

HOT-LINE FROM HOLLYWOOD!

SHIRLEY CALLING

I'd had a hard day at the office and was just relishing the thought of collapsing in front of the telly-tube for a glorious evening of doing absolutely nothing, when — you've guessed — the 'phone rang!

*"*****" I thought to myself. And muttering curses on the G.P.O., I heaved myself over to pick up the receiver. Talk about a quick-change artist! The moment I heard Shirley's voice, all the life bounced back into me and I felt ready to sit there chatting far into the night.*

SHIRLEY: Hello again, Pat. I'm back.

ME: *That's great news . . . But I didn't even know you'd been!*

SHIRLEY: Well, how about that? Of course you didn't. It just goes to show that, once I get an idea fixed in my head, it's not going to be budging for a while. You see, I'd planned on calling you before we left for New York, so you'd know where I was if you wanted to get in touch. So, naturally, I reckoned you knew all about it. I'd clean forgot that, what with all the scurry of packing up and organising the kids, I never got around to putting that call through!

ME: *Well, now you've finally made it, how about filling me in on some more of the details?*

SHIRLEY: Sure . . . Though I guess there's not all that much to tell. We went out 'cos Jack was due to start a play in upper New York last month. I always like to share times like that with him whenever I can. He's still out East now, of course, but I flew back home because I was due back in L.A. on the 13th.

ME: *(Only half serious). You say you flew back . . . Did you get out there some other way?*

SHIRLEY: We sure did. We drove across country.

ME: *You WHAT!!! It must have taken ages!*

SHIRLEY: (Laughing.) Oh, no, not really. We took five days over the trip, but I guess we could've done it in four if we'd really trod on the gas. But the whole idea was to take it easy instead of rushing everywhere and having to stick with flight schedules. It was nice to be able to work out our own schedule for a change . . . To stop for an early dinner one night and go on driving into the night the next, depending on how we felt. And, of course, we did

get to see a whole lot more of the countryside than you would way up above the clouds!

ME: *Oh, yes. I should think it must be great in all sorts of ways! But weren't you terribly tired by the time you finished the journey?*

SHIRLEY: No. Hardly at all. In fact, a lot less than I'd figured I'd be. I guess it makes a big difference having two drivers . . . I certainly wouldn't be keen to try it out solo! And we went in the family station wagon, which is so roomy — even when it's loaded with all our baggage and the extra bits and ends Jack figured on needing through his stay in New York. We never did get that terribly cramped, closed-in feeling that you can sometimes get if you travel long distances that way.

ME: *I gather you didn't have the boys with you then! I can't see it being so roomy with five of you there!*

SHIRLEY: No . . . It would have been a sight less quiet and peaceful too, I can tell you. Mind, we didn't leave them behind for just those reasons! In fact, I guess they'd have come along but for their schooling. Jack and I don't like to take them out of school unless it's for something really, really important. And I mean that. They get plenty of vacation for us to take them out East or someplace else they'd like to visit. But once they've missed out on school, it can take quite a time to pick up on grades again.

ME: *Mmm . . . I can see your point. But do they see things the same way?*

SHIRLEY: It may surprise you some, but yes, they do. You know, although I say it myself, they're kind of sensible kids, and they do hate to fall back on grades. Mind, I've also got a hunch that they get to have quite a good time while their father and I are off the scene!

ME: *Ah, that sounds more like it! I hope there wasn't too much debris to clear up when you got back?*

SHIRLEY: (Laughing.) Oh, no . . . Not so's you'd notice anyway! You see, the housekeeper keeps an eye on them to make sure they come to no harm. I guess they just enjoy getting shot of their grouching Mom and Pop for a week or two!

ME: *You want to be careful, you know . . . If I didn't already know how Shawn, Pat and Ryan really feel about you, I might just believe you!*