Cassidy, 38, who was a teen singing idol when he starred with her on "The Partridge

Family," just finished a rock musical in London.

He was supposed to star with her in a Partridge family reunion show that would turn into a series for him, Jones said. But the plans have stalled because he wasn't pleased with the concept.

Shaun Cassidy, 29, had a short-term role on a soap opera last year and, most recently, had a guest role on a two-part "Matlock" episode.

Patrick Cassidy, 26, starred as Jacqueline Bisset's young lover in the recent "Napoleon and Josephine" miniseries.

Ryan Cassidy, 22, was a regular on "Facts of Life" for a year. Now he spends most of his time selling cars, which is just what his mother hopes he'll keep doing.

"As an actor, you're constantly waiting for your next job, and it's really, really difficult," she said thoughtfully.

"When it's your own flesh and blood out there, the obvious thing is to try to protect them from that."