



"I'm just a normal teenager," says Mitchell (in her Ventura County, Calif., bedroom with close friends Megan Chase, left, and Brenda Gunn).

Heaven's Great

TV actress Beverley Mitchell clinches fame on *7th Heaven* while embracing adolescence—and her many young fans

Judging from the student body's enthusiasm over Beverley Mitchell's arrival at Pacoima Middle School near Los Angeles, you would think the kids were about to bond with a Spice Girl. As the 17-year-old actress from television's *7th Heaven* prepared

Photographs by Dorothy Low

to paint murals and plant flowers around campus for the Save the Children charity, dozens of fans surrounded her, offering hats, shirts and even their forearms for her flowery John Hancock. "When people get excited about me, I'm still surprised," says Mitchell.



Mitchell gets onscreen comfort from TV dad Stephen Collins.

DANNY FELD

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"I go to the mall and turn around to see this whole entourage following me. I'm thinking, 'Uh-oh, do I have toilet paper on my shoe?'"

No, just the breakout role on the WB Network's No. 2 series, behind *Dawson's Creek*. A drama about a minister and his wife raising their party of five, *7th Heaven* premiered in 1996 to low ratings but last year grew faster than any show on TV. Two seasons into her role as middle-child Lucy Camden, Mitchell has emerged as *Heaven's* brightest star. "I see a lot of Sally Field in her," says *Heaven* executive producer Aaron Spelling. "Beverley has similar energy and attitude. She believes in herself, but there's no cockiness. She's that way in real life, and she's that way on the show."

The parallels extend to darker places. Last year, Mitchell lost a close friend in a car accident, then agreed to do a recent episode of the show featuring a similar plot. In re-



"I love meeting fans," says Mitchell (signing autographs). "I know some people like to go out in disguises, but not me."

visiting the experience onscreen, "I was able to fix things that I had done wrong," she says. "I hadn't allowed myself time to grieve, focusing on everyone else when I should have dealt with myself." Recalls her TV mom, Catherine Hicks: "You could see that she was looking to release some of her pain."

Mitchell has always sought release through performing. She grew up in Arcadia, Calif., the only child of David, an Indy race car organizer,

and Sharon, an office manager. Mom kept tape recorders in every room of the house to capture her daughter singing Disney songs, and she would cut out one side of cardboard boxes so Beverley could pretend she was on TV. At 4, Mitchell was throwing a tantrum at the mall over a toy she wanted when a talent manager saw her and handed over his business card. "He told me he noticed all the spunk she had," says Sharon. Within

a year, Mitchell was cast in an AT&T commercial, but her big debut nearly crumbled when the bike she was supposed to ride fell on her, gashing her knee. "There were only 15 minutes left to finish filming," says Sharon, "so she didn't want to see what had happened. She did her last scene, and when she saw her leg, she started screaming."

Mitchell landed parts on TV (*Quantum Leap*, *Melrose Place*) and in film (*The Crow: City of Angels*) before snagging her *7th Heaven* role in the spring of 1996. But just as her fictional family came into place, her parents split up. Her father moved to San Diego, while she and her mom moved into a two-bedroom home near Los Angeles. "They're still good friends," she says. "And I spend a lot of time with my father, so things work out for the best."

Not without a solid effort. Like any responsible teen, Mitchell has to balance work and play. Off the clock, she indulges her passion for roaming the mall and doing flips on her trampoline, but she also spends a large chunk of time studying, answering hundreds of fan letters each month and contemplating her future, which will possibly include college starting in 1999. "Life gets so complicated," she says. "It was so nice when I was 5 years old and all I had to worry about was when I could get to the playground. It's not like that anymore. I'm going to be a senior this year, so I'm going to have to take the next step up."

- Jeremy Helliger
- Craig Tomashoff in Los Angeles

"Beverley never wants to exclude anybody," says her mom (with Mitchell by their pool).

