



# Rah! Rah! What? They Didn't Make Cheerleader

So you never rated a gold-megaphone charm or satin uniform to make the boys *die*? Brace up, angel—a bevy of glittery luminaries flubbed *their* high-school tryouts, too! By Ralph Keyes



Hard to believe, but none of these athletic beauties was on the pom-pom line at school. From the top, they are—as if you didn't know—Diana Ross, Loni Anderson, Jane Fonda, Susan Anton, Victoria Principal.

□ Sandy Duncan was *sure* she'd be chosen. Even at fourteen, the Tyler, Texas, charmer could kick, jump way up, and come down in a split, thanks to years of dance lessons. Besides, she was spunky good cheer personified.

Making cheerleader was a *very big deal* in Tyler. Cheerleaders dated football players. They sported impressive little gold megaphones around their necks. And at Hogg Junior High School they wore *neat* purple and gold outfits. Sandy wanted one so badly!

Nearly a quarter of a century later, she can still picture the scene of her tryout: mirror-polished gymnasium floor, bleachers along the walls, the press of onlookers. When her turn came, Sandy dashed in, waving her pompoms and yelling for "H-O-G-G!"

Soon afterward, Hogg's new cheerleaders were announced over the intercom by the outgoing squad. "Hi," came the first girl's voice. "My name is Darlene. The cheerleader to replace me will be . . ." Not Sandy. "Hi," said a second voice. "My name is Jerri. The cheerleader to replace me will be . . ." This one wasn't Sandy either. Neither were the next four.

"I kept waiting for my name," she recalls. "When it didn't come I was *crushed*, but I had to pretend not to mind. The guy I was dating clutched my hand, and it was all very dramatic. Oh, God! When I think of being a cheerleader now I just want to *puke*! But at the time I thought it was the end of my world. I was *devastated*!"

Ever since then, Sandy admits, she's thought of herself as an outsider, someone with her nose perpetually pressed against the glass.

"Crushed?" "Devastated?" Bear in mind that what we are discussing here is the right to frantically wave two pompoms made of shredded tissue paper, smile brightly enough to make your cheeks hurt, and yell the most inane bits

of doggerel ever inflicted on American ears until you're hoarse. What is it then that's so cataclysmic about not making cheerleader?

"We're Gonna F-I-G-H-T!"

Until not so long ago, pom-pom-waving was the social pinnacle for high-school girls. Boys could try out for any number of prestige sports. Or drive a souped-up Chevy. Or look hoody, but *interesting*. Barring the almost *totally* unlikely—being chosen Homecoming Queen—the most visibility a girl could hope for was as a cheerleader. The squad wore their uniforms to school on game days. Best of all, the position bestowed *power*: to lead the crowd, drive the boys *wild*.

"Attention, attention. That was the big thing," says Sandy Duncan, who is not the only pom-pomless girl who went on to stardom still harboring memories of her debacle. Glamorous model and actress Lauren Hutton harks back obsessively to her five unsuccessful tryouts as a Tampa teenager. Even after she had appeared on a record number of *Vogue* covers, Hutton contrasted herself with model Cheryl Tiegs by calling her rival an "all-American cheerleader."

Diane Keaton, another late bloomer, wanted to lead cheers at Santa Ana High in California but had to settle for being elected "Miss Personality" by her classmates. Valerie Perrine points out that her subsequent stint as a Las Vegas showgirl proves she *should* have been on the line at Phoenix Camelback High.

Dory Previn—who grew up to dance at the Latin Quarter, record six albums of her own songs, and receive three Academy Award nominations for song scores—still mourns her muffed chance to make cheerleader at Woodbridge High in New Jersey. Dory recalls that day "*indelibly*: The school yard, the trampled grass, the teachers who were there to choose. . . . I thought, well, so far I haven't made anything, not even good grades, but I am sure, finally, to make

## CHEERLEADER [continued]

the cheerleading squad because of my acrobatic dancing."

At her tryout, Dory did especially good cartwheels and handsprings. She also recalls feeling "too curly haired, crooked toothed, and painfully shy."

The next day, a list was posted of those who had made the squad. Dory's name wasn't on it. How did she feel? "I really blocked out the whole thing after I didn't make it," she says now. "All the *terrific* girls got to be cheerleader."

Today, living and working in Hollywood, Dory Previn meets quite a few cheerleader types—or, as she puts it, the ones with "straight hair, straight teeth, and straight A's."

### "We're Gonna S-C-O-R-E!"

Erma Bombeck insists that to this day she can walk into any room and tell with 90 percent accuracy which women were cheerleaders. She herself is in the latter category, of course—although she did make Honor Society. Cheerleader is what she'd *rather* have made.

This disappointment returned to her the moment she rose to the podium to accept an honorary degree from her *alma mater*. As she opened her mouth to begin her remarks, the columnist later wrote, "It all came back. Cheerleader tryouts: 3 p.m. Wednesday, March 12, in the gym. Margie Kretschmer wearing a turtleneck sweater that hung *loose* around her neck. Holly Harper, who didn't have room in her arms for bones. Suzie Werle, who hadn't cut her hair since the third grade. . . . As I looked out over the crowd of well-wishers, I clutched the leather-bound honorary degree and blurted out, 'Don't try to make up now. It's too late! Where were you when I had fat thighs and a cheerleader wish?'"

Noncheerleaders rarely forget the names of those who won the tryouts they lost: the Barbies and Darlens of this world. The setting where tryouts were held is also recalled in astonishing detail, and so are the outfits they wore.

"Mine was a wimpy little white cotton dress with puff sleeves and a fruit decoration," recalls Harriet Rabb, a dean at Columbia University's School of Law. She also remembers vividly the stage of the auditorium at Houston's John J. Pershing Junior High School, how bright the lights were—and how high the fever she had that day was. Under the best of circumstances, Harriet Rabb knew her prospects weren't good. As a nonblonde, nonadorable, and unusually bright Jewish teenager in Texas, she was aware that her résumé didn't fit the job description. Yet for one full term, the second half of eighth grade, she neglected her studies to prepare for the tryouts. "I just practiced my little heart out," recalls Rabb.

If she didn't expect to make it, then why waste the time trying?

"Because I *wanted* it," explains Rabb. Considered one of the country's leading sex discrimination lawyers, she sees a connection between that effort and her success in winning multimillion-dollar class-action settlements for women. "If you only go for things you're sure to get," says Rabb, "you miss out on a lot."

Perhaps there's a great deal to be said for *not* making cheerleader. Just imagine: If she *had*, Lauren Hutton might be waiting tables in Tampa today; Diane Keaton, leading tours of Disneyland; Erma Bombeck, writing obituaries for the *Dayton Daily News*; and Valerie Perrine, go-go dancing in Phoenix.

### "We're Gonna W-I-N Tonight!"


Sandy Duncan thinks the seeds of her success as an entertainer may have been planted on that day in 1960 when her name wasn't announced over the intercom. To restore her shattered ego, she returned to her dance lessons with a vengeance. Now she had the added motivation of showing the world, and especially Hogg Junior High School, what a mistake the judges had made.

The irony is that to this day Sandy Duncan is perceived by many as the quintessential "cheerleader type." When she actually portrayed a cheerleader in the Los Angeles production of *Vanities*, one review called her performance "brilliant," Sandy says, but he added that of course she was "one of those people. . . ."

"That *son of a bitch*. He just assumed I'd been a cheerleader and didn't have to work at the role."

After she became the town's most famous daughter, a homecoming celebration was held for Sandy Duncan in Tyler, Texas. As part of the festivities, Sandy was unanimously elected head cheerleader by Hogg Junior High School. They even gave her a little gold megaphone to wear around her neck. Did that make her feel better?

Sandy Duncan shakes her head vigorously. "Too late! Too late!"

In fact, she adds, the only thing that does console her is knowing how much more she's done with her life than she might have if she'd made cheerleader. Does she remember the names of those who did? After no more than a moment's hesitation, Sandy Duncan rattles off, "Darlene, Jerri, Susie, Paulette . . ." 

### They Did Make Cheerleader

Ann-Margret	Shirley MacLaine
Toni Basil*	Mary Kay Place
Barbi Benton	Cybill Shepherd
Faye Dunaway	Carly Simon
Donna Fargo*	Sissy Spacek
Sally Field	Meryl Streep
Phyllis George	Sally Struthers*
Eydie Gorme*	Loretta Swit
Cheryl Ladd	Cheryl Tiegs
Vicki Lawrence	Lily Tomlin*
*Denotes captain	Raquel Welch