



**Bobby
Driscoll's**

The of

Within the cold, grey gloom of the Los Angeles County Jail, a murder suspect yelled across the crowded cell block to a slightly-built young man of 24, reading a letter.

"Hey, Big Shot! Tell us about all those Hollywood dolls you know."

"Yeah," a pickpocket joined in, "how about fixing me up with Marilyn Monroe when you get out?"

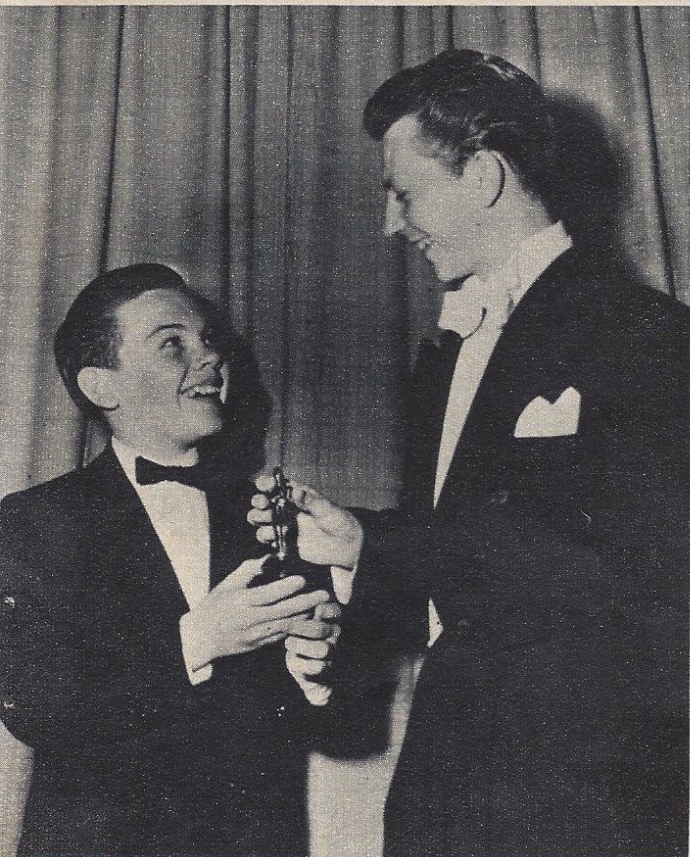
Bobby Driscoll looked up from his letter and drew his prison jacket more tightly around him.

"Sure, fellows . . . anytime," he answered (*Continued on page 58*)

Terrifying Story

Nightmare Life an Ex-Child Star

By **FRED D. BROWN**



Bobby was presented a special miniature Oscar by Donald O'Connor at the Academy Awards ceremonies for 1949.



As a child, Bobby attained stardom in several Walt Disney productions.



He looked like this in U-I's 1945 picture, "Genius in the Family."

**A sensation at eight, Bobby
is the same at 24. But this
time for being in jail**

BOBBY DRISCOLL

(Continued from page 28)

good-naturedly. Beside him lay a stack of letters that had begun arriving two weeks before, when Bobby was arrested and jailed. Some were from fans who remembered him as a famous child movie star who won an Oscar at 12. Others were from viewers who'd watched him on television more recently.

Each letter was different, but the sentiments were the same: words of hope and encouragement . . . now . . . when he needed them most.

Like the letter that morning from Cornel Wilde, which was still in his hand.

"Keep your chin up, Bob," it began. "I have all the faith in the world in you, and so do a lot of other people. There are plenty of parts for you in Hollywood, and when you're ready to work again, I'll do all I can to help you."

For a brief moment a lump swelled up in Bobby's throat. But only for a moment. Then he put the letter with the others and gazed at the sky through the barred window.

"It's good to know I'm not alone anymore," he said softly to himself. . . .

Trouble is not new to Bobby Driscoll.

During the past five years he's been in and out of jail many times, on charges from bean-shooting through various narcotics, battery and burglary arrests.

Now he was back in jail, this time charged with forgery and violation of the State Narcotics Act, and Hollywood was beginning to ask: *What causes a child star to make more headlines than movies as he grows up?*

Ask those who know him what they think of Bobby Driscoll and you'll get as many different answers.

Says a director: "He's a brilliant actor."

A producer: "He's a moody, mixed-up kid. He's changed from the boy we knew."

A friend: "Basically, he's a very sweet guy. It never gets printed how he's cleaned neighbor's yards or helped them move because he knew they were short of money. Only the bad things about Bobby get printed."

An ex-employer: "Driscoll is trouble."

His attorney, Harrison W. Hertzberg, casts perhaps the clearest light on the puzzle of Bobby Driscoll and his repeated escapades with the police.

"Bobby's troubles all stem from his unfortunate choice of companions," Hertzberg believes. "The police officers had certain suspicions with regards to his friends, and when they were arrested they hauled Bobby in, too."

"Even though he was exonerated, the bad publicity from the first couple of arrests resulted in his not being able to find employment, and probably led to subsequent events by association."

Perhaps that is *part* of it. But what's the rest of the story behind a talented young actor, reared in a wholesome home by two intelligent and well-meaning parents, who seemingly goes wild?

As is often the case, Bobby Driscoll became a child star by accident. It was certainly through no choice of his own. Born in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, on March 3, 1937, he was brought to California when he was three by his parents, in search of relief for Mr. Driscoll's sinus condition.

Two years later Bobby was thrust suddenly and quickly into the world of studios, contracts, big business and grown-ups that was to dominate his childhood

and adolescent years and forever set him apart.

It started with a trip to a Pasadena barber shop when he was five. "That kid ought to be in the movies," enthused the barber, and promptly arranged for his actor-son to take Bobby to MGM.

Bobby's mother was sure nothing would come of it, but a week later he won out over 40 applicants for a role opposite Margaret O'Brien in "Lost Angel," and later beat out 500 children to play the youngest brother in "The Sullivans."

At seven, he was making \$300 a week at 20th Century-Fox and attending school on the lot with two other talented juveniles—Roddy MacDowell and Peggy Ann Garner. At eight, Walt Disney put him under contract for the next seven years, which saw Bobby reach his zenith as an actor in such movies as "Song of the South," "How Dear to My Heart," "Treasure Island" and "Peter Pan."

He was awarded an Oscar at 12 by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. He had his teeth straightened to the tune of \$1,400. By the time he was 15 he was earning \$1,750 a week and had a trust fund, ordered set up by the courts, of \$30,000.

By every Hollywood standard, he was a success as an actor. But what of Bobby Driscoll the growing boy?

In the beginning, his mother, a former school teacher, seemed determined that Bobby remain unspoiled. He had a weekly allowance of \$1.75. When his day at the studio ended, Bobby changed into dirty cords and dug foxholes. After dinner he insisted on being read to sleep.

The exact day he first realized he was a star, and thus "different" from other children, Bobby has long since forgotten. But from that day forward a normal life for him became impossible.

"I wish I could say that my childhood was a happy one, but I wouldn't be honest," says Bobby today. "I was lonely most of the time."

"A child actor's childhood is not a normal one. People continually saying 'What a cute little boy!' creates innate conceit. But the adulation is only one part of it. By being a star he's removed from normal people."

"Other kids prove themselves once, but I had to prove myself twice with everyone."

As he entered his teens, Bobby came to hate sitting home to learn lines for his films. He'd much rather have been outside, playing ball or going on hikes. He felt deprived of many things, particularly a healthy relationship with kids his own age.

Try as he would to be one of a group, Bobby always felt he was the outsider.

"I associated with older people almost exclusively," he said later.

Driven by his loneliness, and wanting so much to belong *somewhere*, when he reached 16 Bobby decided upon a bold course of action.

His contract with Walt Disney was ended. He had finished high school. And he was at an awkward age. He had outgrown child parts and was not ready for young juvenile leads.

If he left home for a while, he reasoned, perhaps he would find in another city, with other people, what he felt he had missed in Hollywood. In any case, he wanted to find out for himself. He *must*.

The night he told his parents he wanted to leave home, his mother looked at Bobby with a weary love he had seen before.

Quietly she asked, "Bob, can you tell us why—why you've made this decision?"

There were so many things he wanted to say. But he didn't. Things like, "When

I was little, Mom, making pictures was okay. But there was always another one and still another, and now I'm 16 and I have to know if people want me—for myself."

But how could he make them understand when he knew they would say, "Why didn't you tell us? We thought you were happy. We only wanted your happiness."

That was the way it went in Bobby's mind. But when he faced his parents he couldn't say a word of it. He didn't want to hurt them, didn't want them to think they had failed him. He said only that he wanted to study acting in New York.

"All right," said his mother, who had worked her way through college. "But if you want it that badly you'll have to work for it. We'll give you train fare and enough to live on for a while. After that, you'll have to earn your own way."

During the next three years Bobby made two trips to New York, where he studied with Lee Strasberg at the Actors Studio and with Sandy Meisner and Stella Adler. But when his funds were exhausted and occasional TV roles would not sustain him, he had to return home.

He was no more successful at college. He enrolled at UCLA and again at Stanford, but in each case he dropped out without finishing the first semester. Not only did he fail to find an interest, but the students remembered Bobby's name and, he thinks, looked on him as something from outer space.

"I've never been able to hide this face," he says. Half the students he met either fawned on him or turned their backs on "that snooty movie star."

He had proved nothing.

Perhaps because he lived in the West part of Los Angeles, perhaps because he never really wanted to be a part of Hollywood, Bobby spent few of his leisure hours with other actors. For a time, he went to parties with what he regarded as an *avant-garde* group of talented youngsters that included Dean Stockwell, Millie Perkins and Shirley Knight. At one time, he dated Connie Stevens briefly.

"But I had to amuse myself in other ways," he recalls. "Good talk about writing . . . poetry . . . music. And usually I found it with non-actors."

Unhappy with his own kind, and ill-at-ease with strangers, Bobby rebelled. When he did meet teenagers who talked interestingly of any of the things he liked, he didn't ask himself who they were or where they were headed. He was glad finally to be accepted. On any terms.

"Let's face it," says Bobby today, "I was a wild youngster. But harmless. I never hurt anyone but myself."

The summer he was 19, Bobby ran headlong into the first of his many clashes with the police. A "friend" was arrested on suspicion of having marijuana in his possession—and since Bobby had just left him, he too was arrested and jailed.

"We know Driscoll and the company he keeps," police said at the time.

The charge was later dropped for lack of evidence. But because it had been made, Bobby's draft board promptly classified him as 4-F, unfit for military service.

A month later he was back in jail.

This time he was charged with pelleting a woman with a bean-shooter while driving with his buddies down Wilshire Blvd. It, too, was dismissed . . . but Bobby's bad headlines were beginning to build. Because of them, he found picture work scarce or non-existent, although he worked on television now and then. He had just finished a "Playhouse 90" when one of his rare appearances at a Hollywood party put a detour in his future.

(Please turn the page)

Marilyn Jean Brush was not an actress. She was 19, lived with her parents in Manhattan Beach, and didn't go to school or work. But from the moment he met her, Bobby sensed in this petite, pretty girl with black, curly hair someone who understood him and his loneliness.

Five months later they eloped to Mexico and were married. On March 8, 1957, five days after Bobby's 20th birthday, they were rewed in Los Angeles.

For a time they lived at the beach, and Bobby divided his time between television and working in a haberdashery for \$75 a week. The next three years saw the birth of a son, Daniel, and two daughters, Aaren and Katherine. But there was a separation. Then another. In April, 1960, Bobby and Marilyn parted for the last time.

Today, Bobby has little to say of his marriage except that they were incompatible. "We were both lonely people when we met," he says, "and tried to find refuge in each other. But we were too young for marriage. Neither of us could rely on ourselves. I relied on her for strength and she would rely on me. For a long time the children were the only thing that held us together. We almost destroyed ourselves before we parted."

The fact is, for some time Marilyn has been confined in a hospital with a nervous disorder, and their three youngsters are being cared for by friends. Bobby, of course, foots all the bills.

When Bobby became 21, the burden of supporting his wife and children from sometime television jobs and construction work was eased. The court had allowed his father to invest the \$30,000 held for Bobby in trust at 15, and now Mr. Driscoll turned over to him real estate and bonds that had grown to \$90,000. What's more, after his headlines cooled, Bobby made another movie in 1958—"The Party Crashers."

He hasn't made a film since, but 1959 found him starring in the newspapers again.

Unhappy in his marriage, Bobby was with a group of cronies when police stopped them outside a drive-in. A paper sack containing a hypodermic kit was found nearby and all were charged with possession of narcotics.

Two months later, Bobby was cleared. But the headlines had done their damage. Four months later, his marriage was ended and Bobby was miserable.

"I became a beatnik and a bum," Bobby admits. "I had no residence. My clothes were at my parents' but I didn't live anywhere. My personality had suffered during my marriage, and I was trying to recoup it."

For weeks, Bobby roamed the beaches, taking no interest in anything or anybody. Then one morning he dropped in on a friend at Topanga Beach. Next door he saw a lovely blonde girl with the figure of Venus covered by the skimpiest of bikinis.

"That's my neighbor, Suzanne Stansbury," his friend volunteered.

At the beginning, Bobby and Suzanne took long walks along the beach, swam in the surf and sunned themselves. Then they began having dinner together. In the warm summer days that followed, Bobby learned all about Suzanne.

At 35, she is 11 years Bobby's senior, was born in France and married an American Air Force pilot at the end of the war. Fourteen years ago he brought her and their infant son to America but abandoned them in Los Angeles. Since then, Suzanne had worked in department stores and as a cocktail waitress to support her son.

Bobby and Suzanne were attracted to each other from the start, but almost at once a new set of obstacles appeared to

mar their new-found happiness.

Two weeks after they met, Bobby was washing Suzanne's car at her beach house when two surfers drove up. Seeing the shapely Suzanne sunning herself in her bikini, the two six-footers made enough lewd remarks to send Bobby into a rage. In the struggle that ensued, five-foot-seven Bobby, who hits the scales at 135 pounds, was accused of pummeling one with a rusty prop pistol he took from his car.

More headlines. And this time Bobby pleaded guilty to disturbing the peace, paid a \$52.50 fine and was placed on probation for two years. Then last April he found himself in jail again, this time along with Suzanne.

The charge was more serious. Though both denied it, they were accused of burglarizing an animal shelter of \$450 in checks which were never located. And once again, Bobby was exonerated without ever being tried.

But still more trouble—and headlines—lay just ahead.

On May 1, Bobby was arrested again, this time for forgery, when police said he tried to cash a \$45 check taken in a robbery last January. Bobby claimed a construction boss who employed him gave him the check, and was released on \$2,100 bail. But two hours later, on his way to meet Suzanne, he was jailed again on suspicion of driving under the influence of narcotics.

Bobby admitted taking two pills to relieve his bursitis, but denied that he was drugged.

Bobby was at liberty on bail after spending two-and-a-half weeks in jail, and still faced trial on both counts, when he agreed to meet me at a cafe in Santa Monica. Suzanne, his pretty French companion, was with him at a table when I arrived.

"How does it look, Bob?" I asked, mindful of the 1-to-14-year prison term he faced, should he be found guilty of either of the two latest charges.

Beside him lay a pair of crutches. Bobby had broken his foot the day before while playing ball. "Showing off for his kids," Suzanne added in a charming French accent.

"I'm starting to turn gray at 24, if that's what you mean," Bobby said. "Maybe I can cut out the cute kid bit and make it as an aging adult type."

"Seriously, though," he continued, "I may have to do some time. Not on the forgery or narcotics raps. I think they will be dropped. The only thing I was ever guilty of was disturbing the peace. Now they tell me that by being arrested again, I have violated my probation and I may have to go to jail for that."

Though Bobby has made "between 25 and 30 movies," it is significant that he cannot remember the exact number nor much about them. The mental block is there, protecting him from childhood memories that are unpleasant.

I asked him about his Oscar and if he would pose holding it for a picture for Movieland and TV Time. He eyed me suspiciously.

"I really don't know where it is," he said. "I think it burned up in a trailer I was bringing down from San Francisco. Besides," and he grew more earnest, "I don't imagine the Academy is very proud of me anymore. Anyway, it's something I earned as a child, and I'm no longer a child. It would be like posing with a teddy bear."

"What about the future, Bob?" I asked. "Do you think this recent series of arrests will bar you from acting jobs?"

Bob fingered the wedding band he still wears and looked at Suzanne.

"I used to be very bitter about this business. I still would never let any of my children become a child star, as I was. It's a dirty business. But at the same time, it's a wonderful business. . . .

"After I was jailed the first time, producers wouldn't see me. Derogatory remarks came back and upset me, until I realized that most of them were from people who were washed up anyway.

"But in jail this last time, I had a change of heart. I learned that in spite of everything there are still a lot of big-hearted people, really good human beings, ready to extend their friendship and their prestige to help me.

"Maybe, with their help, I'll get another chance."

Aside from plans to resume his career, Bobby was glowing with a look of happiness for yet another reason.

"For the first time in my life," he said, reaching for Suzanne's hand, "I'm in love. I'm going to marry Suzanne as soon as I can."

Before that can happen, the obstacles Bobby and Suzanne face would discourage anyone not so deeply in love.

Because of the burglary scrape, Bobby is fearful that Suzanne, an alien, might be deported. Neither is legally free to marry, though both have divorce proceedings pending. Suzanne will file on grounds of desertion. In a few weeks, Bobby believes Marilyn will be sufficiently recovered to end their separation with divorce.

"Marilyn and I are very friendly," Bobby added. "She and my parents have stood by me through everything. When the divorce comes, if she is physically able to care for our children they will go with her. If not, Suzanne and I would love to have them."

I had saved the \$64 question—perhaps the real key to the enigma of Bobby Driscoll—to the last.

"What would you say is the reason for all your troubles with the police, Bob?"

Suzanne, who perhaps understands Bobby better than anyone else today, answered the question for him.

"If Bobby likes someone, he doesn't think about them for what they really are. He likes people for what he enjoys in them. Often it's only one facet of them that interests him. For instance, some of the people he enjoys talking about music with may drive expensive cars or throw around more money than he knows they could earn. But Bobby's never asked where it came from, and he didn't care. All he cared about was the one mutual interest they shared."

"If their minds are interesting to me," Bobby nodded in agreement, "I don't care if they sell illegal rattlesnake hides."

That is the pattern of Bobby's past . . . and his troubles. But no more. Suzanne is seeing to it.

"I tell him," she explained, "that if you get in icy water you can't help but get cold. It's the same with choosing the wrong companions."

Bobby smiled at Suzanne.

"The fact is, thanks to her nagging, I don't see *anyone* anymore. I'm a recluse."

Suzanne and Bobby rose to leave. They were due at the home of Bobby's parents for dinner. Mr. Driscoll is a real estate salesman; Bobby's mother works as an assistant librarian.

"They're our best friends," Bobby said. "But then, everybody loves Suzanne. Especially me."

When you piece together a portrait of Bobby Driscoll, based on his own outlook and the opinions of those who know him best, you have a curious picture of a young man still in search of himself.

He is a lonely, complex, intense fellow.

He is gentle and strong. And despite all the criticism he has brought down around his head, he has an acting talent that cannot be denied. If you could know him personally, you would like him for himself. And he'd want you to.

Today, he is facing an exciting new chapter in his turbulent life—with confidence. Confidence born of his first real love.

Perhaps, with Suzanne beside him, Bobby Driscoll may yet find himself.

Before it's too late.

THE END