



Millie Perkins, 19-year-old native of Passaic, N. J., was chosen from more than 10,000 applicants to play the title role in the film version of "The Diary of Anne Frank." She had no previous acting experience, but was a successful young model. In making the movie, she became the close personal friend of another member of the cast, Shelley Winters, who wrote this story especially for Family Weekly.

I COULDN'T BELIEVE my ears when I was told that a little inexperienced kid, a model who had never set foot on a sound stage, had been chosen for the lead in 20th Century-Fox's most important production of the year, "The Diary of Anne Frank."

But long before we finished the film, I knew that neither the studio nor producer-director George Stevens had taken any chance at all. As usual, Mr. Stevens knew exactly what he was doing.

I had my first inkling of this the day I saw her test. The lights were turned off in the theater, a sound stage projected on the screen, and a little girl walked before the camera, smiling shyly. Good gosh, I thought, there's no problem making her look like 13. But how will they ever age her to 15?

Actually, I later found out, Millie Perkins was 18 then. She turned 19 during the filming.

She was beautiful, in an unusual way. No conventional glamour, but interesting.

"Do you want to be an actress?" a voice asked from somewhere behind the camera.

There was no hesitancy in her reply: "I'm a teen model and I make \$40,000 a year."

Like she was saying, "I'm okay where I am. What do you offer that I don't have already?" She displayed intelligence and awareness.

The next question: "Would you like to play Anne Frank in a motion picture?"

"I read the diary, but I didn't see the play." And after a short pause, "I think I could play the part. But I have to go to Europe now for a fashion show."

She didn't say, "So what else do you have to offer?" The thought was there, nevertheless.

I had my first long talk with Millie the noon we had lunch together with Otto Frank, the father of the real Anne Frank, and Diane Baker, who plays Anne's sister, Margot.

Because of her extreme shyness, I was doubtful that Millie would contribute much to the conversation. I was wrong again.

Her questions—the way she asked them, her quick grasp of Mr. Frank's answers—made it plain that she fully realized how painful it was for him to talk about his daughters, who were killed during the last awful days of the war. She asked them in such a way that he didn't mind answering them. At the same time, from a strictly professional point of view, her questions showed a dramatic understanding that would have done credit to someone with years of experience in the field.

Millie was particularly interested in the Franks' wonderful family relationship, which she could easily comprehend because of her own background. Millie comes from a large, closely knit family, having two older sisters, two younger sisters, and a younger brother. Obviously, she missed them all.



by
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Millie Perkins, appearing with Shelley Winters in "The Diary of Anne Frank," is the discovery of George Stevens (above).

How lonely she was for them was apparent by her constant references to them, and the letters she wrote home daily. I could understand her loneliness: when I came to California 12 years ago, I too felt lost, although I had my sister with me.

BEFORE THE CAST sat down for the first reading, Millie had been impressed with the fact that she was not only the central character of the Anne Frank story, but a symbol of resistance, that her every move and every word would be carefully evaluated by millions all over the world. Yet Millie was perfectly calm and relaxed, speaking her lines as if reading a fairy tale to a child.

Finally we started shooting. Millie had a simple scene—she enters the attic and, knowing how frightened I was having just fled from the Nazis, tries to cheer me up with that wonderful smile of hers. I thought she was lovely.

But when we saw the scene at night, I heard her weeping. Suddenly she got up, rushed out of the theater and into her car, for a real cry. I went to console her.

"It was a mistake," she sobbed when she saw me. "I should have stuck to modeling."

"Millie," I said softly, "I know you feel inconsolable right now. I felt the same way when I saw myself on the screen for the first time."

She looked up in surprise, tears still rolling down her cheeks in humiliation and despair.

"Even when I made 'A Place in the Sun,' and I had done many pictures before, I rushed out of the projection room and cried. You're not used to seeing yourself as you really are."

"Well, it's different when you're an actress. The whole idea in pictures is to let the world see your emotions. You'll get used to it, I promise you will."

About three weeks after we started, Millie had one of the most difficult scenes in the picture, 15 minutes in which she had to do a bit with every one of us—touching, funny, dramatic, complete switches of mood. She did it without a flub.

How completely Millie's attitude toward her film career had changed was obvious on the last day of shooting. "What am I going to do when I don't have George Stevens to direct my next picture?" she cried out.

I couldn't suppress a smile. "I'm afraid that's a problem all of us face!"

Her bright eyes looked up at me. "What did you do after 'A Place in the Sun'?"

"I went to New York and studied acting!"

I knew what was on her mind. "I'll see what I can do to help you. There are lots of good acting schools if you're interested."

"But I am!" she exclaimed.

Millie Perkins was a "natural" when George Stevens chose her for the role of Anne Frank, and the way she goes at things, she'll be an accomplished actress in jig time.