

Debbie and her daughter Carrie Frances, 3, share a cup of milk while a disinterested Todd Emanuel, 2, takes care of the cookies.



Her spare hours off-camera, rare these days, mean another kind of work for Debbie. She is devoted to the Thelians, young show-business people who help emotionally disturbed children like the boy above. But first and foremost she's a mother who loves to play with daughter Carrie (below).

my life has just begun

As her divorce from Eddie Fisher becomes final this week, this

vivacious actress tells her own story—her interests, her

By DEBBIE REYNOLDS

problems, her plans and bright hopes for the future



Debbie was 16 when she won Miss Burbank contest which led to the movies.

FOR THE PAST few months, columnists and some of my friends have tried to link me romantically with a number of eligible and not-so-eligible bachelors. Whether I go out with Harry Karl, Bob Neal, or anyone else, there is prompt speculation that I'll soon be headed for the altar.

These people can't see how a young woman can be happy unless she's married. They can't understand how she can run her family efficiently by herself, and they feel that without a man a girl must be lonely, frustrated, and bored.

True, without my children I would feel lonely and unfulfilled. But as for being bored or not knowing what to do with my spare time, my invariable answer is: "What spare time?"

Most of my supposedly "free" hours are spent in behalf of a wonderful and worthwhile charity, the Thelians, a group of young people connected with show business and dedicated to helping mentally and emotionally disturbed children. In the beginning, it was the difficulties of my marriage with Eddie Fisher and the urgency to keep busy at all costs that spurred my enthusiasm for this organization, but I have tried to sustain it ever since.

Then there's my work, of course. And now, being both father and mother to my two youngsters is an

extra responsibility which gives an added purpose to my existence, an additional, wonderful challenge for the future.

So the way I look at it, life has just begun for me. If I can remain as happy for the rest of my days as I am today, I will be the most blessed person in the world!

A year has gone by since I got my divorce. But even today, well-meaning people take it upon themselves to feel sorry for me. I can tell it in their eyes, their handshakes, their whole attitude.

I wish people wouldn't feel that way about me. There's no need for it.

I HAVE LEARNED that unhappiness can turn you into a "martyr" and make you and everyone around you miserable. Or you can profit from unhappiness and benefit both yourself and those who depend on you.

In spite of all that's happened recently, I am grateful for a most rewarding life: I have a promising career ahead of me, I have a number of really close, dependable friends. Most of all, I have my children, Carrie Frances, who is three, and Todd Emanuel, two.

In short, I feel I have a wonderful future. It's

more than events of the past year or so that lead me to think this way. Mostly, it dates back to my early upbringing, and particularly to my religious faith that God can guide us through any difficulty.

I have always enjoyed a close family relationship. I don't think I have ever cried in front of anyone but my parents. That's the reason I managed to keep so calm during the trying days of my divorce last year.

I wasn't being noble. I wasn't trying to be the heroine. I kept my emotions to myself simply because that's the way I am.

Because my family has always been the predominant factor in my life, when I was faced with marital problems it was only natural that I turned to my children for consolation. They gave me not only the incentive to carry on but all the joy and happiness I could ask for.

Watching them, I can't help seeing myself all over again, as I used to be. Particularly Carrie who, among other things, has inherited my temper.

One Sunday afternoon, for instance, she was playing with her toy piano when one of the tiny wooden legs came off. The harder she tried to fix it, the less successful she was and, of course, the angrier she became till finally she flung the toy

into a corner, breaking off the other leg as well.

I knew I should have punished her, but the best I could do was to keep from laughing out loud. I saw myself smashing my favorite Shirley Temple doll, which I had sold many magazine subscriptions in order to buy.

What made it worse in Carrie's case was that the instant she stomped away, Todd came over, picked up the pieces, and patiently screwed both legs back into place. When he handed it back to Carrie, it made her all the angrier. To show Todd—and me—that she could fix it herself, she yanked the legs off the piano again, only to give up the task a few minutes later and let her brother complete the job a second time.

I USED to have such temper tantrums till I was about 19. I only hope that my experience will help me guide Carrie.

My own anger was usually the result of frustration about something I wanted to do, and couldn't—or at least not fast enough to satisfy me. Like learning to tap dance.

I have felt dancing was important to my career ever since I got into motion pictures after winning a Miss Burbank contest. When my friend Camille

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