

"Fortunately I haven't had many really sad days. I've been very lucky. But there was one particularly sad day I know I'll never forget.

"That was the day I found out that my parents were divorced. I was five or six at the time and I can remember crying for quite a number of hours.

"I found out from my father. He picked me up in New Jersey and we were in the car driving to New York when he told me.

"Some friends had told me my parents were divorced but I kept saying, 'No, no, it's just in a play they're doing. It's not real.' Even then, at that young age, I knew what divorce meant and I couldn't face it. I immediately said 'No, it can't be. It just can't be.'

"I never thought it was real. But I finally just had to ask. I asked my mother (actress Evelyn Ward) first. I said 'Are you and Daddy divorced?' And she said 'Well, why don't you ask your Daddy.' That should have told me right then. But I still didn't want to believe it. I just wouldn't allow it to dawn on me that it was real.

"So finally I asked my father while we were driving to New York. I sort of said 'By the way Daddy, are you and Mom divorced?' And he said 'Yeah.'

"At that moment my whole world just went to pieces. Right at that moment it was like I died. It was really an incredible moment.

"I understood immediately what it all meant. I remember asking my mother

later 'Is Daddy still my father?' And she said 'Of course.' But I knew how final it was and what it all meant.

"It meant a lot to me then, but I see now, years later, that it was better that way. I'm sure it had an impact on me but I survived. It definitely changed my life quite a bit but I'm happy now and basically today is all that counts.

"Later when my father decided to marry Shirley Jones, I immediately didn't care for her. I had this preconception of the wicked step-mother. I thought she was going to beat me and all that.

"But the first time I saw her—I mean who can hate her? She's just got so much warmth and all. You just can't hate her. She's just the complete opposite of what I expected my step-mother to be like.

"When I met her, she was so young and pretty and nice. It was awful. I really wanted to dislike her, but I found myself really liking her instead.

"And it's all worked out to the best I think. I still love my real mother but I also love Shirley. And of course my father is just the greatest.

"And I see my three half-brothers about once a week and we have good times. They want to be in show business too, like the rest of the family, but I'm glad they're not now because I don't think being around a studio all day with adults is the proper place for kids to grow up. I really don't. It's not even a good place for adults!"

