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### Beverly. Goody-two-shoes

Watching re-runs of Shirley Temple films is not useful. Unless perhaps you are making a study of child prodigies. Apparently Beverly enjoyed the way that Beverly could be pronounced to sound a little like Shirley—Shirlee, Beverlee, goody-two-tap-shoes.

Obviously washing clothes is useful, goody-two-shoes. And the sun, the moving sun is usefulness itself! It is not useful to wash the same clothes over, and dry them in the sun; stitching will perish, colours fade. I knew a woman whose clothes became colourless. While I knew her she seemed to become—all beige. She took to wearing beige cashmere sweaters, and slacks, and eventually, wigs of beige too.

Her laugh had been a striking, melodic upward scale. Laughing is useful, even when—perhaps most—in the face of calamity. Goody-two-shoes. And her hair had been pale red; it curled closely and evenly around her face, and she would wear it clipped short. Before it grew grey, before it thinned and thinned and fell out in tufts, at certain angles it seemed to shine, like some strangely natural halo.

A halo is not useful. Trying to see one, trying to earn one, trying to keep it. Trying will make you a goody-two-shoes. Two shoes are useful but the goody two-shoes are good for jealousy, for teasing. And for bunions, the pressing pain and deformity of them.

Sometimes, erratically, Beverly would visit her friends-who-had-married, like my mother, on Sunday afternoons. So she would telephone, and visit us, bringing with her a packet of iced imported biscuits to have with lemon tea. She would ask my sisters and me respectful questions about our homework. Goody-two-shoes. Always she wore around her neck a favourite rose-gold charm—a perfect miniature vintage motor car, with tiny, turning spoked wheels; she had the habit of fingering the charm very delicately as she talked and listened, and let go of it, suddenly, to laugh. Charms are useful: if not the trinket-mementoes, then those of the personality, surely, which give intangible pleasure, and lure each of us into the belief that the globe will tilt our particular way. Goody-two-shoes!

As a child Beverly was a Shirley Temple look-alike. Certainly she was given dancing lessons at the age of three, and with a beaming smile and small fingers fluttering she could dance for her father, and glow and

shimmer and shimmy, and be Beverlee. Is dancing useful, goody-two-shoes? Beverly's father believed that she was a 'phenomenon', a child prodigy. He believed, perhaps, unconsciously, that this was useful.

Each in our own ways, my sisters and I, were goody-two-shoes, and we gave solemnly detailed replies to Beverly's queries. Speaking to our mother then, while the lemon tea cooled to cold, she often complained about her other friends; about headaches, and of having no career. My mother would offer to boil the kettle again. Tackling chores in the kitchen, or laundry, or garden might yield a feeling of renewed usefulness. Goody-two-shoes. Later Beverly did not complain about her cancer, but she spoke about its redoubling, then subsiding, and how there seemed to be no rhythm to it, which was the difficulty.

It can be useful to make a pun, to point out other meanings for a word or phrase. Often fathers make a habit of punning, though not necessarily to be useful. Goody-two-shoes. Ultimately, it is not useful to blame the father for unsatisfactoriness in adult life. Goody-goody-two-shoes.

At Beverly's funeral one of her friends-who-had-married remembered that she had been famous in suburban Adelaide for tap-dancing on stilts. Beverlee, tap-dancing on stilts! I have marvelled ever since at the colourful exuberance of this image; I have imagined such absurdly raucous, hazardous rehearsals, their quality of the carnivalesque. And long wondered at the usefulness of attempting such an act. Stilts are useful for seeing further, and seeming larger, but what tenacious holding they require; holding, manoeuvring, carrying the self so as to seem properly above the world. Goody-two-tap-shoes.

Perhaps with Shirley Temple in mind, Beverly lied about her age. She lied also about her bunions, and about her constant efforts to earn admiration and to feel—useful. Even before her illness, she became nervous about appearing to be 'mutton dressed as lamb', and took to wearing beige; she became afraid of the sound being too loud at the cinema, and then of making her courteous visits, and of not making them, on Sunday afternoons.

Regrets are not useful. Nor, goody-two-shoes, are they useless. I regret that Beverly literally faded from our family existence. Beverly, Beverlee, tap-dancing on stilts: how energetically human to try. Goody-two-shoes.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Cynthia Troup.*