

# Convent life, 'miracle marriage' mark career of former actress

By Hillary Hauser  
News-Press Staff Writer

June Haver MacMurray was in town the other day, speaking at a meeting of ChildHelp's local chapter about her life as an actress, mother and wife of the actor Fred MacMurray.

Boy, did that bring back some memories—for me, 10 years ago in a Winnebago.

Many of the women in the ChildHelp audience could remember June Haver as one of the great stars of the musical stage, and how she suddenly renounced her stardom to enter a convent.

June unraveled that story for them, and told how she emerged from the convent to enter a life of helping people and a 31-year marriage to Fred MacMurray.

Her marriage, she said, was a "miracle."

I remembered June's miracle story, because she had told it to me 10 years ago as we sat for hours in Fred MacMurray's Winnebago dressing room on a movie location in Florida. She had bought a beginner's needlepoint kit for me, and patiently tried to teach me the impossible tangles and yarns of that hobby as we talked. (I was in Florida to help out on the picture, and was also doing a lot of underwater exploring in the local waters. Needlepoint, for me, was more dangerous than swimming around with sharks, and I told her so).

### June's joy

June's husband was starring in a television movie called "Beyond the Bermuda Triangle," and it was a cinematic combination of electromagnetic clouds, spinning compasses, people falling down with dizziness and disappearing. So many people vanished in the story that one had to suspect it was all a Screen Actors Guild plot to avoid paying actors for overtime, and I found myself unable to watch a lot of the action on the set without getting dizzy myself.

Inside the Winnebago, June created a different world in talking about her life. Her highly successful career had begun at age 10, with a radio program in Rock Island, Ill., she said, and by the time she was 16, she had signed with 20th Century Fox for a series of 14 or 15 highly successful musicals ("we all pretty much kept our clothes on").

### Tragic turn

But she felt that her life remained unfulfilled.

At 23, she was engaged to be married (to a "young, gorgeous dentist," age 34), and the two of them planned to live in Jackson Hole, Wyo. But, in a tragic turn of events, her fiancé was critically injured in a car accident.

Staying by his side in the hospital where he spent his last days, June began to pour out her grief to the Catholic sisters, who in turn talked to her about things not of this earth.

### Taking the veil

After his death, she returned to acting, singing and dancing, but her heart was not in it. She was thinking about the things she had learned from the sisters, and the issues of life became more important to her than the issues of Hollywood.

So, June Haver abruptly left her film career. She sold everything she owned, donated the money to charity, church and friends, entered a convent in Kansas while her agents and producers entered a state of shock.

In the convent, she found a peace of mind she had never known before in her life, she said.

### Might have cracked

"It is very difficult to stay connected in a very disconnected world," she told her Santa Barbara audience. "If it hadn't been for my faith in God, I might have cracked up, or gone the alcohol and drug

route. It seems to me that the only time we can be happy is when we're doing the will of God, and to let our light shine is to serve people."

She wanted to serve children in a teaching capacity, she said.

In the convent, however, she began to suffer migraine headaches and "couldn't function." She began the long, arduous — and scandalous — process of leaving the convent, getting permission from a cardinal and the Pope to do so.

### Home to mother

At 27, she was back in the world of Hollywood, living with her mother, but she had no desire to return to the stage. She knew she wanted to continue in some manner to help humanity, but she wasn't exactly sure what she was going to do and was "kind of depressed about life."

About two months after she had returned home, John Wayne invited her to a costume party, but she didn't want to go. Her mother, however, encouraged her to go.

At the party, she met Fred MacMurray, whose wife had recently died.

### A little in love

She told the ChildHelp group that she had been "a little bit in love" with MacMurray 10 years before, when they had worked together on the film, "Where We Go From Here."

"On the set, he kept going to the telephone to call his wife," June said. "I told my mother, 'That's the man I would marry, but he's taken.' Now, 10 years later, he sat down, held my hand, it was a miracle. We went out New Year's Eve, and were married six months later."

When she had told me the story 10 years before in the Winnebago dressing room, she had paused at this point in her story and looked me in the eye. "You know," she said, "if I had not gone into the convent, my marriage to Fred would not have worked. It allowed me to give up the need to act, which in a sense was only a search for my identity. The convent allowed me to simply be his wife, and that is why we are still together."

Together, June and Fred MacMurray were the most loving couple I had ever seen. He would come into their private Winnebago world, hand her his props, costumes or whatever, kiss her, and they would sit and talk. And they held hands. They really enjoyed each other after many years of marriage, and it was a delight to see. As I observed the unusualness of these people, I realized that our experiences in life could be likened to a medieval alchemy — you may start out with a known metal, but end up with some-



News-Press photo by BOB PONCE

A life ranging from stardom to convent to marriage and motherhood was recounted by June Haver MacMurray at a meeting of the local ChildHelp chapter.

thing entirely different.

(Similarly, I had always felt that knowing June Haver for that one, priceless moment in time was pure gold — even though "Beyond the Bermuda Triangle," when it finally aired, remained pot metal.

### Youthful brilliance

Now, 10 years later, as I listened to June talk at the ChildHelp meeting, I was struck with the youthful brilliance of her face. I will even confess that I had requested a photographer to come and shoot a picture of her as she addressed the meeting, because I had thought the photograph given to me by ChildHelp was not a current one.

It was a current one — life has not put a line on June Haver's face in 10 years.

She told the ChildHelp group that she was now a great-grandmother, by one of her husband's children, and that brought a round of applause. She also introduced her own daughter, Katy, 28, to describing her as another "miracle."

"I had had female problems, a hysterectomy," she told her audience. "After Fred and I were married, I told him I wanted to adopt a baby. He said, I don't know . . . I'm

See Page G-3, Col. 1

# June Haver devoted to helping humanity

Continued from Page G-2  
46... I've gone through this. I don't know."

At the time of their marriage, MacMurray had a son, 11, and a girl, 14.

## 'I want one'

The MacMurrays went to a party where most of the guests were obstetricians and gynecologists, and "I got them all in a room and I told them. I want one (a baby)," June said.

One doctor told her that the wait for adoption would be at least a year, so June did what she knew best: she called a sister in a local convent, and asked her to pray with her.

"That was the first of May," June said. "Seven days later, my husband called me and said, 'What are we going to do with two little twin girls, born this morning?' I ran out to the hospital, and there they were. They have been sensational in our lives."

Katy, a bright and happy redhead like her sister, is currently in nursing school at Mount St. Mary's College in Los Angeles. She said her parents have been a big inspiration to her and her sister, Laurie, who works with an advertising agency in Sacramento.

Katy said she wants to work for ChildHelp when she receives her nursing degree this year.

## begun by two starlets

ChildHelp USA International, begun in 1959 by two starlets who

played the girlfriends of David and Ricky Nelson on the "Ozzie and Harriet Show," is now this country's largest, non-profit, non-government organization helping children who have been abused, said Yvonne Lime Fedderson, who also spoke at the local meeting.

Ms. Fedderson, who was one of the starlets, said that her group's biggest success story is the establishment of the Children's Village in Beaumont, near Palm Springs.

Abused and neglected children between the ages of 2 and 12 are now referred to the village by the courts in six Southern California counties, and at the village they receive the help of licensed psychologists, medical personnel and a residential staff of 50 which administers "large doses of love and care" to bring the children back to a normal life.

June Haver said she had been working with ChildHelp for nine years.

She also works with the National Charity League, which makes recordings for the blind; the Mary and Joseph League, which operates a home for teen-agers in Palos Verdes; the St. Anne's Home for unwed mothers, and the Bethlehem Center, which helps those on skid row.

Her devotion to helping humanity is the fulfillment of what June Haver wanted to do when she entered the convent all those years ago.