

# Talent Show

## ★ VICTORIA JUSTICE ★ AND SERENE JUSTICE-REED

At 17 years old, the singing and dancing star of Nickelodeon's *Victorious* has finally learned the art of parental appreciation for her mom Serene, dad Zack and stepdad Mark. "I ask my mom for advice on everything, from my hair to work-related stuff to what I should say to a boy," says Victoria, whose family moved from Hollywood, Florida, to Los Angeles when she was 11 so she could pursue acting.

As is true for most families, their mother-daughter relationship wasn't always so chummy. "It's been only recently that Victoria started thinking I was a cool mom," says Serene, 52. "For a while she viewed us as enemies for enforcing a curfew or saying no." Victoria, whose mom describes her as "wise beyond her years," realizes the error of her earlier ways. "I had adolescent syndrome," she laughs. "I thought parents didn't understand anything, and that I could talk only to my friends. But that's changed. Now my mom is the one person I trust."

Serene says there's no magic trick to strengthening the mother-daughter bond. It takes time, patience and lots of conversations. "I try to make everything in life a teachable example," says Serene. "If a celebrity does something wrong and gets in trouble, we talk about why it was bad. If Victoria meets a new friend, I ask what she likes about her, then suggest she strive to achieve those qualities in herself." Much to Serene's surprise—and delight—Victoria sees admirable characteristics in her mom as well. "I wish I could wake up as happy and as perky as she is, instead of feeling grumpy for the first hour I'm out of bed," says Victoria. "It's something I hope eventually rubs off on me. But even more important, my mom is kind, compassionate, accepting and attentive—the type of person you always want to have around."

BY PATTY A. MARTINEZ

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FOR THESE  
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★ KEKE AND SHARON PALMER ★

According to Sharon Palmer, the minute her daughter Keke, 16, heard about the earthquake in Haiti, she asked how she could help. “That’s just Keke,” says Sharon, 42, a former theater actress turned high school teacher. And now that Keke has made a name for herself with roles in *Akeelah and the Bee*, *Madea’s Family Reunion* and Nickelodeon’s *True Jackson, VP*, she’s putting her fame to good use: In January she answered phones at George Clooney’s *Hope for Haiti Now* telethon.

“The funny thing is that when we first got to Hollywood people told me to get her involved in a charity,” says Sharon, who, along with her husband, Larry, moved the family from Chicago to L.A. so Keke could pursue her career. “But our family was volunteering long before it was in vogue.” Keke

grew up seeing Sharon and Larry, a minister, serve meals in soup kitchens and deliver food to the homeless. “My parents showed me the value of humility and hard work,” she says.

Keke attributes her confidence to her mom. “Being on TV is hard because people expect you to be perfect,” she says. “But my mom tells me no matter what happens, she’ll always be there for me.” That self-esteem boost has helped her navigate a public adolescence with ease. “I think the reason Keke has so many fans is that she’s real,” says Sharon. When Keke wore her glasses recently at the iPop! Awards Showcase Gala, girls wrote letters thanking her for showing that lenses can be beautiful and glamorous. “To see Keke have that kind of impact on girls’ self-esteem,” says Sharon, “is what makes me really proud.”

## ★ MITCHEL AND KATHY MUSSO ★

To keep 18-year-old Mitchel's hectic schedule running as smoothly as possible, his mom, Kathy, 46, tries not to sweat the small stuff. "As a young actor, he's had to follow so many rules," she says, adding that they split their time between Los Angeles and their hometown of Garland, Texas. "Sometimes he just needs to be a kid."

But it's not always easy. Mitchel, who plays Miley Cyrus' best friend on Disney Channel's *Hannah Montana*, is also working on a new show, *Pair of Kings*, which will debut this fall. The talented multitasker also released his first pop-rock album last year. With all his career demands, Kathy often has to remind Mitchel to take a break and hang out with his brothers or his friends.

While Kathy and her husband, Sam, enjoy watching their son make his showbiz dreams come true, what truly gives them pleasure

is seeing what kind of young man he has become. "He's so gentle with his fans," Kathy says. "When he visits children in hospitals with Miley and Billy Ray Cyrus, they talk and pray with the kids—and you can tell from their faces that it means the world to them."

But Mitchel saves plenty of sweetness for his family. "I recently recorded a song from *Les Misérables* just for fun," says Kathy. "He cranked up my CD, then texted me to say I had a beautiful voice."

In addition to thinking his mom is a fabulous singer, Mitchel calls her "a great cook and one of my best friends." His perfect night would be sitting down to her homemade fried chicken and okra, followed by some mother-son bonding. After all, he relies on Kathy's advice for nearly everything. "Well, except for girls," he clarifies. "That would be too weird."





☆☆ **SHAWN AND TERI JOHNSON** ☆☆

Shawn Johnson takes pride in being strong-willed, an attribute she learned from mom Teri. “I tried to raise Shawn to be confident because I was introverted and insecure growing up,” says Teri, 50. And Shawn, Olympic gold medal gymnast and winner of *Dancing with the Stars*’ coveted mirror-ball trophy, says she couldn’t have succeeded without Teri’s support. “She’s always there to cheer me up or encourage me,” says Shawn, 18, who lives with Teri and her dad, Doug, in West Des Moines, Iowa. In fact, when she wanted to quit *Dancing with the Stars* the second week because of a difficult salsa routine, it was Teri who convinced her to stick with it. “It’s stressful always being in high-pressure situations,” says Shawn, whose next challenge will be picking a college to attend. “But that’s how I’ve learned

what a caring and compassionate person my mom is.”

While Shawn has had her share of accomplishments, the most important one for Teri is Shawn’s reputation as a girl who doesn’t give up. “Of course I’m happy about her medals, but those are personal triumphs,” says Teri. “What I love most is how she’s affected kids by being someone they can look up to.” It’s an honor Shawn doesn’t take lightly. “I want kids to know that if they’re dedicated, they can be successful.”

The biggest compliment Teri can get as a mom is hearing that Shawn makes others feel good. “That’s when I realize I’ve done something right!” she says. But Shawn is quick to point out that her mom’s done plenty right too. “She sticks to her opinions,” says Shawn, “and that makes her a real inspiration.”



★ JENNIFER AND CHRISTY STONE ★

Jennifer Stone, 17, who costars in Disney Channel's *Wizards of Waverly Place*, has a resilience that makes her mom marvel. "Even when things don't go her way, she manages to stay positive," explains Christy, 49. "While other people dwell on disappointments or shortcomings, Jennifer walks away from a project she didn't get believing it was for a good reason," says Christy, who raised Jennifer in Arlington, Texas. "It's almost like she knows there's something better out there."

But Jennifer credits Christy for being such a good role model. She says one of her mom's most valuable lessons is to remain true to yourself. "My mom always tells me, 'Be the best you can be, because there's no one else like you,'" says Jennifer. "In a world where so many people try to emulate others to fit in

and be accepted, she's taught me to be an individual."

The positive message has helped Jennifer become a successful actress (she also will play the title character in the upcoming TV movie *Harriet the Spy: Blog Wars*). But Christy has kept her daughter grounded by not changing the house rules just because she's living with a famous teen. "Clothes still need to be washed and folded, and her bedroom still needs to be cleaned," says Christy. "If she doesn't learn those responsibilities when she's young, it'll be too late," she says. "After all, fame is fleeting." But the fact that Jennifer is aware of that reality is part of what makes Christy so proud. "Watching my daughter become a smart woman with a solid head on her shoulders is a reward in itself," she says. ●