

Lucille Ball: Busier, Happier, Funnier Than Ever

Success at work is an old story to Lucy—but serenity at home is something new

By PEER J. OPPENHEIMER

OUTWARDLY, nothing seems to have changed. When I visited Lucille Ball at Desilu Studios in Hollywood, where she is currently filming "The Lucy Show," she looked, acted, and talked just about the same as she had five years earlier when she finished a six-year run of the highly successful "I Love Lucy"—same orange hair, clear blue eyes, trim figure.

She clowning around on the set with her co-workers, did a hilarious Charlie Chaplin imitation, good-naturedly yelled into the telephone about transferring a call to some other extension, and was as interested in me and my family as she always is about her friends and acquaintances.

Lucy lives in the same house in Beverly Hills, and as she talked about herself there was at first the familiar tenseness in her voice, a withdrawn attitude that made her appear unable or unwilling to concentrate on questions—till she relaxed as we walked into her dressing room for lunch.

She is even surrounded by pretty much the same people who worked with her earlier, except for Desi Arnaz and Bill Frawley. Vivian Vance again plays her girl friend. The writers and much of the crew have stayed with her. So have the all-important audience ratings: once again Lucy is on top of the Nielsen heap.

Yet a lot of things have happened in the five intervening years. She divorced Desi, married comedian Gary Morton, and for one year was so physically run down that her doctor wouldn't allow her to do anything more strenuous than sit in a rocking chair.

HER CHILDREN, Lucie and Desi, Jr., are now 11 and 9 respectively, and as they grow older, Lucy's responsibility as a mother has increased. "I even worry when they go to the drugstore alone. In fact, I won't let them go by themselves!" Lucy said apologetically.

It takes a little while (and you have to know Lucy well) to realize that there has been a change in her—a subtle one, but one that is there nevertheless. And when you mention this new calmness to her, she gives most of the credit to Gary, his eagerness to settle down, and particularly his willingness to accept the responsibility of fatherhood.

"Gary was married before, but he had no children. Believe me, he welcomed the adjustment to them with open arms. I wouldn't even call it an adjustment. The children really dig him. Gary gives them the kind of



New husband Gary Morton has taught Lucy his secret: the ability to relax.



Lucy plans to spend more time with her children, Lucie, 11, and Desi, Jr., 9.



In her new film, "Critic's Choice," Lucy trades laughs with Bob Hope.

discipline they have never had before, and they love it. I can be strict—for about 60 seconds. Then the children can wind me around their little fingers. You can depend on the person who disciplines you, because he is always the same way; he's dependable."

There seems to be a genuine affection and understanding between Lucy and Gary. He is a tall, blue-eyed, amiable man who, unlike Desi, has the ability to relax—and make Lucy relax. "With him, a home isn't just a place to change your clothes," Lucy told me. "He loves every room. And I'm contented because someone is doing with me the things he likes to do, and I'm doing with someone what I like to do."

Today Lucy has more time for the children than she ever had before. They relax by the pool, go riding or swimming, have picnics. Gary frequently takes Desi, Jr., along when he plays golf.

A good part of their time together is spent in the garage, which has been turned into a theater by little Lucie and Desi, Jr. "They put on plays and fool around with costumes, make-up, and lighting," Lucy explained. "I recently brought home a sketch we did on the Danny Kaye special. The children wanted me to help put it on, but as usual I told them to call me in to smooth the rough edges after everything was set up. But Gary has been in several of their plays, including a horror mystery that they wrote themselves."

To spend as much time as possible with her family, Lucy has been reluctant to accept too many outside engagements. She has just finished the movie, "Critic's Choice," with Bob Hope, and has done two tv specials, one with Hope, the other with Danny Kaye (for which she was paid the highest price ever given a single performer for this kind of show—\$100,000). From now on, she plans to star in one film a year, and is presently discussing the lead in "Mary, Mary" with Warner Brothers.

AS FAR AS financial security goes, Lucy doesn't really need to work. In addition to owning 52 percent of Desilu Productions, one of the world's largest producers of tv programs, she is part owner of a hotel in Palm Springs, has an interest in a road-building machinery firm in Flagstaff, Ariz., and has real-estate holdings in California and Arizona.

Just before she took over the presidency of Desilu, I asked her if being on the board of directors didn't involve a lot of extra work. Lucy quipped: "I'm just a VP—in charge of dusting!" Until then, she had attended board meetings when she was in town but had not taken an active interest in running the company.

All that changed abruptly last month when Desi suddenly resigned as head of the company, and the board of directors decided that Lucy was the logical choice to take over the presidency. Although she agreed to accept responsibility for making the final decisions, she has no intention of personally running the firm in the intensive manner which characterized Desi's term of office.

Lucy is fully aware that her new task will encroach on her time with her family. But friends feel she is calmer and better-adjusted than ever before and thus more capable of coping with whatever problems may come along—personal as well as professional.



COVER:

A smiling baby, photographed by Vivienne Lapham, symbolizes our hopes for the coming year—and gives Family Weekly the opportunity to wish its readers a happy one.

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