

OBITUARY

Dorothy de Borba dies at 85; child actress in 'Our Gang' comedies

She played Dorothy on the popular program in the early 1930s, appearing in 24 episodes. She was known for her light-brown hair that was typically done up in ringlet curls topped with a big bow.



Dorothy de Borba, left, in a scene with Matthew "Stymie" Beard, Bobby "Wheezer" Hutchins and Shirley Jean "Measure" Rickert in "Our Gang." (Associated Press / June 5, 2010)

By Dennis McLellan, Los Angeles Times

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Dorothy de Borba, a former child actress who played Dorothy in the "Our Gang" comedies in the early 1930s, has died. She was 85.

De Borba, whose married name was Haberreiter, died of emphysema Wednesday at a hospital in Walnut Creek, Calif., said her daughter, Janet Moorehead.

The daughter of a singer-dancer-actress and a drummer for the Paul Whiteman band, De Borba was 5 years old when she began appearing in the popular "Our Gang" series of comedy shorts produced at the Hal Roach Studios in Culver City.

She reportedly got the job after impressing Roach, who launched "Our Gang" in 1922, with her

ability to cry on cue.

Beginning with "Pups Is Pups" in 1930 and ending with "Mush and Milk" in 1933, De Borba appeared in 24 "Our Gang" comedies alongside the gang's more famous stars, including Jackie Cooper, George "Spanky" McFarland, Matthew "Stymie" Beard and Bobby "Wheezer" Hutchins.

Known for her light-brown hair that was typically done up in ringlet curls topped with a big bow, she was described in Leonard Maltin and Richard Bann's 1977 book "Our Gang: The Life and Times of the Little Rascals" as a "little bundle of curls, pep, and mischief."

At the Roach Studios, she was quickly dubbed "Echo," although the name was never used on-screen.

She earned the nickname after being cast as Norman "Chubby" Chaney's sister in three of her earliest "Our Gang" shorts. As Chubby's sister, she had what Maltin and Bann described as a "smart-alecky compulsion to repeat as best she could whatever he'd say."

De Borba had fond memories of working on the Roach lot, which also was the home of Laurel and Hardy, who occasionally would show up on the "Our Gang" sets to watch the young actors perform.

"It was like we had the biggest playhouse in the world," she told the St. Petersburg Times in 1993. "We were always playing when we weren't working or going to school. 'Uncle' Bob McGowan [the director] had a real terrific way with children."

She enjoyed the close-knit atmosphere of the studio, she told The Times during a celebration in Culver City in honor of Roach's 100th birthday in 1992.

She said Roach, who died later that year, held family-style Christmas parties and one of the classrooms for the young actors was above his office.

"I always thought a lot of [Roach] and I still do," she said. "He was big and burly but he didn't growl. And he never talked down to us as little kids."

De Borba, who was born March 28, 1925, in Los Angeles, ended her acting career not long after leaving "Our Gang."

After graduating from Van Nuys High School, she held a number of jobs at Republic Pictures, including working as a secretary.

A brief first marriage ended when her husband died. A second marriage ended in divorce in 1959, and she later worked as a senior clerk in the Graduate School of Journalism at UC Berkeley.

Beginning in 1980, she was a regular guest at chapter meetings and conventions of the Sons of the Desert, the international Laurel and Hardy appreciation organization.

"People still like 'Our Gang' because we did all the things that kids can still see themselves doing," she told an audience gathered in 1997 for "An Evening With Our Gang and Laurel & Hardy" sponsored by the Chicago chapter of the Sons of the Desert.

"The children," she said, "are still laughing."

In addition to her daughter Janet, she is survived by her son, Richard Haberreiter.

No services will be held.

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