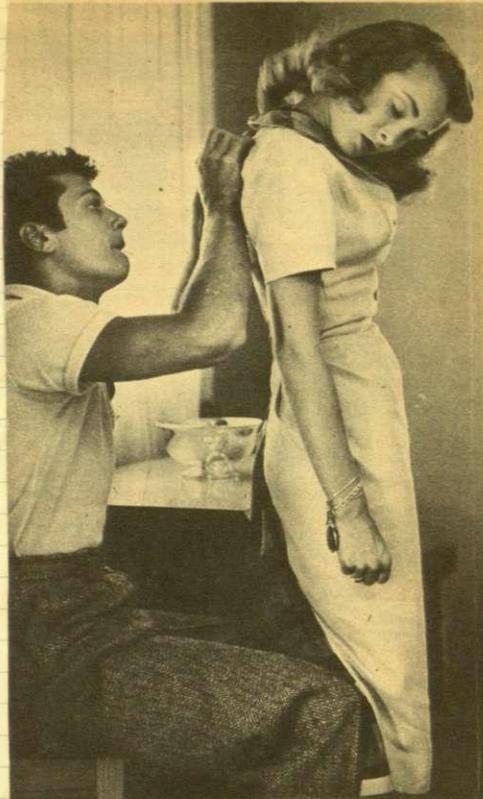


CURTIS, Tony (Bernie Schwartz)
movie actor
* 1925 June 3, Bronx, N.Y.



Mr. and Mrs. Bernie Schwartz are better known to most movie fans as Tony Curtis and Janet Leigh.

Bernie Schwartz grows up

by Betty Betz

Once a tough slum kid, he can hardly believe that today he is glamour boy Tony Curtis



PHOTOGRAPH BY ED ESTA

Sudden success has amazed Tony but hasn't gone to his head. "I'm still the same old schmoo," he tells pals.

Tony Curtis, the teen-agers' newest dream boy, gazes at you seriously out of his deep blue eyes and shakes his head solemnly. "Man, I was a tough kid!" he says. "Why, do you know..." and for five minutes he rambles on about all the things he used to do: Steal fruit from pushcarts, snatch from the five-and-ten, bombard sightseers with ripe tomatoes...

"But I got saved in time, when I was 12," he tells you, his handsome face brightening. "And now look at me..." Here Tony wriggles like a small puppy, gestures with his hands and rocks from side to side. "A \$350 suit, custom-made shirts with my own monogram; these crazy cuff links and Janet Leigh for a wife! Sometimes I ask myself: Is it for real?"

That tall, Adonis-like Tony is riding a pink cloud is the most natural thing in the world. One minute, figuratively, he was a raggedy squirt on Manhattan's lower East Side and the next a smartly groomed motion picture star with Universal Studios staking their blue chips on his future and the nation's females swooning over his classic profile and ingenious manner.

The story of Tony Curtis begins with his real name—Bernard (Bernie) Schwartz. He is the son of an Hungarian-born tailor whose heart was so big he wouldn't press for payment of money owed him and as a consequence, in Tony's youth, was dispossessed 27 times in 10 years.

"We moved so much I can't even remember what part of New York City I was born in," Tony says. "Sometimes we had no furniture and ate off my father's pressing table. I belonged to 'The Black Hand,' a mob of real monsters. We roamed the streets and swiped things... nothing real big... mostly just for the excitement."

Young Bernie used to get his spending money

by fishing up lost change through sidewalk gratings with chewing gum on a stick. Sometimes on cold winter nights he'd take off his shoes and socks, put on a mournful expression and shiver with the hope that "rich folks would ante up for a touch." Once the cops caught him grabbing fruit off a stand.

"You felt so important with all those cops standing around with guns," the star explains today. "Man, it was crazy. But after you're caught once then it's not so exciting any more. That's the time you either go straight or keep on doing wrong. If you've got some love and affection at home you generally go straight. I was lucky. Mom and Pop gave me plenty of love and I prayed all the time."

The real turning point in Bernie's life, he feels, was brought about by a man named Henry Schwartz (no relation), a settlement house worker whom he hasn't been able to locate for the past five years. Schwartz was always after members of "The Black Hand" to join his softball team. When he got no place with that he begged the "monsters" to join his dramatic club, a request which elicited some raucous responses. But Schwartz was a subtle one. He held forth the tempting prospect of staging a mock stickup and the "monsters" promptly went to work writing the script and rehearsing the play. This was Bernie's first acting experience, from which he never recovered.

"Bernie was a good boy," says Sam Negrin, Tony's Seward High buddy, now with a city agency that rehabilitates juvenile delinquents. "If he says he was tough, it's not so. Why, he used to spend hours teaching little crippled kids how to do gymnastics. He was an expert tumbler himself. The kids thought he was wonderful.

"The thing I liked about him was his honesty.

If there was any question about his religion he'd say, 'Sure I'm Jewish,' and you could tell he was proud of it. Even now, with his film success and all, he introduces Janet Leigh as 'my wife, Mrs. Schwartz.'"

Richard Brown, engineer at the Henry Street Settlement, remembers Bernie Schwartz the summer he and Sam Negrin were kitchen boys at the settlement's camp.

"He always had his arm around some little kid," Brown says, "advising him or teaching him something. Mostly all the youngsters went to Bernie with their troubles, even though he was only 15. He knew how to draw them out and comfort them. That winter back in town we put on a play, *We Came From the City*, showing how boys of all racial strains can get along together, and Bernie had a leading part in it. It made a great impression on him."

There were many other plays for Bernie at the Henry Street Settlement House before the war caught up with him. He joined the Navy and, discharged after an accident injury at Guam, he enrolled in a drama school, with his G.I. educational benefits, working at an orange juice stand on the side to earn eating money.

Bernie Schwartz's big break came so quickly he didn't even have time to tell his friends. They didn't even know he was in Hollywood.

"Suddenly Bernie dropped out of sight," Sam Negrin recalls. "After a few months I thought, 'Gee, what's happened to Bernie, he hasn't been around.' Then my wife—I'd married, you see—picked up a movie magazine one day. In it was a picture of Barbara Stanwyck and a bellboy. 'Look, Sam,' my wife said, 'isn't that the Bernie Schwartz you introduced me to a while (Continued on page 19)

BERNIE SCHWARTZ GROWS UP

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back?" I said it sure looked like him. Even then I wasn't sure."

What had happened was that Bernie, playing the lead in *Golden Boy*, put on by the Cherry Lane Players in Greenwich Village, had been spotted by Robert Goldstein, a Universal talent scout. A few days later, in Hollywood with \$4.12 in his pocket, he was signed to a \$100-a-week contract.

That's when Bernie—as Tony Curtis—began riding his pink cloud. He didn't know just why he had been singled out for movie grooming, but it was wonderful. He had a bit part with Yvonne de Carlo and the fan mail poured in. Next he played a hoodlum in *City Across the River* and his mail jumped. Universal threw him into picture after picture and the fan mail kept pace.

A studio publicity man began preparing a Tony Curtis biography in which he was referred to as the son of a European prince who had lost his money and castles. Tony stormed in to the studio chiefs. "You ain't gonna print that on ME!" he shouted, and they didn't. Instead, his biography carefully bowed to the facts.

"I'm doing great!" he wrote Sam,

who by then knew who Tony Curtis really was. "Lots of swell clothes, a smooth convertible, plenty of dates with bee-oo-tiful gals and absolutely no acting talent at all. What a parlay!"

After Tony met Janet Leigh, a rising young starlet, at a Hollywood party, there was only one girl for him. A year ago, in the midst of Tony's personal appearance tour, he and Janet skipped off to Connecticut and married, against studio warning that a wedded Tony Curtis was a dead Tony Curtis, fan-wise.



Apparently the studio was wrong. Tony has finished his 15th picture, *Son of Ali Baba*, and he's still riding high.

Whenever he gets to New York he looks up the old gang. "You changed any?" they ask him. "You gone Hollywood since you hit the jackpot?"

"Naw," says Bernie, who hasn't quite lost his East Side accent, even on film. "I'm the same old schmoo."

"The last time I called him up at his hotel," Sam Negrin says, "Janet answered the phone. 'Is Bernie there, Mrs. Schwartz?' I asked her. 'He's taking a bath, Sam,' she said. 'A bath?' I kidded. 'Every time I call up he's taking a bath.'"

"Janet told him what I'd said and he came running to the phone. 'Sam, it's crazy!' he said, 'but I just like to lie in the hot water and look at these bee-oo-tiful tiles!'"

Tony's moved his mother and father and young brother, Bobby, 11, to a lovely Hollywood home.

Mama Schwartz loves the sunshine. Bobby is living in reflected glory. And Papa Schwartz has a job tailoring for a film costume company.

"You think he looks for me on the screen?" asks Tony. "Oh no . . . he looks for some character in costume. When he finds one, he hedges me and whispers excitedly: 'That one on the left, son . . . I made that!'"

