

Unwavering Courage
By Erica Scott

It was 1934. The merciless black cloud of the Great Depression engulfed families across America. Yet, upon the dark stage a small light began to emerge—a child who became America’s princess. With her sparkling eyes and sheer determination, “Little Miss Fix-It” reached down into the heart of every American and began restoring the joy and hope that had been traumatically ripped away only five years before.

“When the spirit of the people is lower than at any time during this Depression, it is a splendid thing that for just 15 cents, an American can go to a movie and look at the smiling face of a baby and forget his troubles.” That smiling baby described by President Theodore Roosevelt was five-year-old Shirley Temple. After four films, the American public had fallen in love with her cheery disposition and indomitable capacity for love. Her studio shared that love, for she had almost single-handedly rescued them from bankruptcy. Wishing to capitalize on her success, they handed Shirley the same type of roles until the public grew weary of the monotony. Shirley finally slipped from the spotlight after reigning for four years as number one box office star. But that didn’t stop her. Her position of box office royalty may have disappeared, but her popularity as an actress and as a person still flourished.

From her motion picture background, Shirley learned a valuable principle: “Stuck together we would succeed; pried apart, we failed.” On December 7, 1941, the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor—where her Marine brother was stationed. Though he was not injured, Shirley’s sense of community purpose led her to join the battle in whatever way she could. In a single afternoon she sold \$30,000 worth of war bonds. She made appearances all across the country, visiting canteens and entertaining soldiers, giving pep talks, standing behind war causes, and participating in radio broadcasts. But possibly her most valued and appreciated contribution was her frequent presence in military hospitals.

Shirley would walk through wards filled with injured soldiers, speaking with them and quietly listening as they reminisced about home and their families. Singing and occasionally dancing, her presence in the wards was treasured by the soldiers, for it brought them comfort and reminded them of simpler days. As she walked the hospital wards, Shirley recognized her unfailing ability to find fun in every situation to be invaluable. Each new face had its own story, but she kept smiling, and eventually, she saw those she visited smiling too. Shirley just wanted them to know that she cared; she wanted to say “thank you.”

No one knows whether Shirley remained unafraid, regardless of her circumstances. But what is certain is this: she refused to stop smiling, and by doing so, she showed others they could do the same. No matter how difficult the road, she had unwavering courage, grounded in faith that all would be well. “God would see to that.”