

# FLY

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SATURDAY, MAY 14, 1994

## Kids in Show Biz

The fun, not the profit, is what's important



BRIAN CRITES/The Sun

Kaylee Randall (center) recites a line as part of an audition for a Worlds of Fun commercial at Metro Productions. Stand-ins are Kaylee's mother, Denise, and Metro videographer Keith Button

Think your  
child has a  
future in front  
of the  
cameras?  
Here's how to  
get started.  
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By BRIAN McTAVISH  
Arts & Entertainment Writer

**K**aylee Randall has great balance. Whether walking on stilts in the front yard of her home in Blue Springs or negotiating her path in the field of television commercials, the 8-year-old actress makes it look so easy. "I meet new people and I make new friends," she said of her career. "I probably won't do it all my life, but it's fun."

And fun, not fame or fortune, experts say, is the only sensible reason for children to work in the highly competitive arenas of TV, movies and commercials.

"Life for a kid shouldn't be about whether they book a commercial or not," said Peter Sklar, a veteran New York talent scout whose

young discoveries include Ricky Schroder ("The Champ") and former Leawood actress Ashlee Levitch (TV's "I'll Fly Away").

"Childhood is about many more important things," Sklar said. "Parents have to be caring enough, objective enough and smart enough to separate what they need from what their kids need — and kids do not need to be in show business. If they like it, it can be very healthy. If they don't like it, it's stupid."

Denise and Larry Randall, Kaylee's parents, have tried to be smart with their daughter's career. With their careful guidance, and a little luck, it has been a storybook scenario for a young person breaking into the business on a local level.

Kaylee's first audition netted two jobs in an industry in which initial acceptance is rare. She has appeared in TV commercials for several local and regional businesses, including the Jones Store Co. and Capitol Federal Savings & Loan. Last month she won a part in a TV spot for Worlds of Fun and Oceans

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## KIDS

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of Fun.

But it would all end tomorrow if Kaylee gave the word to her parents, who are public school teachers in Blue Springs.

"We have said from the first, 'Kaylee, the moment you don't like this anymore, let us know, and we're done,'" Larry Randall said.

The Randalls provide opportunities rather than marching orders for their daughter, they said.

"I'm not going to push her down any set road," Denise Randall said.

Both parents are thankful for Kaylee's strong personality and open communication with them.

"She knows who she is," her father said. "So we trust her if she's not comfortable."

Being at ease in front of the lens has never been a problem for Kaylee, who began spontaneously posing for family snapshots as early as age 2.

Kaylee says matter-of-factly that she likes "being the center of attention."

Yet there was no thought of turning pro until two years ago, when Kaylee had professional studio photographs taken for the family album. Instant camaraderie between the photographer and Kaylee took her parents by surprise. So did the three hours the enthusiastic photographer spent shooting his subject.

"He kept telling her to tilt her head this way or turn that way," Denise said. "And she was just loving it. I thought, 'Well, maybe she would be interested in this.'"

A friend whose son had appeared in the TV series "Rescue 911" recommended showing Kaylee's photos to a union talent agency.

The Randalls approached an agency and were asked to supply duplicate black-and-white head shots of Kaylee that could be sent with her to auditions. Those photos were shot for little expense at home, although they could have been professionally shot for a typical fee of \$150.

Although Kaylee's parents admitted to being inexperienced in the beginning, by employing common sense they ended up doing things

## Talent agencies are a place to start

By The Star's Staff

Here is a list of Kansas City area union talent agencies franchised by the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists or the Screen Actors Guild:

■ **The Agency/Model & Talent**, 3025 Merriam Lane, Kansas City, Kan.; 362-8382.

■ **Backstage Workshop**, 8025 Ward Parkway Plaza; 363-8088.

■ **Hoffman International**, 10540 Marty Ave., Overland Park; 642-1060.

■ **Jackson Artists**, 7251 Lowell Drive, Shawnee Mission; 384-6688.

■ **Model Talent Charm (MTC)**, 4043 Broadway; 531-3223.

■ **Model & Talent Management (MTM)**, 330 W. 47th St., Suite 220; 561-9967.

■ **Talent Plus**, 4049 Pennsylvania Ave.; 561-9040.

right. What they didn't do was fall prey to any number of scams, including being asked to spend exorbitant amounts of money for photographs or acting classes that usually lead to nowhere but bad feelings.

"As soon as somebody says, 'You need to spend X amount on pictures,' then that person is in the business of selling pictures, not getting auditions," Sklar said. "(Some) agencies have to make their living by selling portfolios and classes and all this nonsense."

If anyone offers to put your child in a handsomely bound photo volume that will help get auditions from coast to coast, don't take the bait, said Maria Lease, a 20-year Hollywood veteran and producer of a video, "How to Get Your Child Into Television, Movies and Commercials" (\$24.95; to order: 800-300-6106).

"They promise that they will distribute it to hundreds of producers and casting directors throughout

the business," Lease said of such book pitches. "And, indeed, they do. But the problem is everyone knows that the book is a complete rip-off."

"To be in Wyoming and have your name in a book is just not practical. When a casting director wants to see somebody, they want to see them tomorrow."

That doesn't mean children with serious acting ambitions have to move to Los Angeles or New York — at least not right away.

"Anytime the child is working and doing really well at it would be the time to hit a larger market," Lease said. "The truth is that, ultimately, if your kid is going to be successful at it, you have to live in New York or Los Angeles."

Another expert piece of advice to parents: Don't coach your child before an audition. That's what a personal manager is for, although a child actor should be somewhat established before their parents consider that expense. (For the record: A manager's standard commission is 15 percent of what the actor is paid for a job. That's on top of a union talent agent's commission of 10 percent. Non-union agents may charge more.)

"A manager will get the script and run lines with them and really prepare the child for the part," Lease said. "It's really best that the parent doesn't, because the parent is not an objective professional. And sometimes the parent will screw the kid up."

Fortunately, Kaylee has learned that rejection is part of show business. Sure, she would have liked to have won that part in a TV movie alongside Patty Duke Astin or ended up in that sitcom pilot with Cybill Shepherd.

But when she doesn't get picked at an audition, it simply may be that her hair color, age or height didn't fit the part. Even at her tender age, she knows it's not because something was wrong with her as a person.

"There will be a tomorrow," Kaylee said. "I'm not going to be killed because I didn't get picked. It's just I wasn't right."

"But you can't give up on anything," she advises her peers starting out. "Once you give up, they'll probably want you for something."

## Child's best interest should be guiding force

Practical advice by industry pros on how to get your child into TV, movies and commercials:

■ Be certain that it is your child, and not you, who wants to get involved in show business and is capable of handling rejection.

■ Select a union talent agency franchised by the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists or the Screen Actors Guild. Ask agencies for a reference list of established clients the same age as your child. Do background checks with the Better Business Bureau and consumer organizations.

■ Stay away from any agent or manager who wants any money up front for any reason.

■ A personal manager can be a key asset to your child's developing career. Early on, however, a manager should not be necessary.

■ Beware of offers to place a photograph of your child in "audition" books sent to producers, casting

directors and talent agents across the United States. Such books rarely merit their fee, which can run several thousand dollars. At first a home snapshot or school photo should be enough to attract interest.

■ A child living in the Midwest does not have to immediately move to Los Angeles or New York to begin her or his career.

■ A child's personality and willingness to open up are more important than his or her physical characteristics.

■ A child's career should be kept in perspective. It should not be the focus of his or her life.

■ Avoid stressful coaching of a child before an audition.

■ Don't ignore your instincts. If something doesn't feel right, it probably isn't.

— Brian McTavish