Charlie Chaplin

A Life From Beginning to End

CHARLIE CHAPLIN

A Life From Beginning to End

Table of Contents

Introduction
Troubled Early Life
From the Poorhouse to the Stage
Coming to America
On Easy Street
War and Success
Unhappily Married
Back in Britain
The Silent Film Hush Money
He Doesn’t Talkie
Socialist Leanings
Exile from the United States
Conclusion
Your Free eBooks!

Introduction

Charlie Chaplin is most famously known for his “tramp” character—the homeless hobo that can be seen hopping from trains and lining up in the soup kitchens of the Great Depression. At a time when the whole world was struggling from economic meltdown, Charlie Chaplin made “destitute” a term of endearment.

We may laugh when we see Charlie Chaplin so broke that he has to boil his shoes and eat them, but during the worst parts of the economic collapse of the 1920s and 1930s, some people had to do just that. So, at the time, even though many would laugh at the crazy tramp’s antics, they could also relate and identify with them.

And the fact that Charlie Chaplin’s tramp character could be completely broke with his pockets turned out, sitting in a gutter with the rain pouring down, yet still be happy, gave people quite a bit of encouragement. People thought that if the homeless, wandering tramp portrayed in Chaplin’s films could get through such rough times and be alright, maybe they could too.

As goofy as some of Chaplin’s slapstick comedic moments are in his films, it was the way he just kept trundling along, even in the face of great adversity, that empowered so many. It was this tantalizing glimpse of hope, more than anything else, that kept them coming back for more.

Chapter One

Troubled Early Life

“A man’s true character comes out when he’s drunk.”

—Charlie Chaplin

Charlie Chaplin was born in one of the poorer sections of South London to his father Charles Chaplin Sr. and his mother Hannah Chaplin on April 16, 1889. His arrival in this world was preceded by his brother Sydney four years earlier. Both of the Chaplin parents were entertainers. His father a singer and his mother an actress and dancer in the popular British music halls of the time.

Chaplin’s mother and father lived a turbulent existence in the early years of Chaplin’s life, jumping from club to club, and stage to stage, each pursuing their mutual interests in entertainment. As a result of their other myriad interests pulling them in different directions, the husband and wife were completely estranged from each other by the time Charlie was a toddler.

Further cementing this estrangement was the fact that his mother gave birth to another man’s son in 1892. The child’s father was Leo Dryden, a familiar face in both Charlie Sr. and Hannah’s circle of friends and he was a fellow fixture at the music halls where they were both still struggling to get their big break.

Illustrating just how unstable Hannah was as a mother, her former lover Leo insisted on taking full custody of their child by the time he reached six months of age. After this, Charlie Chaplin wouldn’t see his half-brother for 30 years. Charlie meanwhile was left quite literally to fend for himself, and at the age of seven, he was sent to the Lambeth Workhouse to help pay off some of his family’s debts.

Later that year Chaplin’s mother finally succumbed to the financial and psychological strain that she was under and had a nervous breakdown.

Custody of her children was subsequently taken away from her, and the remaining Chaplin brothers, Sydney and Charlie, became wards of the state and were housed in the Central London District School for Paupers.

Charlie and his brother spent about a year and a half in this institution before his mother regained custody. But this was just another brief reprieve, and as the tension of his troubled mother began to surface again, Chaplin and Sydney were relocated once more, this time to the local Norwood School. This facility was a kind of poor house for impoverished children who couldn't be looked after by their parents.

To be sure, these early incidents of severe deprivation would leave their mark on Charlie Chaplin, and he would later develop his famed character of the "tramp" upon many of his experiences in these British houses for the poor.

After his mother's admission into London's Cane Hill Sanatorium in 1898, the children were temporarily placed under the custody of their father. Conditions under the auspices of Charlie's father were not much better. By then their dad was a raging alcoholic, and by all accounts, the man was so mentally distant from his kids that even though they were under the same roof, he was a stranger to them. Things would eventually become so unbearable that Britain's turn of the century version of Child Protective Services—the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children—came to pay the Chaplin residence a visit.

The group investigated the living conditions and predictably deemed it not conducive for the children and so put Charlie and his brother Sydney on the move once again. Just two years afterward, Charlie's father would pass away from severe cirrhosis of his liver, brought on by excessive alcohol consumption. Charlie and his brother were for all intents and purposes now completely on their own.

Chapter Two

From the Poorhouse to the Stage

"To truly laugh, you must be able to take your pain, and play with it."

—Charlie Chaplin

In the midst of his shuffling around from poorhouses and other state run institutions, Charlie still found the time to follow in his parents' footsteps as a performer. And at the age of nine, following up on some of his father's old connections at the music halls, Chaplin was recruited as a member of a clog dancing troupe. Clog dancing may seem rather archaic to us today, but this forerunner to tap dancing was quite popular in Britain at the time, and Chaplin was determined to make his mark.

Knowing that the only other alternative was the poor house, he practiced his routines day and night until he became a crowd favorite. Thanks to his commitment and hard work in the troupe, by the age of 13 Chaplin was able to make enough money to support his family. It's hard for us to fathom such a state of affairs today, but Charlie Chaplin, the 13-year-old, became the head of his family.

Chaplin made enough money to put his family in a small flat, and besides paying the bills, he also became the guardian of his mother, taking her to and from appointments and admitting her to the psych ward when needed. Along with these responsibilities, the young Charlie continued to advance his career and by the time he was 14 he signed up with a professional theater group on the West End of London.

Shortly after that, Chaplin was recruited to his first notable role in a rather whimsical production called *Jim, a Romance of Cockayne*. He played the part of a local newspaper boy. Even though the role was small, it turned out to be a big break for Charlie Chaplin. The overall production of the play tanked, but Chaplin was applauded for his comedic abilities on the stage. A local

paper of the day called the *Topical Times*, while it had immense criticism for the rest of the cast, had nothing but praise for young Charlie Chaplin. A page out of the editorial stated that he was the "one redeeming feature" of the whole production, and a "bright and vigorous child actor." Noting the accolades the youth had received, Harry Arthur Saintsbury, the playwright behind the play, decided to include Chaplin in his next stage version of Sherlock Holmes in the role of "Billy the pageboy."

From here, the young aspiring actor Charlie Chaplin was granted the status of a regular and would play a part in several recurring roles over the next few years. Chaplin would continue to reprise his role in Sherlock Holmes until 1906 when he finally decided to leave the production behind. Upon leaving the cast of Sherlock Holmes, Chaplin was now 16 going on 17 years old, and he was ready to see the world.

So, what do young men do when they wish to see the world? They join the circus of course! Well, in truth the circus that Chaplin joined was not of your Ringling Brothers variety, it was a group of burlesque, comedic artists known as Casey's Circus. This group went on tour for the rest of the year and by the summer of 1907, Chaplin, now 18, was already a tried and tested veteran in the business.

Thinking as much, he sought to embark on a solo career, but away from the drilled routines he had established with his other cast members this attempt was largely a flop. Still, thanks to his brother Sydney, Chaplin had an immediate backup plan. While Charlie was touring with Casey's Circus, Sydney was working for the legendary theatrical organizer Fred Karno. Karno at that time was on the cutting edge of British comedy, and with his infamous "custard pie in the face" sketches, he is largely credited as the originator of slapstick comedy and a crucial forerunner of the silent films in which Charlie Chaplin would later become famous.

Lobbying hard for his brother Charlie, Sydney managed to convince Karno to give the young aspiring actor a chance. At first, Karno was a bit incredulous, and despite Chaplin's previous success as a child actor, Karo now perceived the 18-year-old as being a bit of a misfit with his cast. In his own words, he considered him to be a bit too much of a "pale, puny, sullen-looking youngster" and Karno believed that Chaplin "looked much too shy to do any good in the theater." Charlie Chaplin was determined to prove him wrong, and during his very first show with Karno's theatrical company, he was able to wow the crowd enough to convince Karno to sign a deal with

Chaplin for the foreseeable future.

Chaplin began his partnership with Karno at a slow pace, at first reprising minor roles until he gradually worked his way up to a starring role in the 1910 production of *Jimmy the Fearless*. And by all accounts his performance was satisfactory. Getting over any doubt he initially had in his new protégé, Karno then opened the door to the young actor for even more success. Success beyond Charlie Chaplin’s wildest dreams; in a land called America.

Chapter Three

Coming to America

“I am for people. I can't help it.”

—Charlie Chaplin

In the fall of 1910, when Charlie Chaplin found himself washing up on the shores of America, Vaudeville was at the apex of its glory. Singers, dancers, actors, and comedians joined forces to lay siege to local communities with their zany antics. Charlie Chaplin first enjoined them with some antics of his own on October 3, at the Colonial Theatre in New York.

Almost immediately Chaplin received rave reviews, and he was praised for the popular role he played as a comedic drunk referred to as the “Inebriate Swell.” Chaplin loved playing the role of a drunkard because it freed him to create the most ridiculous slapstick humor he could imagine. Since people expected him to have no more rationale than someone who had downed a bottle of whiskey and eight beers, he could throw all pretense out the window and experiment with abandon.

This comic experimentation went on for nearly two years, as Chaplin became a regular fixture on the Vaudeville circuit. Chaplin was having such a good go of it that when the touring troupe finally called it quits and decided to head back to England in June 1912, Charlie was immediately beset with a deep and devastating depression. He couldn’t help but fear that everything he had accomplished in America would be lost upon his return to the “depressing commonplaceness” of Britain.

Fortunately, Chaplin didn’t have to wait for long, and his journey home was just a short reprieve, with the whole troupe returning to the United States in October 1912. It was on the second leg of his American tour that Chaplin would get introduced to the movie business when he was invited to register with the New York Motion Picture Company.

From here he was directed to Keystone Picture Studios, one of the first American motion picture companies. Chaplin had apparently arrived just in time because one of the main actors for the company had just left. He had walked out just in time for Charlie Chaplin to walk in. Chaplin immediately worked out a contract with Keystone, a deal that gained him a steady $150 a week, which would amount to a little over $3500 today. Not a bad pay check at all, during those early days; this weekly check ensured that Chaplin would never have to struggle again. Although he played the penniless tramp, he now had a few pretty pennies of his own in his pockets.

Leaving New York, Chaplin then headed straight to the West Coast to work out of Keystone's main studio in Los Angeles, California, arriving in December 1913. His immediate overseer in this venture was the acclaimed director Mack Sennett. Sennett—much like Karno before him—was rather skeptical as to how useful Charlie Chaplin would be. At first glance, he felt that Chaplin looked too young and otherwise uncharacteristic of a leading man. Charlie at this point was 24 years old, but he still didn't look quite old enough for many of the roles he wanted to play.

This was a problem that Charlie faced early on in his career, and he explains this as the reason why he would make efforts to put a little bit of age on his otherwise baby-faced features. In fact, much later in his career, he would admit that the mustache was initially a tool he used to look older. Nevertheless, despite the director's misgivings, Charlie was cast into a leading role in the film *Making a Living* in 1914.

Chaplin later claimed a strong distaste for his debut, even though he received much praise for his efforts. It was actually in his second film, *Kid Auto Races at Venice*, that Chaplin took on the full garb with which he would become so famous. Just before filming, Chaplin recalls he "wanted everything to be a contradiction; the pants baggy, the coat tight, the hat small and the shoes large."

Chaplin had finally found his shtick; he wanted to be a drunken clown. This role would serve him well in the film, but it did not serve immediately to push him over the top. Wishing to take matters into his own hands, Chaplin positioned himself to begin directing his films. In the end, Chaplin could only get Sennett to agree to the bargain by extending his insurance policy in the advent of failure. The insurance came in the form of Chaplin promising to pay $1500 if the film flopped.

The film Chaplin ended up directing in May 1914 was called *Caught in*

the Rain. This whimsical and charming short film features Charlie in character as the down on his luck tramp gallivanting around and causing mischief. In the brief narrative, the tramp gets mixed up in a lover's quarrel, and slapstick comedy ensues.

The movie was a success, and Charlie Chaplin became even more renowned, and from then on Keystone Pictures gave him the green light to direct almost every other film that he made. In fact, immediately after screening *Caught in the Rain*, Sennett's reaction was, "Well, do you want to start another?" From that day forward Chaplin had a hand in the creativity of any production he was in, and the American audience loved him for it.

Chapter Four

On Easy Street

"All I need to make a comedy is a park, a policeman and a pretty girl."

—Charlie Chaplin

The first official feature length comedic film in the entire film industry was an irreverent little gem called, *Tillie's Punctured Romance* which debuted at the tail end of 1914. The fact that Charlie Chaplin starred in this movie making milestone would only serve to further cement Chaplin's claim as one of the most pivotal pioneers of film to have ever graced the screen.

The film, though peppered with over-the-top humor, contains a rather complex plotline, involving Chaplin as a wandering womanizer from the city who attempts to take advantage of a rich country heiress named Tillie. With this film, Chaplin gained more notoriety and acclaim, and as such when it came time to renew his contract, Chaplin took it upon himself to ask his manager for a raise. He asked Sennett for $1,000 a week, a sum that would amount to about $25,000 today. A reasonable pay check for an up-and-coming star, Chaplin assumed, but upon hearing his request, Sennett flatly turned him down. This would prove to be a grave mistake on Sennett's part because the rebuffed Chaplin took his work elsewhere.

Instead of renewing his contract he signed on with Essanay Film Manufacturing Company in Chicago who were offering him an easy $1250 a week, and a sign on bonus of $10,000. Chaplin had learned a valuable lesson when it came to negotiating contracts and shopping around his talent to the highest bidder. After wrangling for himself the best possible deal, he officially began making appearances at the studio in December 1914.

Here, instead of the bit player he was when he first began at Keystone Pictures, Chaplin came into his own and began calling the shots from the beginning. One of his first major contributions was the acquisition of a

leading lady in the form of Edna Purviance. Interestingly enough, Charlie Chaplin, proving himself as much of a talent scout as he was an actor, had practically snatched Edna right off the street. He saw her at a local café and was immediately captivated by her appearance. Believing she would be a lovely choice for leading lady in his upcoming film *A Night Out*, Chaplin went right over and told her as much. Edna would be by Chaplin's side—in more ways than one—in major films over the next eight years. The two became on-again and off-again romantic partners in real life from 1915 to 1917.

During this time, Chaplin also began to reprise the role of his tramp character, moving away from some of his more brutish antics, creating more of a romanticized and gentle persona. And he reaped the dividends as a result. He soon began to see his tame and lovable characterization featured in comic strips and feature length cartoons. Walt Disney in fact, later admitted that it was Charlie's tramp template on which the cartoon character Mickey Mouse had been based.

The visage of Charlie Chaplin's tramp was everywhere. Riding high on this tide when his contract with Essanay came to a close at the end of 1915, Charlie Chaplin was in a position to accept the very best of contracts that came his way. The highest bidder turned out to be Mutual Film Corporation who offered him no less than $10,000 a week to work for them. The amount was a small fortune back in 1915, making it appear, much as his later film of the same name, that Mr. Charlie Chaplin was now on *Easy Street*.

Chapter Five

War and Success

"The saddest thing I can imagine is to get used to luxury."

—Charlie Chaplin

From 1917 on, Charlie Chaplin had become a global phenomenon, with his films being played on every continent on the planet. But right when the entertainment of Charlie Chaplin had reached world status, the entire world was suddenly at war. Technically, the conflagration that would become known as World War I had begun on July 28, 1914, but it was in 1917 that things were really heating up.

The United States had entered the war on April 6, 1917, putting Chaplin's current nation of residence on an all-out war footing. As a result, Chaplin was soon being criticized by both the British and American press as to why he didn't join the war effort. At that point, just about every able-bodied man was expected to lend his support for the war effort. And Chaplin, not yet 30 years old, provided a highly visible target for draft mongers.

In reality, Chaplin had already registered with the American draft board, and he declared that he would gladly fight for the British as well if they had called on him to do so. Chaplin also donated a considerable amount of money in war bonds said to total $150,000 which was certainly a good chunk of change back in 1917. But in the end, neither nation called him to service, and the war ended a little over a year later.

Meanwhile, Chaplin was a busy man. In June 1917, he had already signed on to finish eight movies for the First National Exhibitor's Circuit in exchange for a sum of one million dollars. With this new windfall of cash, Chaplin decided to construct his very own movie studio. He did this the following November, on a plot of five acres that he had recently acquired just off of Sunset Boulevard. This was 100 years ago of course, and in 1917 this

now extremely congested California thoroughfare looked a whole lot different. In those days, Sunset Boulevard was strictly residential, without any heavy infrastructure as is present today. Back in 1917, it was Charlie Chaplin's territory, and he sought to create a center of production in which he would have full control over the enterprise of film making.

Right on the heels of his completion of his studio in 1918, Charlie was soon again at work on a new major production; an innovative film called *A Dog's Life*. The film opens with the familiar character of the broke and penniless tramp coming on screen hungry and desperate, looking for his next meal. He is then followed by a dog named Scraps who he had rescued from a dog fight. The tramp and the dog do everything together; they look for food, work, and even women, seemingly in tandem. Besides getting comfy with canines, Chaplin had some other interesting co-stars in this film as well. His on-again, off-again girlfriend, Edna Purviance and even his brother Sidney made an appearance.

Chaplin focused intensely on every minute of this film, and his genius of comedic timing would be rewarded as film critics declared the movie to be a "total work of art." In the meantime, while his work was receiving such hefty praise, Chaplin's personal life was being embroiled in a bit of controversy.

He had met a pretty young actress earlier that year, 17-year-old Mildred Harris. This in itself wasn't too unusual—Chaplin was meeting pretty young actresses all the time. But soon after their meeting, the two had become quite intimate, and with startling rapidity, Mildred claimed that she was pregnant with Charlie Chaplin's child.

Chapter Six

Unhappily Married

“This is a ruthless world and one must be ruthless to cope with it.”

—Charlie Chaplin

The woman who would become Charlie Chaplin’s first wife, Mildred Harris, was already a veteran of the movie scene when she met Chaplin at age 17. A child star, she had made her debut when she was only 11 years old. She first met Chaplin in 1918 when the two briefly dated each other. They were intimate, but for Chaplin, it wasn’t too serious.

It was only when he received word from the young starlet that she believed to be pregnant with his child that Mr. Chaplin became gravely concerned. Back in the early days of the film industry, getting such a girl pregnant without the proper recourse of marriage would have had Chaplin biting off much more scandal than he was willing to chew. Knowing that he would never be able to live such a thing down, he felt he had no choice but to marry Mildred and he did so on October 23, 1918. Charlie didn’t marry Mildred out of love; he married her out of fear. And when he found out that the object of his fear—his supposed unborn child—didn’t exist, Chaplin was enraged.

Upon learning that Mildred wasn’t pregnant as she had thought, Chaplin felt incredibly betrayed and cheated. After the vows had been uttered, it was too late to take them back.

As unhappy as his marriage was though, Charlie couldn’t resist digging himself even deeper into his morose pit of unhappiness. He eventually did impregnate Mildred, but this pregnancy wasn’t meant to be either, and after nine months of bitter bickering, the child would die three days after his birth. Despondent and angry, Chaplin had had enough and officially ended his marriage just a few months later, in the fall of 1919. In the court proceedings

that followed, Mildred claimed that Chaplin was cruel and indifferent to her during their marriage and proceeded to lay all of her grievances against Chaplin before the judge who had lent her a compassionate ear.

She was rewarded for her claims in the form of a $100,000 settlement along with some land rights to Chaplin's estate. His failed marriage and especially the loss of his first child served as the melancholy inspiration for Charlie Chaplin's next film called *The Kid*. Production of this epic began in August 1919 and filming would last for nine months, just like the gestation of a real child.

This movie was Charlie's baby, and he was ready to share it with the world when its birthing process was complete in May 1920. Creating a more three-dimensional film that touched upon sadness and loss, he was able to prove that he could make audiences cry as well as laugh.

From this point forward Charlie Chaplin was changed, he was reborn, and this translated into the personas that he was playing. Rather than just having them cavort around like drunken miscreants, committing one series of whacked out hijinks after another, he sought to touch people's hearts and to engage their minds.

With the completion of *The Kid*, Charlie Chaplin had reached a major fork in the road. He could continue to reprise the role of the tramp that had made him famous, or he could step out into bolder and better roles waiting on the horizon. His actions over the next few years would serve to decide his fate forever.

Chapter Seven

Back in Britain

"Actors search for rejection. If they don't get it they reject themselves."

—Charlie Chaplin

In September 1921, Chaplin went back home to England. He had been away for nearly ten years. Even though he was eager to see some of his old haunts, Chaplin was there strictly on the pretense of business. His homecoming was all under the guise of promoting his latest American blockbuster hit, *The Kid*, to an international audience.

Just a few months earlier, Chaplin had arranged for his ailing mother to come to the United States where she was housed in an expensive bungalow with round-the-clock care. Chaplin was a wealthy man at this point, so he could certainly afford it, and no doubt figured it was the least he could do. Not holding any grudges against his mother's previous failings in his childhood, he had bestowed upon her the gift of a small measure of dignity in her final years of life. With his mother thus situated, Charlie Chaplin was back in England to promote his films. But it seemed like the promotion was not necessary, as thousands of fans came to greet him in the street wherever his motorcade went.

On one occasion, he even got an official visit from the mayor of Southampton who seemingly perturbed about the weather famously informed Chaplin, "It does not always rain in England…" At which Chaplin—lest the mayor forget—interjected, "I am an Englishman, Mr. Mayor. And English weather, whatever it is, is good to see." Chaplin then thoughtfully added in recollection, "It was raining, I remember, when I went away nine years ago."

Chaplin then endeavored to do a brief disappearing act for the media and explaining that he was exhausted and needed his rest, pretended to retire to his hotel. He proceeded to sneak out by himself and made his way back to his

old neighborhood where he walked to all of the places he had visited so frequently during his British upbringing.

Once Chaplin had had enough of his forays down memory lane, he returned to the United States and got right back to work on his latest pet project, it was a romantic film he called *A Woman of Paris*. Chaplin chose not to star in this film and instead sought to bolster the fame of his long time protégé Edna Purviance giving her the full spotlight in the piece.

Chaplin like usual was a visionary, and he sought to ascribe complex nuances to the characters in the film, explaining that in real world situations "men and women try to hide their emotions rather than seek to express them." In attempting to express such things, Chaplin showed that he was way ahead of his time.

Today, portraying such complex idiosyncrasies of human emotion in film are a common contrivance, but in Chaplin's heyday of the 1920s, these things were still rather unusual. Most audiences wanted and expected simple plot devices, and such complexities only served to confuse them. They wanted an easy to follow narration with the words "The End" displayed in two big letters at the conclusion of the film to let them know the story was over.

The audience just didn't seem to have much interest in anything that made them think hard, and furthermore without the star power of Charlie Chaplin as a leading character; no one cared about the technical nuances he was struggling to capture from behind the silver screen. The film was eventually a flop, and Chaplin forced to admit defeat returned to comedy shortly after that.

He did so in a big way by the time of 1924s iconic film called, *The Gold Rush*. The concept apparently came to Chaplin one day when he happened upon a photo of the 1898 Klondike Gold Rush. This gave Chaplin the inspiration to create a film that revolved around his tramp character being a down on his luck prospector. He cast Georgia Hale to be his new co-star.

Chaplin was turned on to Hale's acting ability when he saw her performance in the movie *The Salvation Hunters* earlier that year and determined that she would be perfect for his movie as well. Production of the film began in earnest in February 1924, and it would end up costing about one million dollars to make. The bill was racked up apparently through the use of multiple shooting locations, special effects, expensive set material, and in the divvying up the payments to over 600 actors with different walk-on roles. Chaplin had told his colleagues before he began shooting the movie,

“This next film must be an epic! The greatest!” And it seemed with such extravagance in the production process that he was very much living up to his word.

After incurring such costs, Chaplin was finally able to wrap the film up in May 1925. Chaplin was proud of the product, and his fans were fairly content with it as well. In the movie, Chaplin is at his best, by taking gritty realism and tough situations and making us laugh at them with his oddball antics.

This powerful tool was most famously evident in the scene in which the starving prospector is so desperate he eats his boot. But he not only eats it. He dines on that shoe as if it were the finest fare you had ever seen; placing the piece of footwear right on a plate like a steak and delicately cutting the rubber with a fork and knife.

With masterpiece scenes such as this, Chaplin proved once again that he knew just how to make people laugh no matter what they were going through in life. Seeing Chaplin eating a shoe would put even the most agitated person at ease. It was a strange and wonderful power that Chaplin had in those days.

Upon the conclusion of the film, Chaplin stated, “This is the picture that I want to be remembered by.” But unfortunately for him, right on the heels of this box office success, another event would come to cloud his legacy and threaten to have him remembered for something else entirely; the seduction of a 16-year-old girl.

Chapter Eight

The Silent Film Hush Money

“In the end, everything is a gag.”

—Charlie Chaplin

There is no way to sugar coat or view what transpired between Charlie Chaplin and then 16-year-old Lita Grey without some measure of contempt. Even in the 1920s, it was scandalous, and today it would have meant certain jail time for the actor who was nearly 20 years older than the girl.

After the young actress had revealed to Chaplin that she was pregnant from their brief encounter, in a panicked frenzy Chaplin insisted that the two of them get married to avoid the fallout. The two fled to Mexico together in order to complete their vows, tying the knot on November 25, 1924. This hastily managed wedding seemed to be a near identical repetition of Chaplin’s first, except this time, the girl really was pregnant. Lita gave birth on May 5, 1925, to Charlie Chaplin’s first child, a son he named Spencer. It was a chaotic marriage from the beginning, and just as was the pattern, Charlie began to resent his wife and spent most of his time at work to get away from her.

Nevertheless, the two managed to have one more child together, with Lita giving birth to Sydney Earl Chaplin (named after Charlie’s brother) on March 30, 1926. As the couple drifted further and further apart the inevitable divorce proceedings finally came down the pipeline. It was here that the scandal that Chaplin had sought to avoid by marrying the starlet in the first place managed to bubble to the surface. It began with stories leaked to the news media about how Charlie Chaplin had inflicted upon the young girl his “perverted sexual desires.” Shortly after these tawdry tales erupted, it seemed that Charlie’s worst fears were indeed becoming a reality, as his staunchest critics began to call for all Charlie Chaplin films to be banned.

In light of such forceful condemnations against him, Charlie Chaplin felt like his whole world was coming undone at the seams. In order to stave the bleeding Charlie sought to stop the rumors by offering his ex-wife a hush money cash settlement of over half a million dollars. It was the largest divorce settlement—up to that point—that the world had ever seen.

Even by today's standards, this is still a pretty hefty amount, so you can only imagine what a fortune it was back then. But for Chaplin, it was a small price to pay to keep Lita from further besmirching his character in the press. If this sort of thing were to have happened today in the age of near instantaneous social media communication, all the money in the world probably wouldn't have been able to keep this story quiet. But fortunately for Charlie Chaplin, in his day all he had to worry about was the newspapers, and to a much lesser extent the radio. So it was that Chaplin survived this near assassination of his character with his viewing audience still largely intact.

After his divorce from Lita on August 22, 1927, Charlie immediately threw himself full force back into his work. During such a tragic and trying time in his life, he was in the midst of one of his most whimsical films to date. It was out of these dark times that he produced the film *The Circus*, in which he played the role of a goofy hobo turned circus performer. The film was finished up in the middle of October 1927 and went on to receive primarily good reviews.

These accolades led to Charlie Chaplin being awarded at the very first Academy Awards in 1928. Charlie Chaplin's whole being had been rocked by horrible scandal just a year before, but he proved to the world that you just can't keep a good tramp down.

In the end, his past indiscretions would not have any impact on his career and legacy, and would soon be almost completely forgotten. But the entire film industry would be shaken to its core by something new emerging on the horizon that made most of the actors from the silent movie era utterly terrified. It was called the "talkie."

Chapter Nine

He Doesn’t Talkie

“Movies are a fad. Audiences really want to see live actors on a stage.”

—Charlie Chaplin

As innovative as Charlie Chaplin was in his early days, it is incredible to realize just how stuck in his ways the actor was when it came to the introduction of sound in films. For many decades now people have taken it for granted as a foregone conclusion that movies should have sound, but back then Charlie Chaplin refusing to adapt, stubbornly insisted that they were better without it. He also seemed to fear that the tramp character he had so carefully built up with all of his pantomiming would be ruined if he tried to lend a voice to its wild, comic gestures. So instead of jumping on the bandwagon of what Chaplin thought would be just a fad, he continued to work on his silent movies.

Although he passed up on spoken dialogue, he was pleased with the fact that the new audio technology allowed him to score music to the movies, and he was sure to include music on all of his future films whether they had spoken words or not. The next major film he had slated for production was one that he called *City Lights*. The plot of this movie involved Chaplin’s tramp character falling in love with a blind girl he meets on the street corner where she sells flowers. The narrative then follows the tramp as he raises money to pay for an operation that is supposed to restore her vision. In the end, it took Chaplin nearly two years to finish this film, with the final edit completed in late December 1930.

After the debut, the critics were full of praise, and one of them even went so far as to write “Nobody in the world but Charlie Chaplin could have done it. He is the only person that has that peculiar something called ‘audience appeal’ in sufficient quality to defy the popular penchant for movies that

talk.”

Chaplin’s routine was so beloved that even his critics were trying to rationalize why Chaplin shouldn’t jump on board with talking films. They were trying to say that Chaplin was bigger than that, that he had a “peculiar something” that didn’t need to pay homage to the spoken word to generate interest and “audience appeal.”

The film was released to the general public in January 1931 and was said to take in a cool three million dollars. For Chaplin, *City Lights* would remain his crowning achievement and most beloved work for the rest of his days. Even so, shortly afterward Chaplin began to face a crisis, he started to finally come around to the realization that movies with spoken word were where the future of film making was headed. But at the same time he still believed that his tramp character wouldn’t come off well with spoken dialogue. Falling into a terrible quandary, Chaplin decided to take some time off so he could think about his life and where his career might be headed. He set off on a sightseeing tour in the middle of 1931 and wouldn’t come back for 16 months.

Upon his return Chaplin wasn’t much better, he felt like he suddenly had no new direction in which to take his stagecraft; he felt like he was stuck, with an old and outdated shtick. The actor was allegedly so despondent that at one point he even talked about giving up on the film industry and retiring to some remote place where no one knew him. It was in the middle of this turmoil that a vivacious young actress named Paulette Goddard stepped into his life in July 1932.

Chapter Ten

Socialist Leanings

"To those who can hear me, I say—do not despair. The misery that is now upon us is but the passing of greed—the bitterness of men who fear the way of human progress. The hate of men will pass, and dictators die, and the power they took from the people will return to the people and so long as men die, liberty will never perish."

—Charlie Chaplin

She was born with the name of Marion Levy, but by the time she crossed paths with Charlie Chaplin, she had taken on her mother's maiden name of Goddard and changed her first name to Paulette, figuring that these would be more conducive stage names for her. For Chaplin it didn't matter what she was called, he just knew that she was going to be a star, and he saw to it that she became one.

He cast her as his co-star in the 1936 tour de force of *Modern Times*. As it turns out—and as Chaplin himself would admit in later years—during his year and a half of wandering the globe while he was in between films, Chaplin began to have a different viewpoint on the social and political affairs of his day. And as he took notes on what he saw and compared and contrasted it with the situation in the United States, he began to have a deep concern that capitalist industry would eventually become so efficient it would weed out the worker entirely. It was this line of thought that became the catalyst that led to *Modern Times*.

This is also when Charlie Chaplin first started to come under deep suspicion by his colleagues of having sympathies—if not direct ties—to communism. The actor's sudden focus on the worker or as a communist would call them, the "proletariat," made him seem suspect to many. Chaplin,

on the other hand, described his depiction in the film as being a kind of satire of modern industrialized society.

The film takes place during the full throes of the Great Depression, and it serves to reflect all of these struggles that the American worker faces in modern times. The film highlights the struggles between striking workers and factory bosses in a comedic fashion. Industry itself is depicted as a massive juggernaut ready to outmode and replace humanity.

Chaplin scored the music for this film, but for the most part, he did not speak in this one either, the only dialogue Chaplin engaged in (if you can call it that) is a nonsensical song consisting of incoherent gibberish. It remains significant nonetheless because it stands as the very first time his voice was recorded on film.

The aspect that kept getting him the most unwanted attention, however, was the socialist leanings that the critics continued to perceive to be in the film. But if you were to watch closely you would realize that Chaplin wasn't taking any side in this perceived conflict. He wasn't on the striking union worker's side any more than he was on the factory bosses; he was just the hapless clown that was in the middle of it all.

And as if life really does imitate art, Chaplin would soon be caught in the middle of two diametrically opposed forces in real life. He was beginning to receive criticism from those that believed that he was becoming too political while at the same time getting encouragement from others who felt that he was creating an honest portrayal of events.

If Chaplin found himself stuck in a vice after he created *Modern Times*, he would really feel the pressure when he penned the infamous movie *The Dictator*. Meant to be a mocking satire of Hitler and the Nazis, Chaplin began filming this epic just six days after Britain issued a formal declaration of war against Germany.

There can be no doubt that Hitler was the enemy of the international community at this point. They had coddled him enough allowing him to roll all over Czechoslovakia, the Sudetenland, and Austria, but when the Nazi dictator invaded Poland, it was the last straw. There was no love lost, but it was still controversial to make a movie of this kind, and all of Chaplin's peers in the industry had warned him as much.

If Chaplin had been dependent on the bigwigs at a movie company to finance his film, it would have never gotten done. But Chaplin was already fabulously rich by 1940, so he had enough money to pull it off on a private

basis. No one else wanted to do it, but Chaplin was determined. As he later stated, “I was determined to go ahead—for Hitler must be laughed at.”

Laughter aside, the movie covered some serious stuff, and the ending turned into nothing short of a Public Service Announcement when for the last five minutes, Chaplin oddly stepped out of character, looked right into the camera and addressed the audience as to why war is wrong, and fascism must be stopped. Not a bad argument to be sure, but the approach was wrong. Chaplin seemed not to have realized how much people hate to be lectured—especially at the tail end of what was supposed to be a light-hearted comedy. Fans didn’t pay their hard-earned money to be preached at by Charlie Chaplin during the last minutes of the film.

After this strange and awkward moment in the theater, audience goers almost universally had the same reaction: uneasiness. A PSA at the end of a comedy is not what anyone had expected. Even if the message came from a good place, it fell flat, and came off odd. And Chaplin’s star began to fade significantly.

Chapter Eleven

Exile from the United States

“Greed has poisoned men’s souls, has barricaded the world with hate . . . Machinery that gives abundance has left us in want. Our knowledge has made us cynical. Our cleverness, hard and unkind. We think too much and feel too little. More than machinery we need humanity. More than cleverness we need kindness and gentleness. Without these qualities, life will be violent and all will be lost.”

—Charlie Chaplin

With his movie career in decline by the middle of the 1940s, Chaplin was having a hard time coping with his waning popularity. Now he had a following of a whole other kind thanks to J. Edgar Hoover and the FBI who began to track Chaplin’s every move. But no matter how hard Hoover’s snoops tried, they couldn’t find any dirt on Chaplin—at least not anything that would stick—and ended up coming back empty handed. Soon enough, however, Hoover changed tactics, and since they couldn’t find anything, J. Edgar Hoover decided to use some of his craft ingenuity. Hoover began a brutal smear campaign aimed at destroying the star’s public image, and he soon managed to find some willing partners in his conniving and dredged up four separate indictments on the famed actor.

Meanwhile, the ire that Chaplin was attracting to himself was ever increasing due to his vigorous support of Russian War Relief. Although the Soviet Union was technically the ally of the United States at this point, such ardent support proved to be unacceptable, and only served to cast suspicion onto Chaplin’s motivation to aid Russia.

Furthermore, his worried detractors began to realize that with Chaplin’s massive appeal he could reach others with his propaganda. So to counteract

this massive appeal, Hoover and his cronies determined that they needed to take Chaplin's public persona down a few notches in a view to diminishing his influence on the world stage.

One of Hoover's soldiers leading this charge was conservative syndicated journalist Westbrook Pegler who was recruited to print story after story about Chaplin with all of the salacious details and innuendos on his personal life that they could find. He was also very adept at transforming Chaplin's calls to aid the Soviet Union into an all-out call to support Russian communism, and therefore a rejection of American values. Delving deep into Chaplin's—admittedly—troubled marital life, he pointed to Chaplin's string of divorces with American women as if they were proof of his penchant to throw away cherished values such as family, home, and marriage. It was as if he was making the American women that Chaplin had dumped into a kind of symbolism of the many times that he had dumped and betrayed America itself.

Over the next few weeks, a continuous stream of real and imagined details of his private life were dug up and the critics began to pile on, in what today would almost be tantamount to a case of cyber bullying. And in June 1943, Chaplin's tormentors finally had their breakthrough moment. It came when an alleged former lover of Chaplin's came forward and filed a paternity suit.

As is often the case with such affairs, this woman who had been silent for nearly a decade suddenly sprang forth with a vigorous claim that Charlie Chaplin had fathered a child with her out of wedlock. Later on, Chaplin would be vindicated from her erroneous claims with blood tests that proved beyond the shadow of a doubt that he was not the father.

But in the end even this vindication proved to be irrelevant, public opinion had already been worked up against him, and the damage was done. The FBI had used just about every underhanded tactic in the book, frequently leaking fake stories to the press to ruin Chaplin's life, all in the name of national security.

Without ever joining the communist party, Charlie Chaplin had been officially maligned as a communist and traitor, even though the FBI knew that he never had so much as darkened the doors of a communist party meeting. But in the eyes of J. Edgar Hoover, it didn't matter. Hoover had already deemed Chaplin an enemy and an undesirable.

Chaplin, the same Charlie Chaplin who had been fending for himself in

the streets of London since he was seven years old, was not about to take these attacks lying down. However, his bombastic and high-strung defense of himself usually only dug him deeper into the hole that Hoover had pegged him in as a communist sympathizer. The press conferences soon became over-the-top circuses, as was the case in 1947 when an exasperated Charlie Chaplin told the crowd of aggressive reporters who were hounding him, “Proceed with the butchery! Fire ahead at this old gray head!” Sadly, Charlie’s bitter critique of their cruel behavior only incensed them to take him up on his invitation and attack him further.

It has been noted on several occasions that the modern media has a proclivity for building stars up only to viciously tear them down at a later date. Several stars come to mind that might fit this mold such as Michael Jackson, Tom Cruise, Charlie Sheen, and perhaps American boxing legend Mike Tyson.

Even in the midst of his darkest hour, Chaplin once again found love and happiness when he met 18-year-old actress Oona O’Neil. Her age sparked more criticism and fed into the image of Chaplin preying on young women. But for all his problems with women in the past, Oona would stay by his side until the day he died. And Chaplin’s son Charles Jr. would later recall that Oona “worshiped his father.”

As Chaplin languished in the turmoil of his powerful enemies, it seems that Oona may have been his only real friend, his comfort, his saving grace. Chaplin’s aggressors were relentless, however, and continued their assault all the way until 1951 with Chaplin’s last American movie release, *Limelight*. *Limelight* was supposed to be Charlie Chaplin’s comeback movie, and he put everything he had into the film. But it was never given its chance for a proper debut. It was virtually banned from every box office, just prior to Chaplin being effectively exiled from the United States. As a result of the antagonism, Charlie Chaplin, the once revered British turned American icon, would not set foot on American soil for 20 years.

Conclusion

After Chaplin's disappearance from the American movie scene, he would finally see a renewed interest in the early 1960s. The opening salvo in this call for America to bury the hatchet with Charlie was a 1962 editorial in the *New York Times* that satirically read, "We do not believe the Republic would be in danger if yesterday's unforgotten little tramp were allowed to amble down the gangplank of a steamer or plane in an American port."

It seemed that by the 1960s the media's desire to malign Charlie Chaplin had grown cold and the animus that had previously been dished out had cycled back to the nostalgia of the good old days of Charlie Chaplin, the "little tramp." Several other newspapers would follow suit with the *New York Times* in their editorial sections, all of them seeming to long for Charlie Chaplin to come waltzing back to America.

With this shift in the atmosphere, the climate seemed just right for Charlie Chaplin to release his autobiography, a memoir titled simply *My Autobiography*. He had been working on the manuscript for the book since 1957, and by the time it went off to the publisher, it was 500 pages, primarily focused on his glory days as an entertainer. Leaving out most of his recent trauma, the book was just what Charlie and the public needed to help them remember the good times when Charlie Chaplin and his tramp-like character were the darlings of the nation. The time was indeed ripe for a comeback, and the book became an almost immediate best seller. Even so, Chaplin wouldn't make his final return to America until 1972.

The occasion was to receive the Special Academy Lifetime Achievement Award. Chaplin, standing next to the celebrity host Jack Lemmon, looked like a fragile shell of his former self. He also seemed to still be in shock that he was back in America and on that stage. It appeared that after the years of being beaten down by the press, public opinion, and Hoover's FBI, Chaplin had finally given up.

He was not expecting to be received back in open arms, so this was quite a shock to his system. So was the deafening applause. In honor of Mr. Chaplin, people clapped, clapped, and clapped some more. They couldn't

seem to do or say enough to thank this man who had eked out a successful path through the treacherousness of the film industry back when California's movie studios sat on barren, desert wastelands. The clapping was so long it set a record for the longest standing ovation that anyone had ever (then or now) received. Chaplin's spirits seemed to be greatly buoyed and renewed by this reception, and he was eager to begin his next big film project, but although his mind was willing, sadly enough, his flesh was extraordinarily weak.

After suffering a few subsequent strokes he was confined for the most part in a wheelchair, and it became exceedingly hard for him to even speak, let alone direct a film. Nevertheless, before the clock of his legacy struck midnight, Chaplin was able to finish a few last projects. First, there was his illustrated biography *My Life in Pictures*, which was released in 1974, and then the re-scoring of his old film *A Woman of Paris*, before finding the time to show up in a documentary featuring his life story called *The Gentleman Tramp* which aired in 1975.

Later that year Chaplin would receive what was probably the thrill of his life, being knighted by Queen Elizabeth II. He was still confined to his wheel chair, but as he sat there and had the customary sword tap both of his shoulders to symbolize his ushering into knighthood you could sense the pride swelling up from within his body.

Chaplin's health would continue to fade, even as his spirit soared during his last days on Earth. He finally left us on Christmas morning—December 25, 1977—as if to prove that Charlie Chaplin was a gift to us all.

Can I Ask A Favor?

If you enjoyed this book, found it useful or otherwise then I'd really appreciate it if you would post a short review on Amazon. I do read all the reviews personally so that I can continually write what people are wanting.

If you'd like to leave a review then please visit the link below:

Click Here to Leave a Review

Thanks for your support!

Your Free eBooks!

As a way of saying thank you for reading our book, we're offering you a free copy of the below e-Books.
Happy Reading!

>> Click Here <<
>> To Get Your FREE eBooks <<