

Candace Cameron has 'Full House' of her own

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By Mike Celizic

From Judy Garland to Drew Barrymore to Danny Bonaduce to McCauley Culkin, the litany of child stars who grew up to be troubled – and sometimes tragic – adults is as long as it is sad.

Candace Cameron, a child star herself in the role of D.J. Tanner in the '80s sitcom "Full House," has seen it first-hand. One her co-stars, Jodie Sweetin, battled addiction and another, Mary-Kate Olsen, fell prey to anorexia.

So how, TODAY's Natalie Morales wanted to know, did Cameron grow up to be a happily married, stay-at-home mother of three who has never been arrested, served a term in rehab or been the subject of salacious tabloid headlines.

Cameron, the cute kid who is now 31 and prettier than ever, explained that for her, it's all about family.

"My mom and dad – they were always there. They were always on the set. They focused on our family life," Cameron explained. "The entertainment business wasn't the end-all. They weren't out to get the next big paycheck or the next big movie. It was about 'What can we do as a family.' "

Her older brother, Kirk, was also a child star on the show "Growing Pains," but Cameron said her parents always let them know that if they let their stardom go to their heads, they'd find themselves out of their jobs.

" 'This is a wonderful thing, but if it becomes the priority in your life, then we're going to stop it,' " she remembers her parents saying. "They were willing to say no and put their foot down, and that's what kept us grounded."

She was one of four children of Robert Cameron, a school teacher who is now retired, and Barbara Cameron, a stay-at-home mom. They lived in Panorama City, Calif., and, Cameron said, wouldn't have even considered getting into television if it hadn't been for a friend of her mother's who was in the business.

The friend told Barbara Cameron, " 'Oh, your kids are so cute. You should have them do commercials,'

Cameron said. "That was kind of how we started."

She did her first commercial at the age of 5, and for the next six years had regular work, including spot roles on various television shows. In 1985, Kirk got his starring role as Mike Seaver in "Growing Pains."



Two years later, at the age of 11, she went through three auditions for a role in a new show to be called "Full House."

She got the role of "D.J. Tanner," the eldest of three daughters being raised by a widower father, played by Bob Saget. The show was panned by critics, but audiences loved it, and it was a staple of Friday night prime time for eight years and 193 episodes. Today, it still thrives in syndication.

"People loved it because it was such a wholesome show, and it was so full of goodness," Cameron told Morales. "People could sit down and just be entertained and not have to worry about the content for their kids."

One of her co-stars, Jodie Sweetin, who played the middle sister, became addicted to alcohol and then crystal meth after the show's run ended. Twins Mary-Kate and Ashley Olsen, who took turns playing Michelle, the youngest in the family, grew up to be the highly successful owners of the Dualstar Entertainment Group, a production company with more than a billion dollars in annual sales.

But Mary-Kate has battled anorexia nervosa and had a highly publicized romance with Stavros Niarchos III, the Greek shipping heir who broke off with her to take up an affair with Paris Hilton.

One of her brother's co-stars, child actress Tracey Gold, also battled anorexia, almost dying from the disorder.

But Morales observed, even after having three children, Cameron looks to be in better shape than she was when she was a teenager.

Cameron attributed that to her husband, former NHL hockey star Valeri Bure, whom she married 11 years ago.

"He's a professional athlete," she said. "We work out together. We have fun with the kids. We all play tennis together, we ride bikes, we go on walks together. It's really a family effort."

The couple were introduced by Dave Coulier, who played a family friend and mentor on "Full House." A big hockey fan, Coulier had met Bure at a charity event and told Cameron she had to meet him.

As it turned out, Bure, an immigrant from Russia, had learned English by watching television, and one of his favorite shows was "Growing Pains," and one of his favorite characters was D.J. Tanner.

"We hit it off," she said.

She had her first child, Natasha, when she was 22. Lev and Maksim followed.

Cameron could have kept working, but being a mom was more important.

"The way I was raised, family was always the most important," she said. "When I had our first daughter, Natasha, I knew that's what I wanted to do. It wasn't always easy at times, having grown up on television and being in the entertainment industry. But I'm so happy and thankful I made it a point to be a stay-at-home mom and raise them through such important times in their life."

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