

This Falling Star Bounced Back

Jane Froman's hopes crashed in a plane, but now she's 'flying' higher than ever

By Pete Coutros

NEWS COLORFOTO BY HARRY WARNECKE AND GUS SCHOENBAECHLER

DEATH shook Jane Froman by the shoulder 12 years ago and woke her up to the wonderful possibilities life had to offer. Now, having undergone 25 operations, the philosophic canary from Columbia, Mo., counts her blessings and frets over her golf game.

It was in February, 1943, when a Yankee Clipper plunged out of a sloppy sky into the water near Lisbon, Portugal, killing 24 of 39 persons aboard, most of them USO performers en route to entertain troops stationed in Europe. Jane was in that plane.

In the Lisbon hospital to which Jane's broken body was brought for repairs, the daily bulletins read like a prologue to an obituary.

"Patient very depressed—feels life has nothing to offer," read one report. A later one said, "Patient very depressed, wants to die." There were blood transfusions and for a time it seemed the famed singer was but one tired breath removed from eternity.

She survived only to find that the gap between survival and recovery was a chasm across which she had to build her own personal bridge. This realization scored its greatest impact when she found herself on her back, staring at the anti-septic white of a hospital ceiling for days and weeks at a time. It was the catalytic agent which transformed Jane into a practicing philosopher.

"It gave me a new set of values," she observes when talking about her long siege of hospitalization. She rarely initiates talk of the tragedy but, if the subject is brought up (which happens often), she is able to discuss it with an air of detachment, as though the years had blunted some of the heartbreak.

"I began to appreciate the things I used to take for granted," she says. "Walking, for instance."

Walking down the aisle, for instance, to marry John Curtis Burn in March of 1948. He was

the crewman aboard the ill-fated Clipper who swam alongside Jane when they were thrown into the Tagus River and introduced himself as "your old first mate, Burn." He became her second mate when they wed. She had trod the bridal path before, with Don Ross, also of show business. A divorce finished that duet.

Rumor had it a while back that the Burns were off the matrimonial beam. Jane denied it all, saying, "We have some fights which are lulus. But we're still very much married. We even share the same psychiatrist." This must be true love, for in the crazy, mixed-up world of greasepaint, a psychiatrist is a person's prized possession, to have and to hold, till psychoses do part.

The five-foot-six, 125-pound brunette with versatile eyes—they're blue, but change to green or gray to match her dress—studied journalism for a while at the University of Missouri before chucking her repertorial inclinations for voice training at the Conservatory of Music at Cincinnati. While in attendance at the Conservatory, fate steered her to a party at which radio tycoon Powell Crosley Jr. was a guest. Her talent and his influence proved to be a big parlay for Jane and she cashed it in for a radio career. She eventually wound up singing with Paul Whiteman, who released her so she might go it solo. Jane has appeared in the movies and in plays, but her forte is singing all by her lonesome.

"I've been in show business for 27 years and I don't care who knows it," boasts the stunning star. In those 27 years, Jane's caught her share of bouquets, verbal and petal-wise, but none had the fragrance of a review in a show biz bible of a year ago. She especially liked that line which read, "Miss Froman has crossed that line between a great entertainer and a personage." And she did it on one bum leg. **END**



NEWS FOTO BY EVELYN STRAUS
Jane Froman and her husband, John C. Burn, fought side by side in her suit against airline following the crash.