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Final Project

History 105

Parkland College - Sarah Simmons

And Now, Ladies and Gentlemen, Miss Judy Garland

Judy Garland has always been known for her stand-out role as “Dorothy” in *The Wizard of Oz*, but her life had many more trials than the character who sang about happy little bluebirds flying beyond the rainbow. She experienced not only successes like *Oz*, but also becoming known worldwide for her ability to capture an audience. She was more than an actress or a singer, she was a performer. Her need to be loved by an audience not only made it love her, but also had repercussions to her mental health. Despite many obstacles, Judy was persistent and determined to reach her audience.

The child who would grow up to become Judy Garland was born on June 10, 1922, to Francis “Frank” and Ethel Gumm. She was a surprise third child and her parents contemplated abortion, but kept her in the end. They named her Frances Ethel, but she went by Baby from early on in her life. Baby grew up in Grand Rapids, Minnesota, the place of her birth. She had a good early childhood; “‘That’s the only time I ever saw my mother and father happy,’ she said, ‘in that wonderful town’” (Clarke 19). It was there that she experienced illnesses - ear infections, and acute acidosis which threatened her life. Baby was a daddy’s girl, and would continue to seek protective men like her father throughout her life. Babe began performing with her sisters Mary Jane and Jimmie, the group being known as The Gumm Sisters, at the age of two. However, Grand Rapids would not remain her home forever; her father created problems by pursuing young men, and the family had to leave Grand Rapids.

The Gumm Sisters moved to Lancaster, California, with their family to avoid further criticism for their father’s actions. Babe’s talent continued to grow and she was the most confident of the trio. The Gumm Sisters got a gig at the Los Angeles radio station KFI, *The Kiddies Hour*, and performed weekly. They also took dance and performance lessons with Ethel Meglin in Hollywood on weekends. In 1928 they performed with The Meglin Kiddies troupe, and they also had their first movie slot in 1929 – *The Big Revue*. As it became clear where the talent was among the sisters, Baby Gumm started becoming a solo act.

In her later childhood, Ethel Gumm started to become Babe’s manager instead of her mother. She took Babe to auditions every week; Baby loved performing but hated auditions.

Ethel, in turn, would do anything it took to get Babe hired, and introduced her to drugs to energize her and make her sleep at night. Poor Babe also suffered mental abuse at the hands of her mother; when she did something wrong her mother would leave her alone in a hotel room without promise of return. Babe said her mother “in the middle of great kindness or loud laughter, [was still] capable of saying something or doing something that would scare [her] to death.” (Clarke 39). Babe’s parents began to have marital problems. In the midst of their feuding, Frank kept pursuing relations with teenage boys, and Ethel took a lover. Will Gilmore was the name of Ethel’s lover; he had an “unbending demeanor [which] made him seem older” (Clarke 40).

Ethel got a job in Los Angeles in 1929, and brought her mother and sister to live there with her. The Gumm sisters moved in with their mother in July, but were soon sped off for several weeks of big performances throughout California. After moving in with her mother, Babe began attending the Lawlor School for Professional Children on Hollywood Boulevard. She became friends with Mickey Rooney, and was admired for her talent by her classmates. Her performance of the song “Bill” set her apart as she had a mature voice and talent far beyond her years. After a successful tour of the Northwest, Ethel elected to take girls on tour through several cities in 1934; Denver, Colorado Springs, and Chicago.

In Chicago, they experienced hardship, but also met and befriended the Andrews sisters, Babe becoming their friend through her talent. The Gumm Sisters became The Garland Sisters after getting a week-long job at the Oriental Theater. They also found more jobs in Denver, Milwaukee, and Kansas City before heading home in October of 1934. In L.A., the girls began to get more bookings including the Beverly-Wilshire Hotel, Grauman’s Chinese Theater, and the Orpheum. A certain “*Variety* critic said that as a trio [the Garland Sisters] were nothing; but when Babe was featured... ‘she never [failed] to stop the show’” (Clarke 50). While the girls achieved success, however, Babe’s father was evicted from the theatre he ran in 1935, and was cast out of the town for his advances on young men. After an eventful time through the summer of 1935, Babe changed her name officially to Judy Garland.

Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer’s Ida Koverman heard Babe perform and loved her, and soon she was going through a process of auditions for the mega film company. In the end, she signed a seven-year contract with MGM on September 27th, 1935. The whole family moved to just south of Hollywood, where Judy “spent every day at the studio, where she took academic classes in the morning and was coached... in the afternoon” (Clarke 55) Judy was very close to her father, and was devastated in 1935 when he contracted spinal meningitis and died on November 17th.

Judy was heartbroken, but Ethel left for several days after his death, probably visiting her lover Will Gilmore. Judy felt that no one was going to be on her side anymore after her devoted father died.

Judy soon learned that acting was not as glamorous as it seemed; she was in limbo for a time, mostly working as an entertainer at studio parties. Finally, she had a short with Deanna Durbin titled *Every Sunday*. Not long after came a 20th Century Fox film, *Pigskin Parade*, in 1936. Her third film and breakthrough was *Broadway Melody of 1938* with her song "You Made Me Love You" a song which portrayed an adoring fangirl singing of her love to famous actor Clark Gable. She was included in five movies in 1938, and was noticed for her natural acting talent and endearing childlike qualities. However, Judy was considered chubby and was forced to eat only chicken soup for a time, and later given "dieting" drugs. After these series of movies, she went on tour and also traveled to her home state, where she was informed that she was being cast as "Dorothy" in *The Wizard of Oz*.

Metro was to produce the famous *Oz* story, and chose to create a musical drama with comedic overtones. Mervyn LeRoy was the producer, but George Cukor as a stand in director for a week made a mark on Judy's acting - she had to be "transparently sincere" (Clarke 95). He also made her not Hollywood showy, but instead made her wig and makeup simple and natural. Ray Bolger played the Scarecrow, Jack Haley the Tin Man, and Bert Lahr the Cowardly Lion, and the bunch worked hard through the difficult task of filming. Buddy Ebsen, first cast of Tin Man, suffered aluminum poisoning from makeup, and the Wicked Witch giggles while filming scenes, and Director Fleming once stepped in and slapped her to stop one of these fits. Filming lasted more than five months, and the production went through four different directors. The project ended up costing \$2,777,000 (Clarke 100). Publicity for the film was crucial, and Judy spent time both travelling to cities, and preparing and shooting *Babes in Arms* with friend and co-star Mickey Rooney. Although *Oz* had a deficit at first when released in 1939, it was released a second time in the 40s and later shown on television with incredible profits. In the end, the memorable movie launched Judy into the career of her dreams.

Judy not only received a new career, but also received an award for *Babes in Arms* and *The Wizard of Oz* – best juvenile performer. Her performance in *Oz* was spectacular; she made Dorothy "the quiet center about which the movie turns; she [put] her imprint not only on her own role, but on everyone else's" (Clarke 107). The song "Over the Rainbow" was perfect for her, melancholy and expressive "of her own turbulent emotions" (Clarke 108). After her first two huge movies, she was awarded also by placing her hands and feet in cement next to many

other stars in front of Grauman's Chinese Theater. Judy then settled in her own house in Bel Air with her mother and sister, which included her own suite.

Although she was with her mother in a stable financial situation, she continued to feel unloved by her. Her mother simply didn't "hold her tightly and blanket her with words of comfort and reassurance... [or give her] words and gestures that come so naturally to most mothers" (Clarke 112). Her mother married widower Will Gilmore, her long-time lover in 1939; her daughters disapproved of the marriage. Will wanted to have control of the family's money, and this control eventually split his marriage to Ethel after only three and a half years.

In her love life, Judy had a regular need for a strong man, and she had several young love interests. Judy's first real crush was Oscar Levant, a concert pianist and composer, whom she met in the summer of 1939. However, they did not end up together; he avoided her advances and married another woman named June Gale. Another of her crushes was Artie Shaw, a handsome jazz clarinetist. She fell in love with him but he only saw her as his little sister, also settling into marrying another woman, the gorgeous Lana Turner. The two continued to be friends for many years, although she was heartbroken. Judy graduated from Los Angeles's University High School in 1940, two weeks after she had turned eighteen.

As Judy became a woman, she spent her nights at clubs like Ciro's, the Victor Hugo, and La Conga, although the publicity department at MGM started to discourage her partying. Judy began to have her self-confidence destroyed by Metro's beauty standards; Judy believed herself to be "an ugly duckling surrounded by swans" (Clarke 134). She also felt that her value was found in being an entertainer; if the audience thought she was beautiful and performed well, she was ratified. These thoughts affected the all of her life and relationships. However, Judy did not realize that her power to entertain won her more fans than her beauty; "though the swan may be more pleasing to the eye, the nightingale has greater powers of enchantment" (Clarke 137).

From 1939 to 1943, Judy made ten movies, including the classic *Ziegfeld Girls*. Six of those ten movies were made with one of her best-matched co-stars, Mickey Rooney. She and Mickey Rooney were often paired together for many films in their teen years; they were portrayed as "average modern teenagers," although they were "obviously *extra*-ordinary due to their talent" (Griffin 125). The difference between the stardom of Judy and Mickey, which served in her films and was true in her life, was that "Garland's [characters] bordered on erasure, thus encouraging the audience to root for her to assert her self-worth" (Griffin 127).

What drew people in her performances was the fact that she was sincere and emotional, and they could connect with her.

Judy worked incredibly long days to produce her movies, while the stress and exhaustion only helped her to begin taking more drugs. Judy had affairs with a few men after she had been heartbroken by Artie Shaw, although she did not truly fall for any of them. She did, however, fall for a man named David Rose in 1940, who was an older musician like the others, but was quieter and kinder than the others.

Many people, including MGM and her mother, did not want Judy to get married as early in life as she did. They also did not like the fact that she wanted to marry an older man who had already been divorced once. Her mother learned to accept the inevitable, although MGM continued to disapprove. Judy Garland was married to David Rose on July 27th, 1941, when she had just turned nineteen. Judy and Dave moved into their own house in Bel Air, and Judy had the chance to take a few months break from productions. She took the time to volunteer her service to the war effort, and sold war bonds, stamps, and entertaining at training camps around the country. She and her husband travelled and performed vigorously, despite a severe case of strep throat that Judy contracted at one point. Judy and David began having problems after the first nine months of marriage; he was a sullen and passive-aggressive character, and Judy didn't know how to run their household. She discovered she was pregnant in the fall of 1942, and her mother and husband both forced her to have an abortion. Soon after, the marriage between Judy and David dissolved but did not completely end. It had lasted a mere year and a half.

Although still married by law to David, Judy fell in love with the dashing Tyrone Power, who was also married. Their relationship was slowly torn apart, however, by her publicist, Betty Asher. Betty Asher became the close companion to Judy, and would report to the studio all of the actress' daily actions. It was rumored that the two were occasionally sexually involved as well. Between the stress of filming again and worrying about her relationship with Tyrone, Judy "dropped weight alarmingly, from a normal 110 pounds to ninety-four," which confined her to bed for days and kept her from dancing for weeks (Clarke 170). Although Judy pressured Tyrone in to asking for a divorce, his wife would not agree to it, and the affair was broken off.

Judy filmed the Freed-produced and Minnelli-directed *Meet Me in St. Louis*, her second color film, during 1943 and 1944. She played the same type of role she had been playing for years - a young, girl-next-door character, but was somewhat unhappy with it. MGM promised her that what she thought was a dull plot would not harm her career. During production for the

film, Judy was often either late, ill, or absent completely. The various upper and downer pills she had been taking affected her sleep pattern and emotional stability. Minnelli expected much subtlety and sincerity from the actors in the film, and Judy had a hard time knowing exactly what he wanted. In the end, *Meet Me in St. Louis* was a relatable and memorable film, surpassing all former MGM films in its box office sums.

While her filming life was quite busy, Judy's daily life was too. Judy met and began an affair with Joe Mankiewicz in 1943, while still maintaining her relationship with Tyrone. They could not get married because of his institutionalized wife and two young children, but he was a very valuable influence in Judy's career and life. Joe encouraged Judy to undergo psychoanalysis, as it was clear that her self-doubt was unfounded with such success as she had. Under Doctor Ernst Simmel, Judy began psychotherapy, and she was making headway in getting better, becoming her own person and not being controlled by her mother's antics. In an effort to stop Judy's psychotherapy, her mother went to MGM, who fired Joe. He, however, got a better job with Twentieth-Century Fox, and continued to support Judy as she went to visit Simmel. Doctor Simmel proved to eventually be a poor match for Judy; he was too authoritative and not sympathetic enough. In the midst of a possibly feigned pregnancy, Judy travelled with Joe to New York for an abortion, where she found she was not pregnant upon arrival. Their affair faded away after that trip.

Near the release of *Meet Me in St. Louis* in 1945, Judy began living with and going out with Vincente Minnelli. Vincente Minnelli had a very similar rise to stardom as Judy had, and the two got along well, although he was clearly homosexual. Meanwhile, Judy finally divorced the practically forgotten David Rose in June of 1944. As Judy worked on her first non-musical film, *The Clock*, she turned to Vincente for acting help. The two began an affair on the set, once even being caught having sex. Vincente Minnelli and Judy Garland announced their engagement in January of 1945. MGM approved and encouraged their marriage, hoping that Vincente would be a stable partner to Judy. The two were happily married in June of 1945, and were allowed three months for a honeymoon in New York. In August of the same year, Judy found out she was pregnant, and this time was allowed to keep the baby. Her healthy baby girl, who she named Liza Minnelli, was born on March 8th, 1946. Judy took a yearlong break from productions after Liza's birth.

Judy began filming a screen version of the Broadway hit *The Pirate*. Once again, Judy failed to show up to filming, suffering from the effects of drugs. She would show up either in a sleepy stupor or a paranoid, hysteric state. *The Pirate* fell flat when it was released in 1948,

and was the only movie that Judy made which did not yield Metro a profit.

Judy began to have a mental breakdown, and also had an affair with Yul Brynner, as her marriage had been deteriorating. Judy came home one evening to find Vincente sleeping with another man, and her reaction was to begin hacking at her wrists. She was sent to a psychiatric clinic called Las Campanas, so she could rest and recover. Her treatment at Las Campanas was not very successful, so she was sent to the Austen Riggs Foundation. Although her treatments did not reach to the core of her problems, and there were no antidepressant medications at the time to help her, Judy returned to Los Angeles in a better mood.

The ever persistent Judy began to film *Easter Parade* in 1948, and the atmosphere on the set was relaxed and cordial, unlike Judy's other recent productions. After Gene Kelly broke his ankle and could not play Judy's counterpart, Fred Astaire took over the role. He gave her new confidence by bringing his own confidence to the set, and she once again blossomed as an actress. *Easter Parade* was incredibly successful, becoming "Metro's biggest grossing movie in 1948" (Clarke 240). Judy was said to have really grown up and done well in the film; she had a womanly role and played it with dedication. In her next film, *The Barkleys on Broadway*, also with Fred Astaire, Judy was not as reliable as she had been in *Easter Parade*. She was dropped from the film because she refused to come to the set on days when she was to be filming. Her contract at MGM was also temporarily suspended.

She regained her strength at the hands of her good friends Sylvia Sidney and her husband, who took her into their house and cared for her. Her husband, Vincente, was about as helpful as her first husband, which was not hardly at all; she needed a protector and had none. Judy was cast and played her role in *In the Good Old Summertime* after coming back from a time of rest, and the movie was released with success in 1949. Soon after, Judy began work on *Annie Get Your Gun*, and persevered even when the lead broke his leg. It was during this time that she decisively separated from her husband, Vincente. Once again the stress of working on the movie caused her to lose weight and take large doses of drugs again, and although a new doctor prescribed for her six electric shock treatments, she remained exhausted. Judy was fired from the role of "Annie" and suspended from payroll at MGM because of her consistent tardiness and uncooperativeness.

In 1948, it was made known to all of Hollywood that Judy was a drug addict. Judy had an organized supply system of drugs; she had several doctors prescribing medication, and almost every pharmacy in town supplying her. Judy was sent to a hospital again, this time not a mental facility, but a place in Boston which taught her to eat well and sleep well again. Judy spent time

recovering, and also visiting with many of the children in the hospital she was in - they were good medicine for her. She grew attached to one little girl who had not spoken for two years, but when Judy went to leave, the little girl spoke again. Judy was very moved; “I had done a human being some good. She had helped to make me well, and I had helped her” (Clarke 263).

Judy returned to MGM to film *Summer Stock*, and got right back into the same problems she had before. She would be so drugged that she was delirious and could hardly stand, often experiencing hallucinations where she thought her fellow actors were out to get her. The end of *Summer Stock* called for a big finale number, and Judy was able to pull through and produce “Get Happy,” a show stopper and her final song at MGM. She was asked to take a roll for another actress in *Royal Wedding*, but her absences plagued this production as well. It gave MGM the opportunity to finally be rid of her, and they finally suspended her contract for the last time in 1950.

After her release from MGM, Judy had several options – television, Broadway, or even London’s premiere variety show, the Palladium. However, none of these brought her hope in her misery, and one night she tried to commit suicide by slitting her own throat. The attempt was unsuccessful, and hardly harmful; she had only suffered a minor scratch. Everyone around her wanted to do their best to aid her in her difficult time, although the headlines blared disruptive gossip about her misfortune. It was at this time that she also broke off her marriage to Vincente Minnelli, a relationship that had lasted five years.

Judy met Michael Sidney “Sid” Luft in New York just prior to her marriage dissolving. Sid was a strong and temperamental man, much different from Judy’s former lovers. In the beginning of 1951, Judy accepted an offer to perform for several weeks in London’s Palladium, and she prepared a somewhat biographical set of her best songs to perform. When she reached the stage in London, however, she struggled with stage fright on the first night. After incredible success – she sold out all of her shows – Judy went on to tour throughout Europe. Upon her return to the States, Judy began to perform a similar yet more extravagant show at the Palace on Broadway. The show ran a record nineteen weeks, with a total of 184 performances. She also spent several weeks performing the same show in theaters in Los Angeles and northern California, as well as Chicago, before ending her run due to pregnancy.

She married Sid Luft in June of 1952, shortly before her thirtieth birthday. Not long after, she gave birth to her second child, a girl they named Lorna Luft. All the while, she continued to deal with depression and self-harm. After a time of recovery, the death of her mother in January of 1953 brought her depression back again.

Right after her mother's death, Judy began work on one of her most pivotal movies – *A Star Is Born*. For the first weeks, she was fairly reliable in showing up to production at Warner Brothers, and when she did at first begin to avoid work, was still focused when on set. When released in 1954, the movie was extremely successful, but after unnecessary film cuts, attendance dwindled. Warner Brothers ended up losing money on the picture, but one of Judy's memorable songs, "Born In A Trunk," still holds its legacy today. Not only that, but she was nominated and expected to win an Oscar for her performance.

Judy's third child, Joseph Wiley Luft, was born on March 29th, 1955. She was in the hospital with him while expecting news on her nomination, but was disappointed by a loss. Although expecting the film to allow her back into Hollywood jobs, it fell flat despite her hard work and hope. She tried once again to tour with stage productions, and did not have as much success. It was then that she began doing a version of her stage productions on TV, "drawing a viewership of forty million" with her first broadcast on CBS (Clarke 328). She also performed in Las Vegas with record profits before returning to the Palace in New York for a seventeen-week run.

The good times were soon followed by a small amount of bad again, however. After a dispute, CBS cancelled her show and her contract. She and her husband attempted to sue the station without success. She overcame the problem by returning to Las Vegas in 1957, before touring throughout the country and to London's Palladium again. She had problems with performing in some places, but soon was back on top again. In 1959, she appeared in three of America's biggest opera houses, including the Metropolitan, where she made a record \$190,000 after seven shows.

Behind the scenes of her successes, Judy's life was not as starstruck as her fans were. She also continued to expand her horizons in drugs, taking as many as seven at one time in a harsh concoction. If anyone proceeded to take away her hidden stashes, as her husband often did, she would occasionally react with extreme anger. Also, she and her husband Sid were often on the brink of financial ruin, no matter how much money Judy managed to bring in; they were indebted to both the Warner Brothers and the IRS. Their problems were due to Sid's overspending, and Judy threatened to divorce him. The two fought vigorously, and Sid would often leave after only a few days with the family. This gave Judy ample time to have affairs with

James Mason, Frank Sinatra, and Harry Rubin. She also had affairs with two or three women, although she was not mainly attracted to them. As her marriage deteriorated, so did her health.

In November of 1959, Judy was admitted to Doctors Hospital in Manhattan, suffering liver failure and acute hepatitis. The doctor warned that she could only have five years left in her life, the last of which she would not be able to perform through. She took many months to rest and recover, travelling to London, a place where she felt very much at home. Soon enough, she was back to performing, not only at the Palladium, but also in Paris and for U.S. troops stationed in West Germany. Judy took on a new manager, Freddie Fields, at her husband's suggestion. She also went back to tour in America in 1961, the best performance of her entire career being in Carnegie Hall on April 23rd. Her audience would later say that "she had shown what she could do and what she could be, and, through the miracle of her music, she had opened a window into a realm beyond [the ordinary]" (Clarke 355).

At that time she also played roles in *Judgment at Nuremberg* and *The Lonely Stage*. Soon after, she worked to produce voice-overs for a cat named Mewsette in *Gay Purr-ee*, along with playing roles in *A Child Is Waiting* and a sequel to *The Lonely Stage*. With rising marital problems, Judy battled to be rid of her husband of eleven years, Sid Luft. The stress took its toll even more heavily this time, and Judy attempted suicide by overdose. Within a month, she had attempted suicide three more times. As in the past, however, Judy continued to be a genius of acting when she was focused.

Judy also made TV appearances at this time on the *Tonight Show* with Jack Paar, and was scheduled for her own show as well. *The Judy Garland Show* only lasted one season, as it was a costly flop. Her marriage healed somewhat at this time, although she was also having an affair with David Begelman. David stole money from Judy on pretenses of helping her, and although Sid pointed it out to her, she still pursued the relationship. In the sixties, Judy had at least five other lovers, including Mark Herron, who she traveled with to various countries on tour. Although her first performance in Australia was well received, Judy was too heavily drugged to function for her second appearance. When confined in a hotel in Hong Kong due to a hurricane, and after reading a criticism on her second appearance, Judy attempted suicide by overdose. Mark found her unconscious and took her to a nearby hospital where she remained in a coma for fifteen hours, not expected to live. She moved on to Britain, where she attempted suicide by slitting her wrists, but recovered again to attend a charity show which brought back her confidence.

By the beginning of 1965, Judy Garland's once rich voice was beginning its decline; "By the end of her life, that voice, formerly one of great trumpet-like flexibility, was nearly rigid" (Green). However, her audiences still loved her, and she still loved them. She stood up for her homosexual fans; she felt she could identify, to an extent, with the hard lives many of them had. She too "was a victim of intolerable treatment" (Green). She attempted to take part in several movies after touring the country more, but the show business had grown hard against her antics and would not provide her a role.

The year 1965 still brought Judy some happiness, though; she finally divorced Sid Luft and married Mark Herron. Soon after, it was plain to see that Judy had developed probably manic depression or bipolar disorder. Her moods would swing constantly without warning, exacerbated by the new drugs included in her "regimen" – heroine and morphine. She also attempted to set fire to her house twice, and would physically threaten her household employees. Judy was no longer the girl who played "Dorothy"; "Garland's later years were ugly, deranged and ruined by drug addiction" (Leonard).

Not only was Judy a menace at home, but treated her assistant Stevie Phillips horribly. In her memoir, Stevie wrote about the many times that Judy harmed herself in front of her. One of the most horrible times was when Judy slit her wrists down to the artery, and Stevie was covered in her blood. All the while, the only thing she could do was constantly be there for Judy. "Garland's 'suicidal episodes', she rapidly discovered, were not intended to be fatal but were all about 'manipulation and power'" (Leonard). Judy had an undying need for attention, and Stevie gave that to her, keeping her alive four more years than she may have lived without her.

Judy broke off her marriage to Mark Herron, although their divorce would not be till 1967, and had exciting affairs with Tom Green and John Meyer. She continued to fall deeper into debt, ultimately selling her house. She found another lover and man to care for her, Mickey Deans, in 1968, and the two flew off to London together. They were married and had a grand party, but none of Judy's famous friends attended. Judy then toured through Scandinavia, returning to England to settle in a cottage with her new husband. Their happiness was short lived; after only two years of relaxing marriage, Mickey came home to find a disaster. Judy had overdosed for the last time, and with no Stevie to rescue her, it was fatal.

Although the end of Judy Garland's life was far from glamorous, it is not what she should be or is remembered for. She will always be remembered as the all-American girl, the incredibly talented songstress, and the incredible actress that she was. Her life's work continues to capture hearts today, and the world would not be the same without her additions to it.

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