

He became an elderly "fuss-budget" after his wife's death, then he married June

Life Begins Again for

By PEER J. OPPENHEIMER

"HEY, LOOK! There's Fred MacMurray!" cried a youngster watching a Hollywood parade. "Gee whiz, I'd sure like to get his autograph!" his companion exclaimed.

They were only two of hundreds of youngsters and teen-agers who crowded around the tall, blue-eyed grandfather, whose physique, stamina, and popularity among youngsters belie his 52 years.

Ovations like Fred now receives are customarily reserved for such teen-age idols as Fabian, Troy Donahue, and the Everly brothers. No one is more surprised by his new popularity than Fred himself, who admits that the best he could do a couple of years ago was sign an autograph for an old lady who became his fan after he costarred with Claudette Colbert in "The Gilded Lily" back in 1935.

The rebirth of Fred's popularity can be traced to two things—"The Shaggy Dog," a gimmick movie which became Walt Disney's top grosser of all times, and his marriage to former film star June Haver, who talked the middle-age widower with two nearly grown children into starting life anew.

"When I married Fred," June says, "he was terribly set in his ways. He was a fuss-budget. He hadn't quite progressed to being a lint picker, but he was already an ash-tray emptier, and that's just about as set in his ways as a man can get."

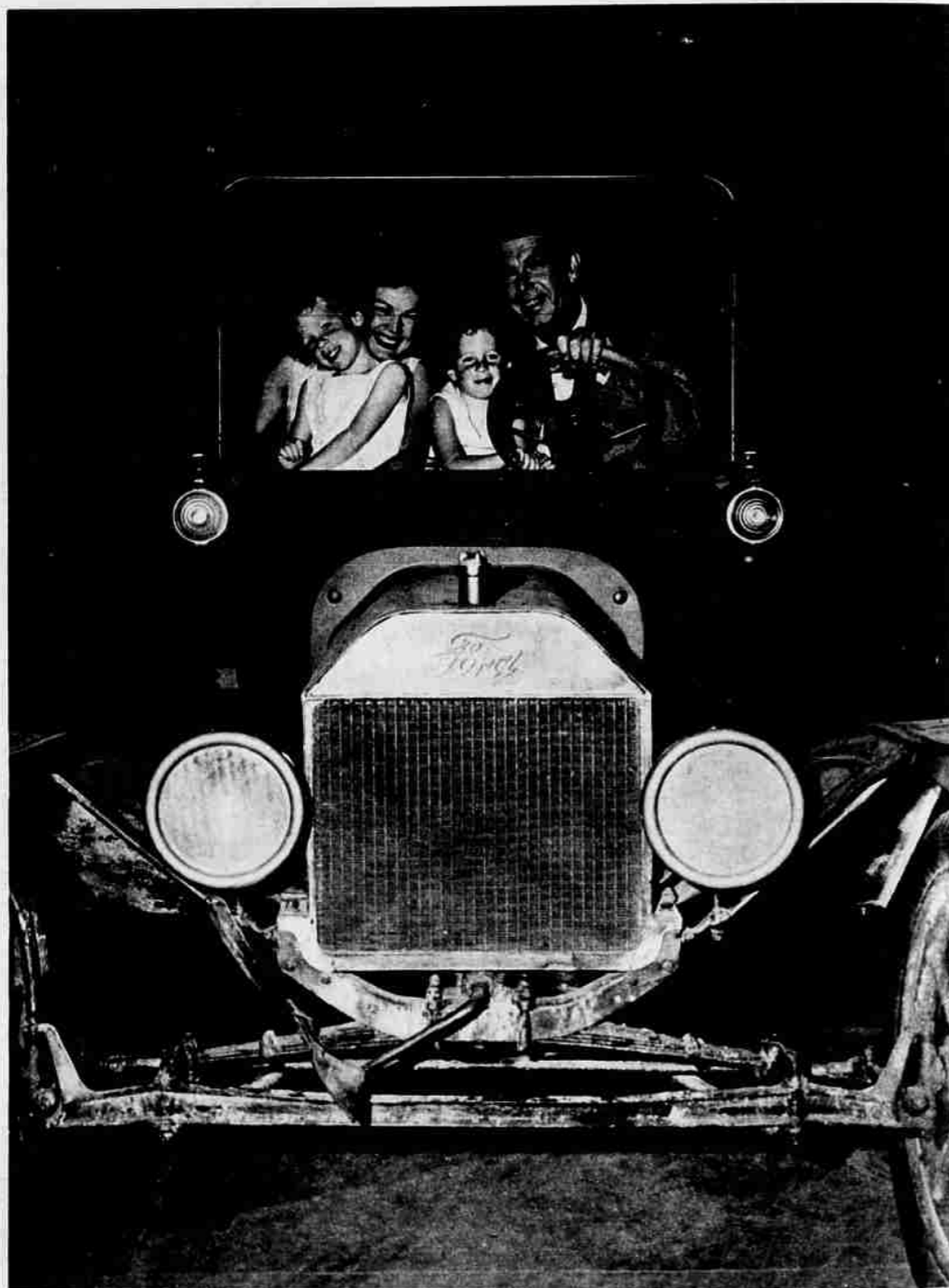
Fred was 45 when his first wife, Broadway actress Lillian Lamont, died in 1953 after 17 years of marriage. Fred lost ambition, interest, even enthusiasm for life itself. With Lillian gone, he told himself, he would just fish, play golf, and accept a movie role only if he couldn't resist the script.

Certainly he didn't have to work any longer. In 20 years as a top star, he had amassed a fortune—and held on to it tightly.

Fred would never deny he is a cautious man with a penny. One of his friends assured me that Fred resoled his own shoes to save on cobbler's expenses, and a coworker reported Fred brings his lunch to the studio in a paper bag.

Fred isn't sure what's behind his frugal tendencies, but thinks it may stem from his early days in Los Angeles when he barely supported himself and his mother by doing anything from scraping paint off old cars to playing a sax in local bands.

Spoofig it up a bit, June, Laurie, Kate, and Fred sit for a family portrait in an old Model-T Ford.



Haver and there's been no stopping him since

Fred MacMurray



Fred MacMurray poses with a new film star, the canine of "Shaggy Dog" fame.

Since then, he has counted every penny earned, spent, and saved, and has always put aside a certain amount for a rainy day. By the time his wife passed away, Fred had enough money in real estate—including a 2,500-acre cattle ranch in northern California, oil interests, and part-ownership with John Wayne in a hotel—to live comfortably through his remaining years.

Enter June, Bringing Happiness

And then, all of a sudden, it was June. Pert and attractive, June had planned to become a nun after an unsuccessful marriage to musician Jimmy Zito and the sudden death of her next fiancé, a Beverly Hills dentist. Instead, she found herself a husband 19 years her senior, plus an 11-year-old stepson and 14-year-old stepdaughter.

"It was difficult to feel like we were a family because we had no memories in common," she recalls, "but it grew easier as the years went by and we shared our own experiences."

June not only had beauty and youth, but also a vitality which rubbed off on her new husband, for whom she readily gave up what could have been a resurgence of her once-successful career.

The effect on Fred soon became apparent to his friends. His clothes, once ultraconservative, became gay and youthful. Where he had been known as quiet—one of his associates said you could be friends with Fred for 15 years and still know nothing about him—he now became talkative and zestful, the life of the party.

Although June's influence on Fred was evident in many ways, it was her determination to adopt a child that brought about the greatest change.

When June first suggested adopting a baby, Fred wouldn't even consider it. "I've been through all that," he protested. "Now I'd like to watch someone else raise a family."

In fact, he was looking forward to becoming a grandfather, an ambition he recently realized when his daughter, Mrs. Tom Pool, presented him with his first grandchild.

Fred good-humoredly insists it was a conspiracy that changed his mind, but June says it was pure coincidence that she accepted a party invitation from an obstetrician friend, Dr. Al Meitus. By the same coincidence, all the other guests were obstetricians and pediatricians, and the talk was about nothing but babies. By the time they left the party, Fred had agreed to adopt a baby!

Instead, he got two. A few days after the party, Fred was playing golf when June excitedly called him at the country

club with the news that Dr. Meitus knew of twins they could adopt. Fred clutched the telephone receiver. "Twins!" he shouted.

June breathlessly explained how much easier it would be to raise two girls, and when the conversation ended, Fred was reluctantly agreeing.

"They were premature babies and still in an incubator," June recalls, "so we had a month's time to get everything ready. Fred didn't become enthused about it until we were fixing the babies' room. When he saw me clumsily trying to put up the bathinet, he took over and showed me how to do it properly. That's all it took to get him excited about the prospect of having two brand-new infants in the house."

Fred was still a little wary when Katie and Laurie were brought home, and at first refused to hold them. But his enthusiasm increased quickly, and soon he was feeding, bathing, and changing them—even getting up in the middle of the night when he heard them crying. The twins, now four years old, responded to Fred, too. "They climb all over him when he's home," June says happily.

"I try to be strict with Katie and Laurie, but I don't think I am," Fred admits. "I have too much

fun with them to worry about discipline."

The twins also helped put Fred in the right mood to accept the role in "Shaggy Dog." Although Fred was never out of work, his career had sunk to supporting roles and low-budget pictures until Disney offered him the part of the father of a boy who turns into a shaggy dog.

The conservative Fred MacMurray of the old days would have scoffed at playing such a role. The rejuvenated Fred MacMurray thought it would be fun, although he never guessed the impact the film would make on his career and private life. The subsequent success not only established him with the new generation but led to a lead in Billy Wilder's tremendously successful "The Apartment," the title role in Disney's forthcoming "The Absent-Minded Professor," as well as a new TV series of his own, "My Three Sons."

To Fred, acting has become fun again, as has life itself, and Fred credits most of his new-found happiness to luck—and June Haver.

"I just happened to be in the right spot at the right time," he insists. "Meeting a girl like June was luck, and if I have any talent, that's luck, too. I didn't have anything to do with it."

In his latest film, "The Absent-Minded Professor," Fred shares a chemical discovery with his dog Charlie.

