

## **Kim Darby Has Rich Girl's Shoulders**

### **SHOW THE MAGAZINE OF FILMS AND THE ARTS by Digby Diehl February, 1970**

*That's what Israel Horovitz, who wrote the screenplay for her latest movie, says. You figure it out.*

She's all the girls your mother wanted you to date. An elfin bundle of freckles, dimples, curls and giggles. "Home-grown sexy, the kind of girl I'd like my son to marry," says Glen Campbell. Shirley Temple sugarcoated, straight from the Reader's Digest centerfold, a true grit daughter of the Duke - that's what they call her.

And there she is, looking every bit like the Doris Day of the Counter-Culture, in the middle of make-believe People's Park riot with stuntmen cops flogging long-haired extras and mobs of chanting, shoving kids being hauled into the MGM paddy wagons. Director Stuart Hagmann is yelling, "Cut, cut!" and trying to keep his cameraman from disappearing in the melee while the kids are just getting into the energetic spirit of good, clean, violent protest. Surging over a fence, they begin to overwhelm their artificial antagonists, armed only with rubber billy clubs, and one hirsute enthusiast shouts, "Bring on the real cops!".

The chaos is multiplied by some guy across the street from The Strawberry Statement set who turns the "Marine Hymn" up full blast on his hi-fi. The situation is clearly out-of-hand, and our heroine, the supposed hard-nosed radical leader of Women's Liberation, looks like she's about to scream with terror. "I don't think I'd make a very good revolutionary," she observes, voice still shaking, after calm is restored to the scene. "Is that a real campus protest as rough as that?"

She speaks with the honest naïveté of a girl who bears no more

resemblance to a female revolutionary than Tricia Nixon. "Hey, like, I don't know anything about politics. What can I say? I certainly don't believe in war and I don't like any kind of violence. I don't believe in hunting or killing or anything like that. In fact, I don't know if I believe in football games. Most of my friends aren't really involved. Most of them are older, like 29 or 30, and aren't going to universities. They're just trying very hard to raise their children as well as they can without all the terrible sex hang-ups that we are burdened with - that I was, really, being raised by grandparents who are, golly, old-fashioned."

But when you're one of the hottest youth properties in filmdom, there's no need to play parts which seem like such a far reach, so why bother? "For one thing, I wanted to get away from the whole True Grit thing. That idea of me as a goody-goody. You know, simple, introverted, troubled young woman. I don't know what all that is about. It has nothing to do with Kim Darby. People got the idea that was me because I clammed up when I was working. But that's not really what I am at all."

Hagmann, the 28-year-old director of *The Strawberry Statement*, probably has a better understanding of Kim than almost anyone: "It's like peeling the layers off the skin of an onion - she gives off a lot of vibrations. On our first meeting I told her that there were a couple of real problems with the script in making the character of Linda believable because she's an incurable romantic and also an incurable revolutionary. And she looked me right straight in the face and said, "I don't find that unbelievable at all". I looked into her eyes and I saw exactly that girl on an intimate level. She's a very complex little chick - not an innocent at all."

To begin to understand how such a peculiar variety of levels of maturity collide in an intense 22-year-old actress who swerves from a success pattern of square roles into a part that reflects adolescent rebellion, one has to look back into the steamer trunk where she was born. Metaphorical, of course, but Kim was definitely a show-biz baby; the only offspring of the Dancing Zerbies. On July 8, 1948, Derby Zerby bounced into the world and was promptly traumatized by the divorce of her two years later. She was raised in North Hollywood by her patriarchal grandparents with periodic visits with her father.

By the time she was eight, she was assisting with dance lessons in her father's dancing school and taking singing lessons. "They would tell me, 'Go out there and really belt it out!' Jesus Christ, I was eight years old; what did I know about belting it out? It was not conducive to normalcy. In junior high I was kind of a little clown, you know? Something you'd find under a cabbage leaf. In high school I was the schizophrenic-girl-next-door-almost-pregnant. I mean, that's what I really was.

Worse yet, family disgrace, personal failing, she didn't get parts in the high school plays. Shipped off to the Desilu Workshop in Hollywood, she discovered not only a great deal of satisfaction in acting, but a new identity: Derby Zerby, for no particular reason, became Kim Darby. After her first television appearance on *Mr. Novak*, Kim's future seemed destined.

"Just to be able to work, to be wanted and needed was really important to me. I used to get so wrapped up in a seven-day television show that I would sit down and cry because I didn't want to leave those people." Her personal tensions were also reflected in moving apartments five times in six months. "Well, I was very lonely ... every day. I didn't have a lot of friends in school, and I had two grandparents protecting me, and I was being filled up with dancing lessons and singing lessons ... But that's what my childhood was: just flooded with discipline and hard work. I've been taking a vacation since I was about eighteen."

During her early years, she appeared as an extra in the film *Bye Bye Birdie*. "I really danced hard in *Birdie* and sometimes wouldn't go to lunch just so I'd be around in case they called me for something or needed someone for a special bit of business. In fact, the first day that I had on the picture, I stayed up all night throwing up because I was so nervous. I got on the set and I was so nervous that I threw up again. That's awful, you know?"

In 1967, Kim kissed Jim Stacy on a *Gunsmoke* episode and a few months later they were married. Seven months later, they were divorced, shortly after the birth of Kim's daughter, Heather, who is now eighteen months old. "My baby is the biggest thing that ever happened to me," Kim said with real joy. Then, she turned despondent. "But it's a big responsibility having a child, having a human being. It wasn't so

long ago that I was little, you know, and a child myself. Golly. I'm divorced. I'm twenty-two, divorced and I have an eighteen-month-old baby. That's sad."

Luckily, in addition to her personal troubles, her key break in motion pictures occurred almost simultaneously. "The first thing I remember about *True Grit* was being in a hospital bed, after I had my child, with a pelvic thrombosis, and an agent standing in the doorway, fuzzy to me then, giving me this script. I turned it down about five times, and then for some strange personal reasons that are too painful to discuss, I ended up doing it." Although she clearly established her abilities as an actress in the role of Mattie Ross, making the picture took a large emotional toll: Henry Hathaway, the director, has no talent. He'd shout at me and call me dirty names. Then I'd cry. Duke was, well, Duke."

*True Grit* was followed by the yet-to-be-released *Norwood*, again with Glen Campbell. And then, *Generation*, with David Janssen and Pete Duel.

In *Generation*, Kim succumbed to her leading-man complex again, which led to a romantic encounter with Pete Duel, who played her husband. That kind of theatrical emotional involvement first developed when Kim, at age eighteen, had a 'mad crush' on Arthur Hill while they rehearsed one of those out-of-town deaths, *Porcelain Years*. Hill gently assured her that if he weren't married and she weren't quite so young, she'd be a wonderful girlfriend. In Stockton, where *Statement* is filming, the scene got to look a bit like a George Feydeau farce with lovers under the bed, in the closet and so forth. No sooner had gossip columnists started buzzing about reconciliation possibilities with Jim Stacy due to conspicuous 'nuzzling and hugging' with Kim on the set, but Pete Duel appeared for several weekends. And then her Strawberry co-star, Bruce Davison, whom she calls her 'bookend', seemed to be getting his share of the leading-man charisma.

To all of this, Kim replied: "Yeah. Golly. I do seem to fall for my leading men. Well, I guess I'd marry an actor again. I do want to get married again, only this time I'd like to spend a little time having fun with my husband."

And so, here is Kim Darby sitting in the mayor's conference room in Stockton City Hall, which is supposed to be a university administration

building, and five hundred extras are rioting below. Knowing her better, you can't help feeling a twinge of sadness, knowing what is going to happen, because James Simon Kunen, author of *The Strawberry Statement*, has just arrived with his girlfriend, Laura Jacknick, the real girl radical/revolutionary, upon whom Kim's character is based. Laura is a bright, young Susan Sontag type from CCNY who scoffs at Kunen's TV antics as selling out real political radicalism.

The confrontation is brief, and, after a few pleasantries, Kim is visibly shaken. And as she stands there, looking out the window at the mock riot below, you'd like to grab her by her rich girl's shoulders and tell her that it's all right, that she doesn't have to be girl revolutionary. And that somewhere, in a better world than this, the Dancing Zerbies want her back.