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Donita Lucas Shields

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America's ideal young woman

Jane Jayroe: Pride of Western Oklahoma

By Donita Lucas Shields

When Miss Jane Jayroe received the ultimate honor for young ladies in Atlantic City on September 10, 1966, few people outside Western Oklahoma had ever heard of her or of Laverne, her hometown. Yet, everyone across the nation loved her immediately when she became the symbol of the best in the American way of life.

Today, twenty years later, Jane Jayroe has become a part of almost every household in Oklahoma as KTVY News 4 anchor/reporter with Jerry Adams and Linda Cavanaugh and as host of "Oklahoma's Own" and the "Jane Jayroe Special."

The moment that the Miss America crown was bestowed upon Jane, she became a "first" in more ways than one. She was the first Miss America from Western Oklahoma. The Miss America Pageant of 1966 was the first to be televised nationwide on color TV. And Jane Jayroe was the first Miss America to visit a combat zone during wartime.

Shortly after her coronation, Jane mentioned that more than anything else, she wished to visit with the soldiers in Viet Nam. Her wish came true in August, 1967, when she and five other beauties—Miss Maine (1964), Miss South Carolina (1967), Miss Alabama (1966), Miss Connecticut (1966), and Miss Wisconsin (1965)—entertained the troops with "What's Happening Back Home."

With humility, Jane greeted the battleworn soldiers with "No one knows what it means to me to meet the real VIPs of Viet Nam." She sang "Cabaret" and other popular songs to them in the blazing sun and monsoon rains. Dressed in drab battle gear, her natural beauty, talent, and kindness shone through to brighten the Viet Nam scene.

While Miss America, Jane—as goodwill ambassador—traveled more than 200,000 miles throughout the U.S. and foreign countries in her portrayal of the ideal American girl. She belonged to America and became a celebrity con-

trolled by the Miss America Corporation. For her travels she was provided with a Jet Commander, an Oklahoma-made twin jet private airliner. For shorter distances between airports and for her parade appearances, she was furnished with ten white Oldsmobile convertibles. The corporation allowed her to work four hours a day with a guaranteed income of \$100,000. This amount included a \$1,000 salary for each appearance plus her clothing and a scholarship to continue her education after completing her reign.

Jane's personal characteristics of honesty, cheerfulness, determination, and compassion served her well as she climbed to the top. No doubt it was her belief in honesty to herself and to others, coupled with her humility, that opened the doors to her many successes.

At age 16, she won her first pageant when she was a senior in Laverne High School. As Miss Laverne, she entered the Northwestern Oklahoma State University Pageant in Alva to become Miss Cinderella. Three months after enrolling as a freshman at Oklahoma City University, she stepped into the throne of Miss All-College Queen. The next crowns were given to her as Miss Oklahoma City and Miss Oklahoma in 1966. When she moved on to the greatest pageant of all where the judges selected her as Miss America, she commented that she hadn't even become used to being Miss Oklahoma.

Those who observed Jane throughout the various pageants recognized that she had the naturalness, kindness, beauty, and poise and charm to possibly be a winner. As she fielded questions and performed as a professional trouper, she always remained the unspoiled, unassuming young lady, never realizing that she had the potential of becoming the best in the nation.

At one time Jane actually said that a small-town girl from Western Oklahoma would never have a chance—that

the Miss America crown was attainable only by the sophisticates of the big cities. No one was more surprised than she when she received the coveted Miss America crown and scepter. In fact, after having won the Atlantic City talent contest with her rendition of singing and conducting the pageant orchestra, she could never have been happier. Being selected as Miss America 1967 was to her the icing on the cake.

Jane Jayroe vowed that becoming Miss America wouldn't change a thing. She would always remain a small-town girl. She loved small country towns and always would. Today, twenty years later, Jane still returns nearly every vacation and holiday to Laverne, where her parents have retired.

Jane Anne Jayroe was born in Clinton on October 30, 1946. At that time her parents, Pete and Helene Jayroe (Mr. and Mrs. E. G.), and her 4½-year-old sister, Judy, lived at Hammon where Mr. Jayroe taught school. When "Janie" was three, the family moved to Sentinel, her father's boyhood home and the home of her pioneering grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. W. C. Jayroe.

The Pete Jayroes lived in Sentinel for eleven years. According to her parents, Jane began singing at the local Methodist church at age three. When she started to school, Mrs. Blanche Thomas, a 45-year veteran first-grade teacher who had also taught Pete Jayroe in 1926, recognized that Jane was a very special little girl that loved to sing, a child that stood out as a leader.

Singing was natural for Jane. Her mother, an elementary classroom and music teacher, acquainted her with a love for and the basics of music. When she entered the sixth grade in Sentinel, her classroom and music teacher, Mrs. Ferne Howard, noted Jane's exceptional talents and introduced her to the rudiments of conducting. Mrs. Howard continued her musical training for three years until the Jayroes left Sentinel in 1960. She was assisted by Mrs.

Lawton Cothran, who gave Jane piano lessons. She always rated high in music contests, receiving top scores at state levels when she was in junior high school.

Mrs. Howard, now deceased, remembered that Jane had the ability to overcome anything in her way without being unkind to others. When the Town of Sentinel honored Jane as Miss Oklahoma 1966, Mrs. Howard was quick to notice that she was especially kind to autograph seekers and to all children.

After moving to Laverne where her father became assistant principal and head basketball coach, Jane continued her musical education with Mel Kenney of Beaver. In addition to her practice sessions and the 50-mile weekly drives for private lessons, Jane also became a first-string forward on Laverne's high school basketball team. When she was a senior, the team won second place in the state playoffs. Her coach, Walter Hoffman, described Jane as a hard worker who was a great "hustler" because of her personal ideals and determination.

Upon entering Oklahoma City University, Jane continued playing basketball on the Alpha Chi Omega team and also conducted her sorority's top-notch musical production at OCU's traditional May Sing in the spring of 1966. Her music teachers--Mrs. Inez Silberg (voice), Nancy Appgar (piano), and Dr. Ray Luke (conducting)--believed that she was well prepared to enter the Miss Oklahoma City Pageant in the summer of 1966. She did, with a vocal medley from FUNNY GIRL, "Sadie, Sadie, Musical Lady" and "Who Are You Now?" She won and went on to the top honor in the Miss Oklahoma Pageant in Tulsa.

Jane's Oklahoma sponsors decided to change her repertoire for the Miss America Pageant. Kenneth F. Harris, an executive in the production department of WKY-TV, who also arranged her FUNNY GIRL medley, supplied her with "One, Two, Three." With this, she won the talent contest in Atlantic City. Mr. Harris had never met Jane at that time but was far prouder of her than of his personal efforts.

After completing her successful year as Miss America, during which she emceed over 130 state and local pageants throughout the United States, Miss Jayroe returned to Oklahoma City University to complete her Bachelor of Arts degree in Vocal Music. She

continued her education at Tulsa University where she earned a Master of Arts in Humanities. While in Tulsa, she met and married a Tulsa attorney. They had one son, Tyler Jayroe Petersen, who is now nine years old.

It must be assumed that Jane Jayroe's whirlwind schedule as Miss America served as a mere prelude to her many notable and worthwhile endeavors. In addition to her TV anchor/reporter responsibilities in Dallas, Fort Worth, and Oklahoma City, she is an effective public speaker and entertainer. She has given numerous



Jane Jayroe — 1967

lectures on charm and self-improvement to teenagers. She presided at the dedication of the Lloyd Noble Center in Norman. She was toastmistress at a Cowboy Hall of Fame Banquet in Oklahoma City, and she served as co-host with Art Linkletter when they aired their 13-part series special, "The Other School System," on eighty-four national channels.

As an actress, she has appeared in numerous leading roles in theater productions in Dallas and Oklahoma City. She starred with Yvonne DeCarlo in THE SOUND OF MUSIC and held other starring roles in OKLAHOMA, FIORELLA, and THE BOY FRIEND.

Jane Jayroe spent four years in Dallas and Fort Worth before returning to Oklahoma City. While in Texas, she was news anchor at KXAS-TV. She was the first woman to receive the "Woman of the Year" award when she was recognized as the Outstanding Television News Personality by the American Women in Radio and Television. THE DALLAS TIMES cited Jane as one of the three best-known women in the area, and an Oklahoma City newspaper listed her as one of the "great" personalities in Oklahoma.

THE DALLAS MORNING NEWS

featured her in a Sunday publication, which included a full cover-page color portrait and 1½ pages of interview. Jane was also one of six women TV anchors featured in PARADE, a magazine insert in 123 national Sunday newspapers.

Jane's college sorority awarded her the Alpha Chi Omega Achievement Award, and in 1982 she received the Muscular Dystrophy Broadcast Journalism Award for her efforts and achievements. She has worked as host and producer for educational programs on OETA and as a specialist in arts in education and in the handicapped program for the Oklahoma Department of Education.

Her interests in health, education, and welfare are evident in the many humanitarian organizations with which she is now involved. She is a member of the advisory boards of Oklahoma County Child Welfare, the Oklahoma Blood Institute, the Oklahoma Child and Family Institute, the Women's Professional Studies Program at the University of Oklahoma, and is chairman of the Breast Care Diagnostics.

She is also a member of Leadership Oklahoma City, the Steering Committee of Volunteer Connection, past honorary chairman of the membership drive for YWCA, and honorary chairman of the Conference on Teen Pregnancy. She is an active member of the Church of the Servant, where she is Sunday School teacher for five-to-seven-year-old children, and the Skyline Urban Ministry to the Inner City Christian programs. She sings in the church choir and is a member of the Women's Connection program committee. She is a past member of the Board of Ministries.

For the past two decades, Jane Jayroe has continued to live by the traditional Miss America concepts. She once commented, "The nicest thing about winning is being able to share with other people." Today she continues to share her capacity for hard work, her beauty, her talents, and her love for humanity.

She still remains the same unassuming person that she was as a child, a person who strives for perfection in her attempts to eliminate injustice, prejudice, and poverty--a striving for goodness and the best attainable in the American way of life. Without any doubt, Jane Jayroe, once the unknown ideal American girl from Western Oklahoma, has now become the ideal American woman.