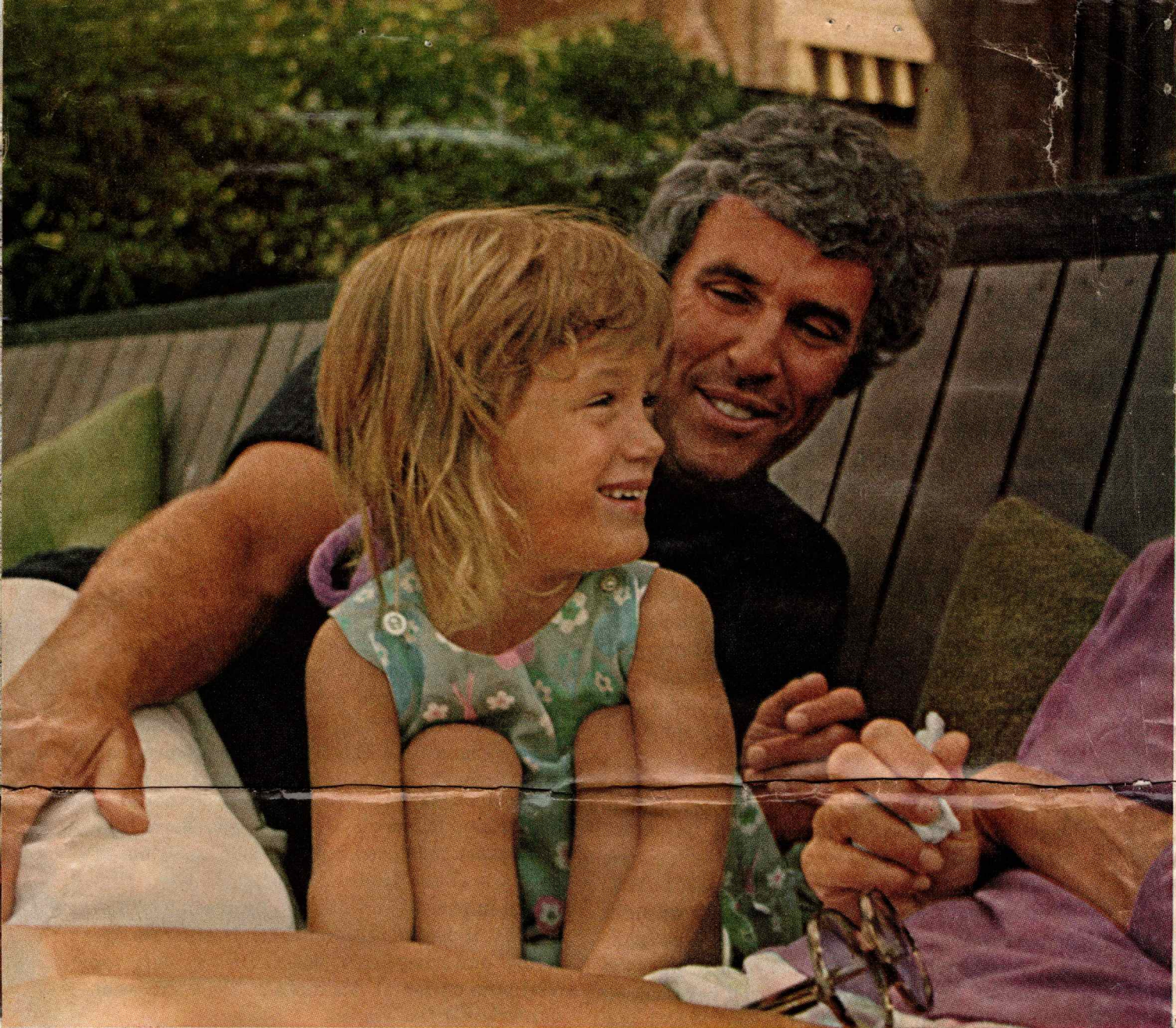


**Burt Bacharach and Angie Dickinson:
Their Private World**





Burt Bacharach and Angie Dickinson:

THE PRIVATE WORLD OF

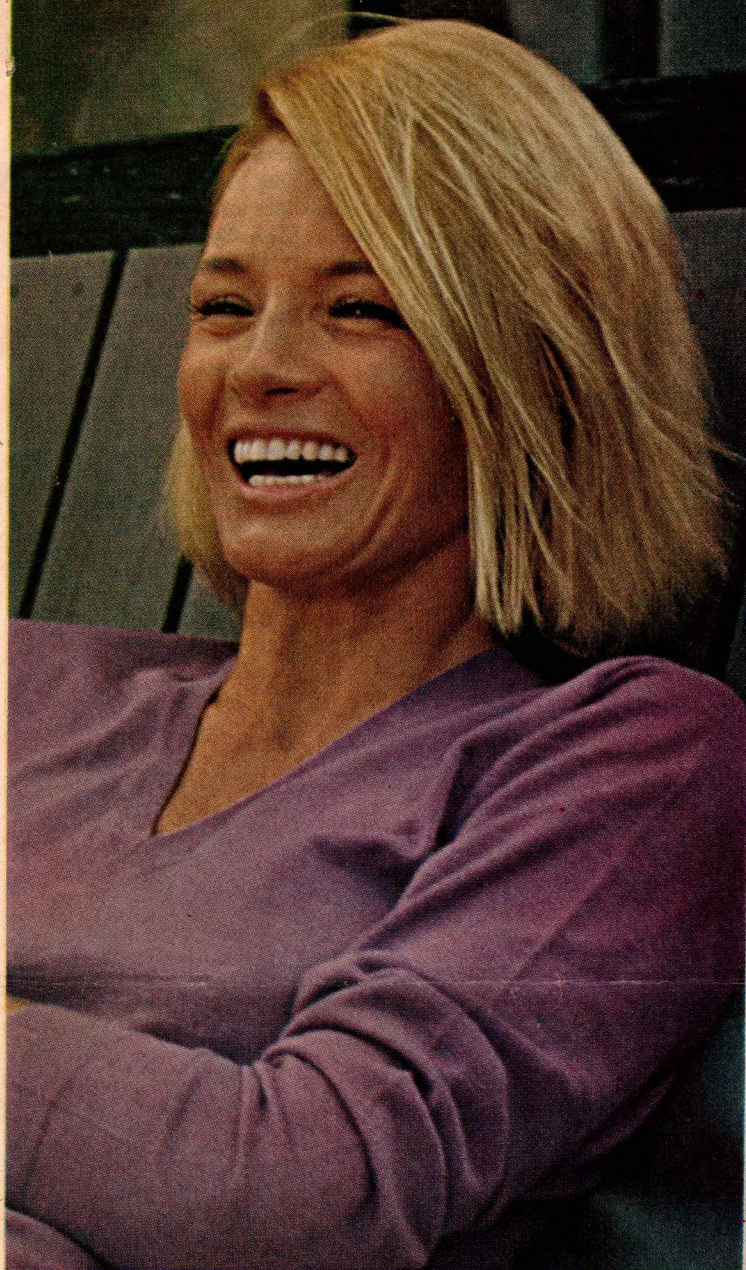
“I organize our little family’s time together as if our very lives

A glittering guest list is what every star-struck Hollywood hostess dreams of. Last year the dream might have starred the Richard Burtons and the Paul Newmans. But this year the odds-on favorites have got to be Angie Dickinson and Burt Bacharach, the handsomest, most talented, most sought-after duo in or out of town. To get *them* to come to your party would be like getting Artur Rubenstein to play chopsticks on your upright piano.

This, at least, is the public image of Hollywood’s

newest Golden Couple. However, when you get a rare inside view of how the Bacharachs actually live, it’s a far cry from all that.

For the 43-year-old Burt, there is the omnipresent, built-in fear that exists in all creative minds: the dread that the next musical note he strikes will be a sour one. He’s a man who doesn’t sleep well. Often at night he will get up quietly, a tune jangling nervously in his mind, and go to his secluded, soundproof study in the basement of his home to



The Bacharach's daughter, Nikki (enjoying a joke with her parents, left, and a day at the beach with her mother, above), was born prematurely. Now six, she has overcome almost all of the handicaps that followed her early arrival.

Don Ornitz—Globe

A GOLDEN COUPLE by Muriel Davidson

depended on it," Angie says, "and in a way, they do."

scratch out the notes he hears in his head. From such interludes have come wonderful songs like *What the World Needs Now Is Love*, *Sweet Love*; *Alfie*; *This Girl's in Love with You*; *The Look of Love*; *Raindrops Keep Fallin' On My Head*; *I'll Never Fall in Love Again*, and more than 200 others. The songs are why Irving Berlin has called him "The George Gershwin of the '70s." The Emmy statue Burt won for his musical TV special last year (for which he not only composed the music, but con-

ducted the orchestra and sang) sits tarnished and unpolished on his mantel—quiet testimony to his indifference to things past. "There's never enough time for all that has to be done," he says, "there's just never enough time."

For Angie, the problem is different. She has more or less sublimated her own career in favor of her husband's, and her decision to do so has called for difficult adjustments. As a rising young actress, her flawless legs—like

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BURT BACHARACH AND ANGIE DICKINSON

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Marlene Dietrich's before her—were once insured for a million dollars, and to dramatize that fact, her studio photographed her in a black leotard, standing atop a \$1,000,000 stack of currency. No longer is she so available. Today she accepts few star roles (her latest are *Pretty Maids All in a Row*, *The Resurrection of Zachary Wheeler* and *Second Face*) and they must be carefully programmed to fit into Burt's frenetic schedule. "I'm more receptive to work now than I've been in recent years," Angie told me recently, "but I am not yet ready to say to Burt, 'Sorry, darling, I can't come to London to be with you for three months.' I organize our little family's time together as if our very lives depended on it. And, in a way, they do."

For together, Angie and Burt share an overwhelming common concern, where *both* put aside career problems and demands, and devote themselves entirely to their six-year-old daughter, Nikki.

When Nikki was born almost three months prematurely, she weighed exactly one pound, ten ounces. At first, she was not expected to survive. "Her head wasn't even as large as a baseball," said Angie. "In the hospital, Burt and I just stood there looking helplessly through a glass window while

the doctors fought to save her. Finally they told us she would live, but that there would be brain damage, and that she'd probably be blind."

Recently, six years after those difficult days, I sat in the Bacharach's comfortably unpretentious living room and personally observed how miraculously the child has overcome her handicaps. Nikki flitted about the room like a blonde hummingbird. She sang her version of her father's song, *Promises, Promises*. She chattered charmingly as she played with her collection of toy horses—imitating her dad's abiding passion for the real racehorses he owns.

"Nikki *was* slow to learn," Angie explained, "but only slow, not retarded. Now we sometimes wish she wouldn't learn so fast." Blessedly, she has escaped blindness, too, but she does have an optical problem called strabismus, which prevents her from focusing both eyes on the same point at the same time. Nikki already has had eye surgery, and it is hoped that that condition, too, will be corrected.

As a result of Nikki—no less than of their own temperaments—the Bacharachs spend most of their time in their totally secluded house, which is behind gates within gates in a remote Beverly Hills canyon, or in their equally private forty-seventh-floor apartment in New York. Burt's work, of course, takes him to studios and concert halls all over the world. For example, his last year's CBS special (in which he ap-

peared with Barbra Streisand, Tom Jones and Rudolph Nureyev) was filmed in New York, Hollywood and London. His 1972 special (which will be seen on April 23 on ABC) was done *entirely* in London.

He also emerges from his self-imposed isolation to pursue his pet hobby and joy: the buying and racing of thoroughbred horses. Of the 11 he owns his favorite filly is Nikki's Promise, named, of course, after his daughter. When Nikki's Promise placed third at Hollywood Park not long ago, Burt told me he was more excited than when, that same week, two of his songs made the Top Ten in the record-selling charts.

Angie, too, surfaces for her work, and also for *her* special form of relaxation: politics. As a close friend of the Kennedy family, she has been active in two presidential and two senatorial campaigns. She told me, "I once dedicated my life to help put John F. Kennedy in the White House." According to friends who knew her then, she did just that, learning about campaign issues and policies as thoroughly as she memorized her movie scripts (she then was under contract to Universal Pictures). As a Kennedy activist, she also became closely associated with such dignitaries as the then U.S. Ambassador to India, John Kenneth Galbraith. New York society editors still recall the spectacle of the ultra-dignified, six-foot-six-inch Galbraith wildly doing the

Twist one night at El Morocco with the at-least-one-foot-shorter Angie.

It seems nearly inconceivable that the politically oriented actress (she is also big on astrology) could ever have met the shyly modest, almost apolitical Burt Bacharach, who was known at the time of their first encounter—if he was known at all—only as the pianist-arranger for Marlene Dietrich. Angie and Burt are as far apart in background as another Golden Couple—Georgia country girl Joanne Woodward and Paul Newman, member of a wealthy suburban Cleveland family.

Burt is the son of Bert Bacharach, the well-known syndicated newspaper columnist and author. In the early 1930s, while Burt was still toddling around his parents' spacious home in Forest Hills, N.Y., one Angeline Brown was making a noisy, if uneventful entrance into the town of Kulm, N.D. Her father was the owner, editor and publisher of the *Kulm Messenger*, and prophetically he turned the birth of his third daughter into front-page, headline news for the *Messenger's* 625 readers.

Kulm's 85-year-old retired postmistress, Mrs. Annie Bjornson, remembers Angeline as "a sparkling youngster, skipping down the street instead of walking. Of course no one dreamed she'd be a movie star, for goodness sakes, but we all knew she was completely different from her sisters, Mary Lou and Janet. Special, she was. Glowing, you might say."

Angie was nine years old when the Brown family moved to Burbank, Calif., to escape the cruel North Dakota win-

ters. While she was attending parochial school in Burbank, Burt was still in Forest Hills, struggling with two problems: the first, his mother's insistence that he take piano lessons. (He really wanted to play drums, but he couldn't keep time to the music on the radio. He didn't do too well on the piano, either, but at least when he made his own tempo, it didn't sound too bad.) His second problem, which he has still not entirely escaped, was his hated nickname, "Happy." Recalls Irma, his charming mother, "On the way to the hospital to deliver him, I remembered that we didn't have any names picked out. When he arrived we still hadn't agreed on a name. He was our only son, but we hated the idea of calling him Junior. Finally we settled for naming him Burt—spelled with a "u" instead of an "e" as my husband does. We were so happy to have him, though, that I started to call him Happy, and to this day we've never called him anything else. He tolerates the name from us, but no one else had better try calling him that."

While Burt was suffering from both the rigors of orthodontics and his piano lessons, Angie (whose teeth were as naturally beautiful as her fabled legs) placidly continued in school. In high school she took secretarial courses "so I could go out and support myself as soon as possible." School over, she got an office job with a Burbank aircraft company. She also got married for a short time to a football player named Gene Dickinson. All she retained of the marriage was Gene's last name, which she considered more distinctive than Brown. A career in show business seemed as distant as her early life in the flatlands of North Dakota.

But, in one of those quirks of fate, her debut in the entertainment world came much sooner than Burt's; her success much more quickly. Her company entered her in a beauty contest and she won. The prize was acting lessons, which she took, desultorily with the wife of the Columbia Pictures acting coach, meanwhile continuing her typing and shorthand chores at the aircraft plant. Before long she was picking up routine television jobs on the side, including a stint as a chorus girl on *The Jimmy Durante Show*. One night, in the inscrutable way of Hollywood, movie director Howard Hawks observed her kicking her magnificent legs, and promptly cast her in an ankle-length costume as the female lead opposite John Wayne in a period western, *Rio Bravo*. She was a smash, and went on to do other big-hit movies, including her finest, *Captain Newman, M.D.*, with Gregory Peck.

Burt, in the meantime, was struggling along in semi-obscurity. During the Korean War, while still a student at McGill University in Montreal, Canada, he was drafted into the Army and sent to Germany. By now he was so musically oriented that when the Army assigned him to be a clerk, he automatically typed the word "bass" instead of "Base" in soldiers' military orders; whereupon the Army threw up its collective hands

and decided to let him tour the bases in Germany as a pianist-entertainer. There he met Vic Damone, and when both returned to the United States, Burt became Damone's accompanist.

Burt also tried his hand at song-writing during this period—with total non-results. But among show-folk he was developing a reputation as an inventive accompanist and was hired in this capacity by people like Polly Bergen, the Ames Brothers and, finally, Marlene Dietrich. He, like Angie, had a brief fling at marriage in the 1950s: to singer Paula Stewart.

While Burt was trailing in the wake of Dietrich's successful concert tours, Angie had finished *Captain Newman, M.D.*, and was sent to New York by Universal Pictures to help publicize the film. Among the dozens of newspapermen who interviewed her on that hectic limousine-and-champagne trip was Burt's father, the columnist.

The elder Bacharach took one look at Angie's wide-set, deep-brown eyes, her almost classic Grecian beauty, her superb body, and said, in the manner of doting fathers everywhere, "Have I got a boy for you!" The "boy" apparently had a mind of his own, since Burt didn't get around to phoning Angie for a date until a year later. "We met and had the obligatory drink together," said Angie, "and it was just nothing. Burt disappeared again for six months. Then, to my amazement, he called for another date. This time it was different. When he brought me home that night, and when his lips touched mine, I knew this was something very special. We were married two months later."

A year after that, with the arrival of Nikki and the anguish of her premature birth, Angie's strong maternal instinct took over. She spent less and less time at her work, and more and more time with her baby.

Friends say that Burt's reaction to their problem paralleled his wife's, but moved him into an unparallel direction—a frenzy of musical creativity with his close friend and collaborator, lyricist Hal David. One reason for this, the friends say, was Burt's desire to relieve Angie of the additional worries created by the staggering costs of Nikki's medical care. In any event, beginning with his hit song, *Do You Know the Way to San Jose* (recorded by Dionne Warwick, who has recorded all Burt's tunes), his career has gone in only one direction—up—helped along, no doubt, by his stunning good looks.

His first financial breakthrough had come shortly before *San Jose*, with the initial Bacharach-David song, *Magic Moments*. It was a melody that successfully bridged the gap between rock music and the old standards. Then, as now, he disregarded all the basic forms of conventional music-writing. As composer Richard Rodgers says, "You never know how many bars or changes of rhythm Burt is going to use in any given song. That's what makes his work so unique and unpredictable." Putting it another way, the great jazz trumpet player, Clark Terry, says, "Most composers write from their heads. Burt's

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