

DIANA BARRYMORE:

A *Chippie* Off The Old Block?

By BRAD SHORTELL



Following in her father's fuddled footsteps has gotten Daddy's little girl three husbands, trouble with the law, and punched more times than a punchboard!



"Women should be struck regularly like a gong," Diana once said. John McNeill, left, bruised in fight in Diana's flat, agreed, later handed her two black eyes!

OldMagazineArticles.com

Daddy's Girl



Third hubby Robert Wilcox, one of disputants in bottle battle in Diana's apartment, gets drink-by-drink account from wife. An unidentified gal ducked out during bout.

IN RECENT YEARS, the saddest contradiction of the theory that following in an illustrious parent's footsteps is a sure-fire way to success is a young lady named Diana Barrymore, daughter of the greatest actor of his generation. Yet, had anyone pointed out to John Barrymore that he, alone, was responsible for his first-born's decision to follow in father's fuddled footsteps, the informant would have been shrilly told to go to a psycho ward and have his buttons counted.

Denials notwithstanding, it was actually Barrymore, playing an unaccustomed role as a parent, who helped crystallize his sexy daughter's suppressed desire to do as Daddy did, and not be like Momma.

It was shortly after Diana returned to the United States from a convent in Paris, to which she had been sent at seven and spent 10 years, that trouble patterns began emerging. Her mother, poet-playwright Michael Strange, had divorced Barrymore and remarried again. Diana was shipped off to school.

Daddy's Girl Was Bounced Out of Elite Schools

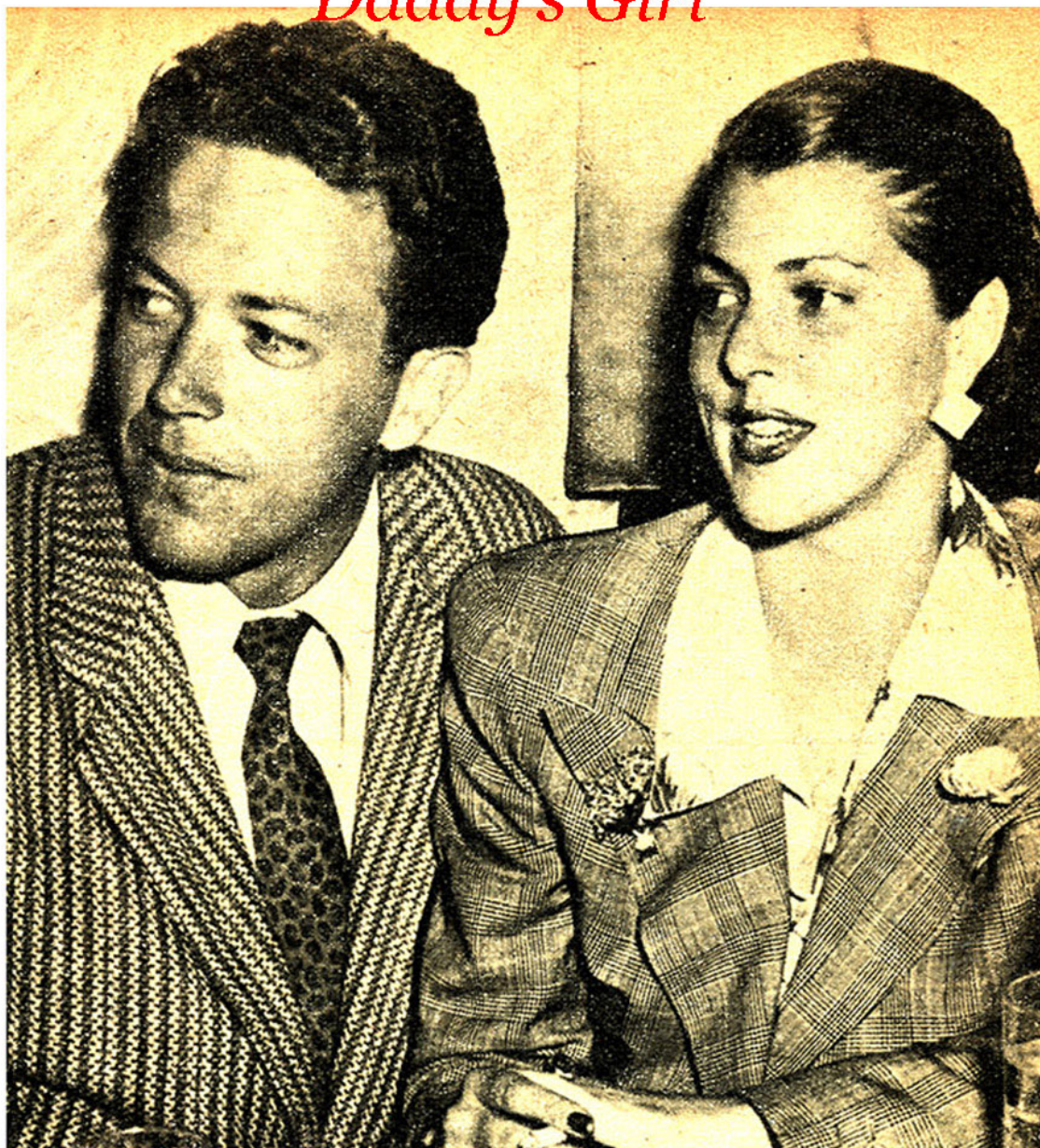
At first, not realizing she'd inherited her old man's appetite for sensation, Diana couldn't understand why her hijinks were getting her constantly kicked out of school. In staccato succession she briefly attended Miss Hewitt's Classes, Brearly, Fermata and other elite establishments dedicated to feminine decorum, and found herself frequently asked to leave because she was considered a bad influence on her classmates. It was while pondering this problem, with the Damocletian sword of expulsion hanging over her head, that Diana received a fatuous letter of advice from her frisky father.

In view of the fact that at the moment he was rapturously engaged in l'amour with his third wife, Dolores Costello, the boozing busker should have stood in his bar-room. He was really in no position to play the stern parent, much less write a letter advising Diana: "This is your time of life to prepare for the future. Be serious about it."

She replied to her father that she had studied *his* school record carefully and it was every bit as bad as hers. In fact, she pointed out, if scholastic escapades helped put Barrymore on his rosy Olympian pinnacle, she damn well would use him as a model. "She's a Barrymore through and through," the Great Profile proclaimed when he read the letter.

He wasn't kidding. Neither, for that matter, was Diana. After a memorable session at the Dalton School, a progressive institution which urged students to express themselves — though in Diana's case they should have known better — the actor's daughter spent two years at the American Academy of Dramatic Arts. She was follow-

Daddy's Girl



Now doing rap for white slavery, Diana's second hubby John Howard, left, earlier got himself involved with law when he and wife had set-to with Louisville cops.

ing the Barrymore party line, right down the alley. In fact, if there was a party in any alley, chances were even that Diana would be one of the guests.

Tries to Out-Drink Her Bottle-Fighting Dad

Like her father, Diana early acquired a passion for potables. This penchant once prompted a Toots Shor wit to observe, "That dame has been in more bars than TV," a statement Diana disdained to deny. After all, in the course of 40 years of consuming strong drinks, her father had been able to put away the equivalent of 640 barrels of assorted alcohol, a real mark to shoot at. Especially for a girl determined to emulate him.

Just for the record, as of this writing, John's little gal, who was actually born Joan Strange Barrymore in 1921, has had the following happen to her in 32 years:

a) She was booted out of a half dozen fashionable schools; b) Married to three men, one of whom later went to jail for white slavery; c) Had a ceiling fall on her head; d) Slapped the face of movie badboy Lawrence Tierney and pulled out hairs on his shirtless chest; e) Wrenched her back in an automobile accident; and f) She was fired from an Australian stage, allegedly for using dirty language. As if that were not enough, Diana has also been involved in triangles, in one of which she wound up with a pip of a shiner; in another she earned herself a pair of blackened glims, bringing her total casualties in the mouse department to an even dozen.

She has also suffered some monumental hangovers. Even there, Papa's fine shaking hand is evident. Barrymore's drinking was epic, his (Continued on page 50) hangovers truly Homeric.

In the matter of the maulings she has taken, Diana is as frank as was her father, whose vitriolic remarks often resulted in his classic kisser being impaled on a fist. Barrymore was unusually fond of fastening a lecherous eye on some frosty-face dowager in a night club and asking owlishly, "Madam, can you direct me to the men's room?"

Diana's direct manner, and an utter lack of conventionality, has also won her some lovely lumps, as witness the historic hassle which took place in her New York apartment on East 63rd St. last June. The slugging, which netted her a pair of puffed peepers, followed a call she made to a boy-



friend, John McNeill, in Hyde Park. Ever the actress, Diana feigned illness. When McNeill drove 90 miles only to discover that instead of lying in bed, Diana was just lying, he blew his stack. This condition was not helped by the presence of a bit actor with whom the supposedly ailing Diana was consuming cooking sherry. After ordering the actor out, McNeill asked Diana for an explanation.

As McNeill explained later, one word led to another and he clouted her. Despite the fact that the clobbering resulted in two black eyes, Diana reacted in typical Barrymore fashion, declaiming:

"I don't mind being punched. Noel Coward said women should be struck regularly like a gong and he's right. Women are no damn good."

Barrymore Senior would have heartily subscribed to those sentiments, too. Beset, as was his daughter, by marital difficulties (and, in his case, he usually was required to pay off) he once delivered himself of a decision on alimony that would have done credit to a Supreme Court Justice. "Alimony," Barrymore said, "is the most exorbitant of stud fees, and the worst feature of it is that you pay it retroactively."

It was always Barrymore's policy, incidentally, to roll with the punches Fate tossed him. He managed to amass four wives in his lifetime, pay alimony in the hundreds of thousands of dollars and, in 10 years of Hollywood, net something over two million bucks. He was prodigal with his money and once, for a lark, paid a madam in Madras, India \$1,200 to rent her brothel. Then he promptly closed the doors to all customers but himself and a male Eurasian friend — for two days.

Spends Dough Like Her Dad

Diana's disdain for money comes strictly from observing her father fling currency around. He took good care of her, though. Under the terms of his divorce from Diana's mother, Barrymore paid \$18,000 a year for the maintenance of Michael and her daughter, and agreed to keep up the premiums of a life insurance policy, at \$1,500 a year, with Diana as beneficiary. He also signed over to Michael Strange a home in White Plains, New York, complete with furnishings.

Consequently, Diana never wanted for a thing and was free to follow pop's erratic path. It led her to three marriages. The first was to actor Bramwell Fletcher, former spouse of actress Helen Chandler. It ended in 1946 and Diana later took on John Howard, Jr., a tennis pro, but finally divorced him after three years of con-

5
Daddy's Girl



Describing her dude-ranch garb as "my divorce outfit," Diana Barrymore leaves Welfare Island Hospital, New York, with pal John McNeill, a bottle casualty in drinking bout with Diana and hubby, Robert Wilcox.

stant bickering and a trial separation. Howard later went on to make a name for himself. Arrested on vice charges, he pleaded guilty in Federal Court to having transported a woman from Los Angeles to New York for immoral purposes. He drew a year and a day, a sentence which impelled one of Diana's intimates to point out the playboy was the first member of her set to be behind bars, instead of in front of them.

Australia Wasn't for Her

Diana, at the time, was married to her third husband, Robert Wilcox, and unhappy about it. She had married Wilcox in 1950 and, by an odd coincidence, the following year was booked to play Australia, where her father had made a nuisance of himself many years earlier. So far back, in fact, that at the time, Diana wasn't even a gleam in Barleycorn Barrymore's eyes.

It was during his stay in the Antipodes that Barrymore managed to get himself arrested for disturbing the peace. He was also barred from a swank club for knocking over the bar glasses with his cane. And he popped the eyes of the citizenry, early one morning, by racing to rehearsal clad in pajamas and bare feet.

Australia, similarly, provided Diana with the opportunity to outdo daddy's devilment. Though she had a long list of profitable engagements to fill, she and Wilcox were back home in five months. What happened was this: The manager of Brisbane's Theatre Royal fired her because he said her language was offensive to audiences; at the Princess Theatre in Melbourne, though scheduled for three weeks in Noel Coward's "Fallen Angels," Diana was summarily cancelled after three nights. She was also not required to fulfill a month's contract in a Sydney nightclub: after two weeks the management decided it had had it. In spades and spates.

Diana's semantic acrobatics have made her a virtuoso in the field of vocal abuse. Though finishing schools gave her the foundation of a broad "A", she seems to have dropped the "A". When she gives out, she can match daddy's teamster tirades anytime. On the few occasions she visited Barrymore (she was then an actress

Daddy's Girl

who could carry a load with the best of limelight luses), the party usually started off in subdued key, marked only by the tinkle of ice in glasses or the soft thud of champagne corks arrested in flight. Once a few bottles hit the floor, though, the Barrymore temperaments clashed and all hell would break loose.

It is still hotly debated among witnesses to these acrid sessions whether Diana's gutter argot surpassed the picturesque Elizabethan monologues of her rum-pot pop. Backers of Diana's invective still marvel at the way she verbally pinned back the ears of Elaine Barrie, her stepmother, one four-star filled night in New York. Diana, on that occasion, didn't even have to follow through on a threat to sock Elaine's schnozzle.

"My Husband Bores Me!"

Wilcox's departure from Diana's fiery-side followed a colossal carnival of Cupid when her hubby and Diana's off-again, on-again friend McNeill (a month before McNeill was to hang one on Diana) got into a punch-tossing, knife-heaving imbroglio while the lady of the house was out being entertained by a policeman. Diana frankly confessed later that it wouldn't be cricket to give her paramour's name, but she did confide he was a law-enforcing lover boy with a wife, two children and a Buick. "My husband bores me," she explained.

When Diana returned to her apartment, she found Wilcox and McNeill had reduced it to a shambles. She also found a gal whom her husband had been entertaining while she diddled with Dick Tracy. The girl onlooker was rooting for both sides, a situation Diana would have deplored except that it was imperative to stop the fight. "Don't be so Hemingway-feudal boys," she shouted throatily, "And don't kill anyone in the apartment; it would be awfully messy."

Since Diana's voice can on occasion be raised to foghorn stridency, it wasn't long before cops arrived. McNeill went to the hospital, and Diana, as usual, made headlines. But in the true Barrymore tradition, possibly remembering how Daddy frequently took the blame for things (especially when caught sneaking into the boudoirs of married women), she assumed sole responsibility for the fracas. Her husband, she pointed out, was in the right. "The defiled nest and all that sort of thing, you know," Diana said.

Some of the reporters didn't know. But it was a cinch that had Diana's daddy been present, *he'd* have known. Also, probably would have been proud of his little fledgling who, by following Poppa's example, won her wings the hard way: hard liquor and hard knocks!

Confidential

TELLS THE FACTS AND NAMES THE NAMES

march, 1954 *p. 9

OldMagazineArticles.com