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British Home Child Group International

British Home Child Charlie Chaplin? by Sandra Joyce

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Charlie Chaplin, one of the world's most famous silent film stars, could very well have ended up in Canada as a British Home Child. At two different points in his young life, he was at a workhouse in London or 'living rough' on the streets.

Chaplin was born in London, England, on April 16th, 1889 to music hall entertainers. His father, Harry, was a versatile vocalist and actor; and his mother, Hannah Harriet Pedlingham Hill, known under the stage name of Lily Harley, was an actress and singer, who gained a reputation for her work in the light opera field.

Charlie's mother, Hannah, had a turbulent on and off again relationship with Chaplin Senior, meeting him for the first time in a stage play when she was just 16. However, at the age of 18, she became involved with another entertainer, Sydney Hawkes, who led her to South Africa. According to one source, he forced her into prostitution and when she became pregnant, she returned to England to Harry Chaplin in 1885. gave birth to a son, Sydney and married Chaplin the same year. Returning to the stage after the birth, she received acclaim in various cities in Great Britain.

Up to 1877 Hannah continued to perform throughout the UK but her health began to fail. In 1889, she gave birth to Charlie but by 1890, the relationship with Harry had deteriorated mainly due to his drinking and his touring in the United States. Harry provided little financial support for his family.

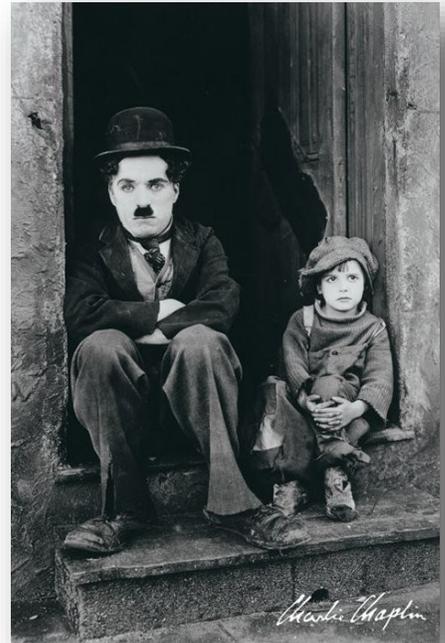
After living with her sister for a while, Hannah became involved with Leo Dryden, another music hall performer in 1892, and had her third child with him. They lived comfortably for just over a year. However, Dryden left Hannah in 1893, taking his son with him.

Hannah continued to perform, although she was now plagued with violent headaches, and she began to have trouble with her voice. There is a clear record of the night in 1894 when she lost her voice while performing at the Canteen in Aldershot. Her son Charlie, five years old at the time, sang in her place, giving him a real taste of performing.

She tried to support her children by working as a seamstress but her health continued to fail and she was admitted to the Lambeth infirmary with psychotic episodes, probably caused by syphilis. As it became harder and harder for Hannah to cope, Sydney and Charlie were sent to Lambeth Workhouse when he was seven years old. The council housed him at the Central London District School for paupers, which Chaplin remembered as "a forlorn existence".

From Chaplin's book, *A Comedian Sees the World*, he recalls, "How well I remember one Christmas Day sitting on that seat at Hanwell school, weeping copious tears. The day before I had committed some breach of rules. As we came into the dining-room for Christmas dinner we were to be given two oranges and a bag of sweets. . . 'I am speculating what I shall do with mine. I shall save the peel and the sweets I shall eat one a day. Each child is presented with his treasure as he enters the dining-room. At last it is my turn. But the man puts me aside.

'Oh, no—you'll go without for what you did yesterday.'



Charlie Chaplin *continued*

Chaplin was briefly reunited with his mother 18 months later, before Hannah was forced to readmit Charlie to the workhouse in July 1898 at the age of nine. Sydney had already, at the age of twelve, been on a training ship called Exmouth and subsequently had started to work as a steward on various shipping expeditions. Charlie was promptly sent to Norwood Poor Law Schools, another institution for destitute children.

Over 200 children were sent from the Norwood Poor Law Schools to Canada by the Lambeth Board of Guardians (who were responsible for the workhouse inmates) to be placed as indentured farm workers and domestics.

Even though Chaplin's mother was ill, it was probably her and his brother Sydney's involvement in Charlie's life that caused him to remain in England. They were determined that he continue his education.

However, his father's connections gave Charlie a chance to become a member of the Eight Lancashire Lads clog-dancing troupe, with whom he toured English music halls throughout 1899 and 1900. Chaplin was a hard worker, and the act was popular with audiences, but he really wanted to form a comedy act. At the age of 13, he abandoned education.

At the age of 14, he was signed to a theatrical agency in London's west end and even though the first play he was in was a flop, the reviews of Chaplin were highly praised. This was just the beginning of his career that spanned 75 years and took him from theatrical plays to the beginnings of silent short films to full length colour "talkies".

How different Chaplin's life would have been if he had been emigrated to Canada from Norwood Poor Law Schools to do farm work in his formative years.

"Smile" is a song based on an instrumental theme used in the soundtrack for Charlie Chaplin's 1936 movie *Modern Times*. Chaplin composed the music. John Turner and Geoffrey Parsons added the lyrics and title in 1954. The lyrics, based on lines and themes from the film, tells the listener to cheer up and that there is always a bright tomorrow, just as long as they smile. "Smile" has become a popular standard since its original use in Chaplin's film. The song also represents Chaplin's youth and his relationship with his mother.

Smile, even though it's breaking

When there are clouds in the sky

you'll get by

If you smile through your fear and sorrow

Smile and maybe tomorrow

You'll see the sun come shining through

for you

Light up your face with gladness

Hide every trace of sadness

Although a tear may be ever so near

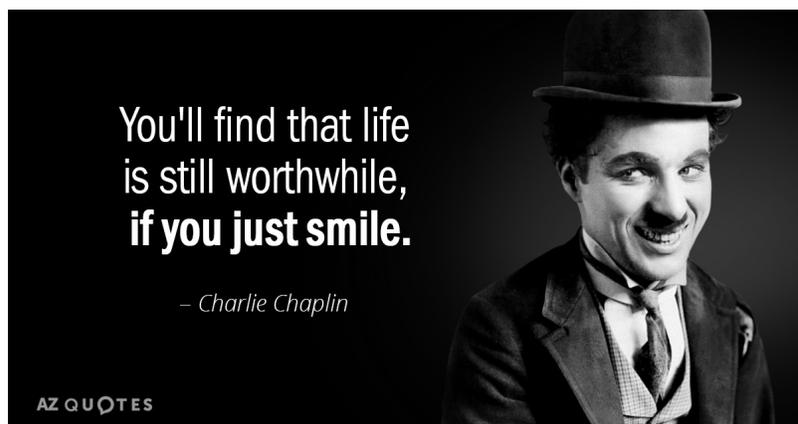
That's the time you must keep on trying

Smile what's the use of crying

You'll find that life is still worthwhile

If you'll just

Smile"



Manx Home Children & their link to Quarrier's by Sandra Joyce

An island measuring just 14 by 32 miles, the Isle of Man, is located in the Northern Irish Sea and is almost equally distant to Northern Ireland, England, Wales and Scotland. It is a self-governing British Crown dependency and the head of State is Queen Elizabeth who holds the title of the Lord of Mann. The Queen is represented by a Lieutenant Governor and the island's defence is the responsibility of Britain. People there are also referred to as the Manx.

However, the Isle of Man is not part of the United Kingdom under British Law. It has maintained independence, choosing not to be a part of the European Union and Manx citizens have not been able to work in Europe. They did not vote in the 2016 referendum on the UK's EU membership. EU citizens are entitled to travel and live, but not work, on the island without restriction.

Although it is a smaller island, there was also an institution that sent Home Children to Canada. It is documented that 318 were sent to Canada mostly through the Orphan Homes of Scotland (Quarrier's).

The main institution sending children, called the Isle of Man Orphan and Destitute Children's Home and Children's Emigration Home, was run by donations and regularly listed people's contributions in the local newspaper, the Isle of Man Times. Aside from money, including that sent by 'old' Home Children established in Canada, donations included straw, potatoes and turnips, codfish, bread, beef and 'the loan of a trap.'

In an article in the Irish Times in 1892, there is a glowing report about the Manx children who were helped by being emigrated to Canada and how their success aided in advertising the goodness of the island. In the same article, it is said that only two of the hundreds of children were 'unsatisfactory' and that three were already in possession of their own farms while many of the other children were striving to do so.

According to the information on the Library and Archives Database, the reasons for the children to be in the institution are those which are all too familiar: death of a parent, abandonment, or the parent's inability to care for their dependants. More detailed information can be obtained from the Manx Museum on the Isle of Man.

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