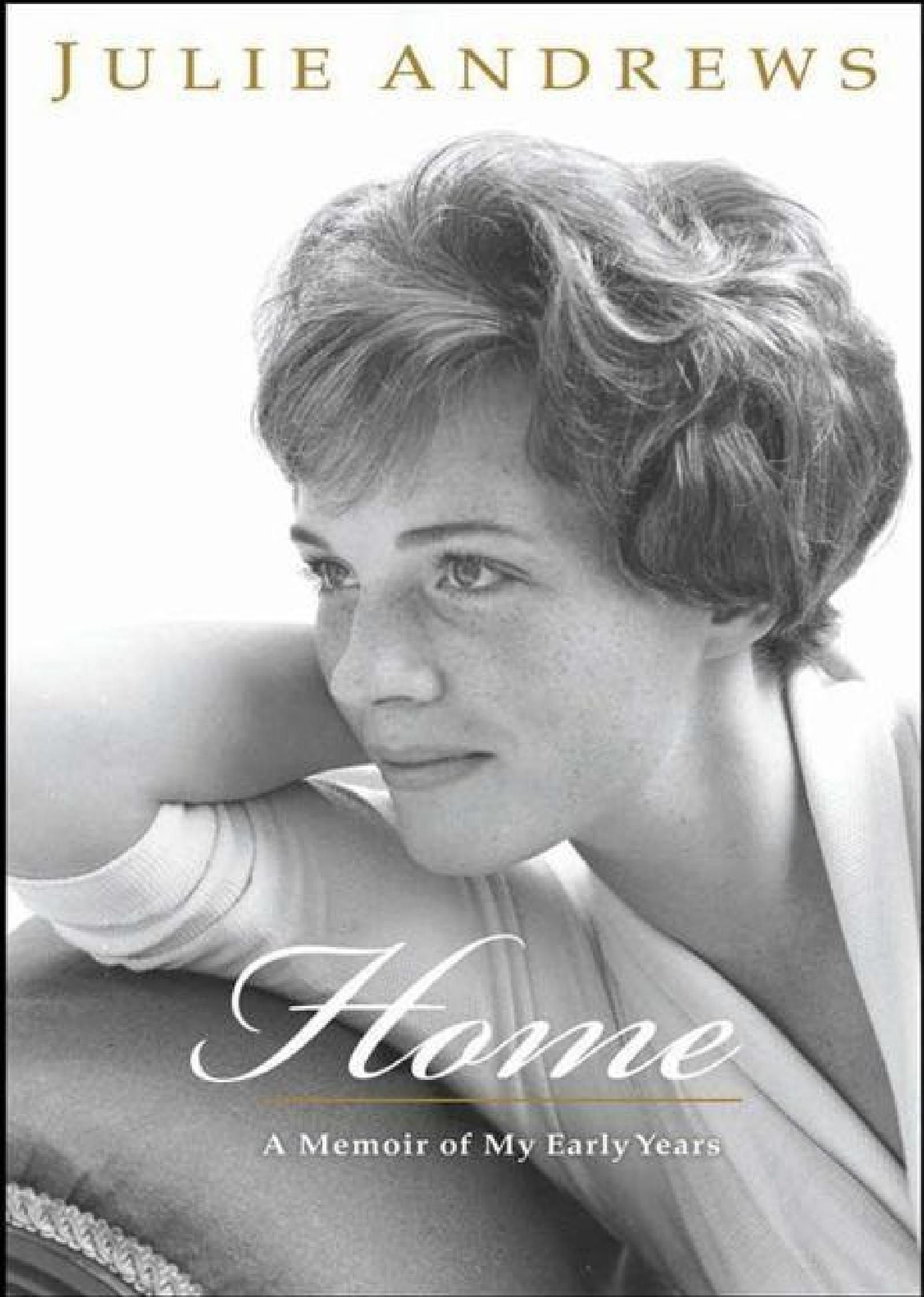


JULIE ANDREWS

A black and white portrait of Julie Andrews. She is shown from the chest up, leaning her head on her right hand. She has short, wavy hair and is looking slightly to the left of the camera with a gentle expression. She is wearing a light-colored, possibly white, sleeveless top. The background is plain and light-colored.

Home

A Memoir of My Early Years

Julie Andrews

Home

A Memoir
of
My Early Years



*For Emma,
with all my love*

*Silver tinsel on the ground.
River, streams. A round
water tower. Shining sun
flooding woods and meadows. Spun
gold and steel. Clouds punctuate
the hills and valleys and great
white cliffs of Dover.
Sea and ships. And, crossing over,
my heart soars like this aeroplane,
and I know I'm going home again.*

JULIE ANDREWS

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ONE

I AM TOLD THAT the first comprehensible word I uttered as a child was “home.”

My father was driving his secondhand Austin 7; my mother was in the passenger seat beside him holding me on her lap. As we approached our modest house, Dad braked the car to turn onto the pocket-handkerchief square of concrete by the gate and apparently I quietly, tentatively, said the word.

“Home.”

My mother told me there was a slight upward inflection in my voice, not a question so much as a trying of the word on the tongue, with perhaps the delicious discovery of connection...the word to the place. My parents wanted to be sure they had heard me correctly, so Dad drove around the lanes once again, and as we returned, it seems I repeated the word.

My mother must have said it more than once upon arrival at our house—perhaps with satisfaction? Or relief? Or maybe to instill in her young daughter a sense of comfort and safety. The word has carried enormous resonance for me ever since.

Home.

THE RIVER THAMES begins as a trickle just above Oxford in an area referred to in old literature as “Isis.” The trickle has become a fair river and fordable by the time it reaches the great university city, and from there it winds its way through the English countryside, changing levels from time to time, spewing through the gates of some exquisitely pretty locks, passing old villages with lovely names like Sonning, Henley, Marlow, Maidenhead, and Bray.

It flows on through Windsor and Eton. Wicked King John signed the Magna Carta at a picturesque stretch of the Thames called Runnymede. It progresses through the county of Surrey, past Walton—the village where I was born—past the palace of Hampton Court where Sir Thomas More boarded the water taxis that carried him downriver after his audiences with Henry VIII, and continues through the county town of Kingston, on to Richmond and Kew. Finally it reaches London, gliding beneath its many bridges, passing the seat of British government, the Houses of Parliament, before making its final journey toward Greenwich and the magnificent Thames Estuary into the North Sea.

Because of the Thames I have always loved inland waterways—water in general, water sounds—there’s music in water. Brooks babbling, fountains splashing. Weirs, waterfalls; tumbling, gushing. Whenever I think of my birthplace, Walton-on-Thames, my reference first and foremost is the river. I love the smell of the river; love its history, its gentleness. I was aware of its presence from my earliest years. Its majesty centered me, calmed me, was a solace to a certain extent.

The name “Walton” probably derives from the old English words *wealh tun* (Briton/serf and enclosure/town). Remnants of an ancient wall were to be found there in my youth. Walton is one of three closely related villages, the others being Hersham and Weybridge. When I was born, they were little more than stops on the railway line

leading out of London into the county of Surrey. Hershams was the poor relative and had once been merely a strip of woodland beside another river, the Mole. It was originally occupied by Celts, whose implements were found in large numbers in the area. The Romans were there, and Anglo-Saxons were the first settlers. Hershams was very much a fringe settlement. Walton, slightly better off, was a larger village; Weybridge was altogether “upmarket.”

Walton’s small claim to fame was its bridge over the Thames. A very early version was painted by Canaletto; J. M. W. Turner painted a newer bridge in 1805. The span was reconstructed again long ago, but in my youth the bridge was so old and pitted that our bones were jarred as we rattled over it, and I was able to peer through the cracks and see the river flowing beneath. Driving across, away from the village, usually meant that I was leaving home to go on tour with my parents. Crossing back, though, was to know that we were in familiar territory once again. The river was our boundary; we could leave the busy world behind us and our front door was only moments away.

To this day, when I am flying into England, it is the view of the river that I search for as we descend toward Heathrow. And suddenly, I see it—stately, sparkling, winding through the meadows, forever soothing, forever serene.

I WAS NAMED after my two grandmothers—Julia Elizabeth.

Julia, my mother’s mother, was the eldest daughter of William Henry Ward. He was a gardener, and met my great-grandmother, Julia Emily Hearmon (always referred to as Emily), when they joined the staff of a large house in Stratford-upon-Avon. Great-Granny Emily was a “tweeny,” which is the name given to the poor unfortunate who gets up even before the servants and lights their fires so that they, in turn, can see to the comforts of the household. She was eleven years old when she went into service.

Some years later, she and Great-Grandpa William married and moved to Hershams, where their first daughter, my maternal grandmother, Julia Mary Ward, was born in 1887. There was to be a barren lapse of nine years before the rest of the family came along at two-year intervals, in a vain effort to produce a son. Four daughters were born, who were collectively known as “the girls,” all bearing highfalutin names, starting with Wilhelmina Hearmon, followed by Fenella Henrietta, Nona Doris, and finally, Kathleen Lavinia. Mercifully, they were all shortened, to Mina, Fen, Doll, and Kath. Finally, the longed-for son arrived—William Henry, shortened to Harry and then to Hadge, by which time Julia, being the eldest, had married...and soon after, gave birth to my mother, Barbara Ward Morris, in July 1910. This meant that my mum had an uncle only a few years older than she, and therefore a built-in playmate.

I remember meeting my Great-Granny Emily Ward when she was in her eighties. Great-Grandpa had died, and she was living with her daughter Kath. Great-Granny was small and round like a barrel, with flawless skin and fine, pure white hair. She always smelled of fresh lavender and called me “dearie.”

She had a sweet smile and a soft voice that sounded as if it were coming from a great distance. She loved canaries, and kept an aviary in the back of Auntie Kath’s house in Hershams. I have loved canaries ever since.

Aunt Mina, Aunt Kath, and the other great-aunts were wonderful ladies, great

characters all. Uncle Harry—or “Hadge”—was the black sheep of the family, and an alcoholic. I always felt there was something a little rough and dangerous about him, though he could be kind and had a playful sense of humor. Like his father, he had a magical touch with the land, and he eventually became our gardener. Things flourished when Hadge was in charge. My mother had a soft spot in her heart for him, and he was so competent when he was sober that she always wanted to keep him around. I used his image for the character of the gardener in my first children’s book, *Mandy*.

My sense of the family history is somewhat sketchy, because my mother kept a great deal to herself. She spoke of her early years when pressed, but she never volunteered much—other than to speak lovingly of her mother, my namesake, Julia. Mum always took primroses to her grave in Hersham on Primrose Day, April 19, which was Granny Julia’s birthday. Clearly, she missed her mother very much. The earliest recollections I have are of my mother’s sadness at losing her. She must have carried her grief with her for many years in order for me to pick up on something like that.

It was left to my father and my aunt Joan, my mother’s younger sister, to fill in what little I do know about my grandparents.

Grandmother Julia was apparently a sweet mouse of a woman. Sensitive, shy, of a retiring nature, yet a lover of music—my aunt told me she sang quite well. She wanted no more of life than to look after and love her children. I was told that my grandfather Arthur found this state of affairs suffocating and that her obvious attempts to please irritated him.

Unlike my mother, Aunt Joan spoke rather scathingly about Granny Julia, putting her down as being inferior to their father in intellect and breeding. Piecing the details together, I have concluded that my maternal grandmother was uneducated, pretty, hardworking, troubled; and that her husband, Grandfather Arthur Morris, was angry, talented, a womanizer, a bully, a drunkard, and illegitimate.

Arthur Morris was conceived at a time when it boded ill to be born “on the wrong side of the blanket,” even if sired by a “Sir.” Being tall—over six feet—of good countenance, and brainy, he apparently had an arrogant personality, but if he desired, he could be a great charmer. His own childhood was unhappy to say the least, as he was banished to the scullery most of the time, for his mother eventually married and his stepfather couldn’t bear the sight of him.

As soon as he was of age, Arthur ran away to join the army and became a Grenadier Guard. Here he learned music and gained a promotion into the brass band, where he played the trumpet. He also excelled at the piano.

While stationed at Caterham Barracks, Surrey, Arthur met Granny Julia. They started seeing each other at every opportunity, and according to family rumor, Arthur “took advantage of” Julia in a field and she became pregnant. They dutifully married on February 28, 1910, at the Register Office, Godstone.

My mother, Barbara Ward Morris, was born on July 25, 1910. Five days later, Arthur did the unthinkable and deserted his regiment. The small family seemed to disappear into thin air for a time, but two years later Arthur was identified by a policeman as being on the army’s missing list and was arrested, tried, and sentenced to sixty-three days in military prison for desertion. His superiors may have recognized that Julia was a new wife with a young child and that she needed her husband, for

pleadings were made on his behalf, and after only twenty-nine days in prison, Arthur was formally discharged.

Julia and Arthur made a fresh start. They traveled to Kent, where Arthur became a member of the recently established Kent coal-mining community. On June 30, 1915, another daughter was born to them—my aunt Joan. After her birth, Arthur “deserted” again for a while, this time leaving his family. He was subject to bouts of depression, but it may simply have been that he went to the more lucrative mining area of South Yorkshire to search out new prospects for himself—for not long afterward, the Morrisises moved again, to the pit village of Denaby, where Arthur was hired as a deputy at the local colliery.

The girls were both enrolled at Miss Allport’s Preparatory School for Boys and Girls, and later they attended the village school in nearby Old Denaby. According to school records, my mother was very popular, very attractive. Aunt Joan was more reserved, always nervous. She depended on my mother a great deal. Both girls were striking, with alabaster complexions and glorious auburn hair.

It was during the period at Denaby that Arthur started composing and publishing poetry, which was quite well received and which earned him the moniker “The Pitman’s Poet.”

He also used his musical skills to entertain the villagers at cricket club functions, “smoking concerts” (men-only evenings), fund-raisers, and other parties around town. Arthur began teaching my mother to play the piano. Temperamentally, they were very much alike, being both self-willed and used to getting their own way. According to my aunt, many a shouting match was heard culminating with the sound of a sharp slap and a box on the ear.

Mum’s version of these events was a little harsher; she claimed that her father hit her across the hands with a ruler. Either way, Arthur seems to have been a tyrannical and cruel parent. Eventually Mum took private lessons from a Miss Hatton and built her piano skills to a very high standard. In July of 1920, at the age of ten, she passed the first stage of the London College of Music curriculum. Her father is referred to in the announcement as “Mr. Arthur Morris, the well-known entertainer.”

Years later, my aunt wrote this of her father: *“People would come up to our mother and congratulate her on being married to such a fun-loving man. Little did they know of his dark moods of despair, when he would sit in his chair and speak not a word for days, and I would take the longest way round when crossing the room to avoid going near him. After these bouts, he would go away for a while, and return laden with gifts for us.”*

It seems that desertion continued to be a theme in Arthur’s life.

Toward the end of 1921, he left the Denaby Colliery and the family moved a few miles away, to Swinton. Mum was eleven at the time, and Auntie was six. As Arthur became increasingly busy with his poetry, music, and entertaining, my mother became more accomplished at the piano—and in 1924, at the age of fourteen, she left school to pursue her piano playing full-time with a private tutor, and just a year and a half later she had passed the London College of Music’s senior-level exams.

Mum now often accompanied her father on his tours, playing at many provincial concerts. She took part in several early radio broadcasts from Sheffield, and by the time she was sixteen, she was teaching music. Listed among her students for that year

is my aunt, though the lessons didn't last long for several reasons—one being an acute sibling rivalry. My aunt was proficient at the piano, but music inspired her in other ways, namely to dance. Though untrained, she used every opportunity as a young child to dress up in her mother's clothes to improvise and to dance whenever possible.

All this information came not from my mother, but from my aunt and from research. Other than telling me she had passed her exams at an early age—she gained her LRAM and ALCM degrees—my mother never spoke about those years. How she felt about her studies remains a mystery, and I do not know where she took her exams. Given that the family was so poor, I cannot imagine who paid for her lessons in those days. Even if she had a scholarship, which I believe she did, I never saw her actual diplomas: she never displayed them, never had them framed.

IN THE SUMMER of 1926, Granny Julia took my mum and my aunt to Hersham to visit her own mother, sweet Great-Granny Emily Ward. This was apparently a bucolic holiday for the girls, and they discovered the joys of the countryside and all that it had to offer compared to the mining towns where they lived.

Great-Granny Emily took in washing for the more affluent villagers. The tradition of “wash day” was backbreaking, rigorous work and was typical of the hardship and poverty the family endured in those times. Weather permitting, washing was done outside in the garden. Two enormous tubs with washboards and the requisite bars of yellow carbolic soap were set on trestle tables. Buckets of boiling water were constantly carried to and from the house. Sheets, pillowcases, towels, etc., were set in heaps on the ground. Whites went into one vat, colored items in the other, all to be soaked, scrubbed, then set in baskets while the tubs were emptied of their foamy suds and filled with fresh hot water for the rinsing process. Clothes were pegged on lines strung between two apple trees. Sheets were laid out on convenient bushes. In the evenings, the sweet-smelling laundry was brought indoors and made ready for ironing the next day.

My aunt recalled the fun of bringing in frozen shirts and pajama tops sparkling with a silver sheen of frost, the sleeves stiff and straight, which she used as dancing partners while she cavorted over the frozen cabbage stumps.

The following morning, sheets were carefully folded and set on the kitchen table to be used as a soft base for the ironing of clothes. No ironing boards then, and the irons themselves were heavy and had to be constantly reheated on trivets that swung over the fireplace.

ARTHUR, MEANWHILE, WAS performing for club audiences in various towns in the north of England. He bought a set of drums, which he taught himself to play, and when he thought he was proficient, he hired the local church hall. With my mother playing the piano and her mother at the entrance collecting the admission money, he began to run a series of profitable dances.

This new era meant that he was invited to many social gatherings. Granny Julia became hopelessly out of her depth in this more sophisticated company, so Arthur started going alone.

He was seldom home, and one morning, predawn, Julia tiptoed out of the house with her girls and left Arthur, probably because of his infidelities and alcoholism. They took the first train, returning to Hersham to stay permanently with Great-Granny Emily Ward.

Granny Julia quickly found a job as a maid for a Mr. Mortimer, who allowed her and the children to live in. Arthur remained in Swinton, but then tragedy struck: his new lifestyle had driven a wedge between him and his family, and his casual liaisons with women resulted in his contracting syphilis. He traveled down to Hersham, and perhaps realizing that she was unhappier without him than she was with him, or knowing that he was ill and in need of care, Julia took him back and the family was reunited for a time. Arthur's vitality quickly dwindled, however, and he became thin and lethargic. He was admitted to the Brookwood Sanatorium in Woking on November 16, 1928. He died the following August, at the age of forty-three, with the cause of death given as "Paralysis of the Insane."

I think my mother mentioned this period in their lives just once, giving me only the bare facts. Later, I begged my aunt Joan to write about it, but she shuddered and said, "Why would I write about something so terrible? That place, the stench, the people... screaming, demented." She must have been traumatized, given that she was only thirteen at the time, but I sensed she was also ashamed and loath to discuss this with me. Syphilis was certainly not "genteel." The heartbreaking consequence of Arthur's actions was that he infected Julia, and shortly thereafter she, too, became ill and died just two years later. In retrospect, it's not surprising that my mother's grief was so transparent and lasted so long.

TWO

OVERNIGHT, CHILDHOOD ENDED for the girls and the business of survival began. The early demise of their parents changed forever the course of my mother's career, for she now became mother as well as sister to Aunt Joan, assuming the role of full-time caretaker and thus cementing what had always been present—their larger-than-life sibling rivalry and a total dependency on each other.

They moved from Mr. Mortimer's house and took a bed-sitting-room to be closer to Great-Granny Ward, who provided them with lunch, ensuring they had one good meal a day. Finding the room was comparatively easy, until they mentioned they would be bringing a piano and a set of drums. It was only after a great deal of cajoling and the promise that Mum would teach the daughter of the house to play the piano that they finally got the room. All they needed now was some money. They calculated their assets and decided they couldn't sell the piano. But what should they do about the drums?

My mother said, "Right Joan. It's obvious you must learn to play them. You watched Dad often enough, so let's give it a try."

They launched themselves on the local Women's Institute. The sight of a skinny fifteen-year-old girl, clad in pink velvet, black stockings, with long red hair secured by a white ribbon à la *Alice in Wonderland* playing the drums was apparently too tantalizing and people closed in, staring curiously.

When my aunt complained about this, my mother said, "Play louder—bang everything you've got!" And it worked. The money started rolling in.

The girls began to play a number of highly improbable gigs, from genteel afternoon and evening parties to a rather risqué nightclub in a once-venerable old mansion called Mount Felix. When eventually one of the flats in this building became vacant, they were able to rent it. It soon became apparent that most of the turnover for the club was acquired by providing drinks after hours, and one Saturday night the place was raided and they were all driven off to the police station in the local Black Maria, the police van.

Aunt was still attending school, and when the kindly headmistress learned the girls were trying to survive on their own, she arranged a scholarship for Aunt. Other employments included a stint in the chapel of a local convalescent home, where Mum played the harmonium and Aunt worked the bellows—Mum often exhorting Auntie to "Pump harder!" They often laughed at the contrast between their pious pursuits at the beginning of the day and their sleazy nightclub occupations in the evenings.

A dear friend once described them to me: "You cannot imagine the impact those two girls had on the sleepy villages of Walton and Hersham. They were a sensation! They had a strange Northern dialect, they were marvelously attractive, vital, self-confident, with this wonderful red hair—and each brilliant in her field."

One of their employers suggested that my aunt should be taught to dance properly, and kindly offered a letter of introduction to a good school in Wimbledon. Somehow my mother got my aunt to the audition, where she was asked what she could do.

"Well, I don't actually do anything special," Joan replied. "I express what the music

seems to be saying.”

“Then we’d better have some music, hadn’t we?” the auditioner suggested, and commissioned my mother to play.

It was decided that though Aunt was very late starting, especially for ballet, she had ability and could make a good all-rounder. Terms were discussed, and in exchange for arriving at 10:30 A.M. to tidy up the studio, dust and plump the cushions, attend to the cleanliness of the cloakrooms, wash up, serve tea to guests in the afternoons between classes, and be a general dogsbody, Aunt received her tuition, doing so well that after a few weeks she was dispatched to Balham in South London to teach a tap class on behalf of the school. Mum was also to play for two afternoons a week.

The year before their father had died, the girls had come to the attention of two decent young men: one, Edward Charles (“Ted”) Wells, my father; the other, Arthur Cecil (“Bill”) Wilby, later to be Joan’s husband. My dad was two years older than my mum, which would have made them just nineteen and seventeen when they first met. After the girls were orphaned, the lads pitched in to provide them with a fish and chips supper twice a week, with Lyons French Cream Sandwiches for “afters,” often explaining that they’d bought too much food and needed someone to share it with.

MY FATHER’S UPBRINGING was equally impoverished. His paternal grandfather, David Wells, had been a coachman for a Lady Tilson of Guildford, Surrey, and later he’d been a caretaker for the Wesleyan Chapel there. He and his wife, Fanny Loveland Wells, were natives of Middlesex and Surrey, respectively.

Fanny’s relatives had a shop in Hersham called Loveland’s, which made deliveries around town with a pony and trap. Fanny and David had one son, David Wilfred Wells. Young David, my grandfather, was a carpenter/joiner. He was one of the first to be on the City and Guild’s list of qualified carpenters, and builders would give him jobs around the village. During a bad period of unemployment he cycled from Hersham to Wales—about sixteen hours away—in order to find work.

Dad’s maternal grandfather, Mr. Charles Packham, was a skilled gardener. He and his wife, Elizabeth, raised six children: Mary, Susan, Charles, Ellen, Caroline, and Elizabeth Packham.

The youngest, Elizabeth, was a kindergarten teacher when she met and married David Wilfred Wells, my paternal grandfather. David and Elizabeth Wells had four children: Frank, the eldest; Ted, my father; Robert (Uncle Bob); and a daughter, yet another Elizabeth, but always known as Betty.

Frank, I was told, was a dear man and a magnificent craftsman, but he died at the age of thirty from meningitis and I never met him. In addition to being a carpenter, Frank was a teacher, which eventually influenced my dad to become a teacher himself. Bob, the third son, was thought to be the “brains” of the family, and became leader of a research team in a firm called Hackbridge Electric in Hersham, which made huge transformers.

Betty, the youngest and the only daughter, was born mentally handicapped. I don’t know the exact cause, but it was said that her mother, my Granny Elizabeth Wells, had tried to abort her. The child was a terrible burden on the family. Though apparently pretty, she couldn’t speak and was given to fits and rages. My father could never have

friends over to the house because of her disruptive nature. At a young age she was placed in a home for the handicapped, but when Granny Wells went to visit her, she was filled with such remorse that she brought the child back home. Betty eventually died at the age of twenty-seven. It's my belief that Betty had a powerful impact on my father, coloring forever his perceptions of women as being somewhat needy and fragile.

After the 1914–18 war, there was a subsidy scheme for young people wanting to buy houses. My grandfather, David, applied for and received a grant of £70. He bought a plot in Pleasant Place, Hersham, and with his sons and some builder friends he built a two-story house he called "Deldene." It was primitive: three small bedrooms upstairs, plus a living room, scullery, and an outside toilet. Fireplaces were the only source of heat, and the one in the living room had a trivet, which swung into or away from the fire, upon which a kettle was placed for boiling water or cooking. Next to it was a cast-iron baking oven, which, as I recall, was also heated by the fire. There was a bath of sorts—a pump took water from the copper tank downstairs and conveyed it to a tub—but the water was only lukewarm. My dad and his brothers preferred to swim in the rivers Mole, Thames, and Wey for their ablutions. Having covered themselves in soap, they would plunge into the river and rinse the suds away.

Dad received a scholarship to go to Tiffin Grammar School in nearby Kingston, and he enjoyed his time there very much. His first job was at the Hackbridge Electric Factory, presumably before his brother Bob made his way up the corporate ladder there. Dad disliked Hackbridge intensely. It was hot, dirty, noisy—there was no fresh air and he felt trapped indoors. He began drifting around building sites, working as a journeyman/craftsman with his father. Sadly, Dad's father, David, died at the age of forty-five, from colon cancer.

After a while Dad had to return to factory work because there was much unemployment and it was hard to get building jobs. He became a mechanic, but took evening classes at Kingston Tech in order to obtain his building certificate. Later, when his mother suggested he should follow in Frank's footsteps and earn more money, he passed his teacher's qualification finals with distinction. He became a full-time teacher at age twenty-four on Boxing Day, December 26, 1932. On the very same day, at St. Peter's Church in Hersham, he and my mother were married.

My mother once told me that Granny Julia had said to her on her deathbed, "Whatever you do, don't marry Ted Wells." It was probably because he was so very poor. Mum also told me that she married Dad because he was a rock, because he adored her, and because it was safe.

Dad was officially a "practical handicrafts teacher," giving lessons in woodwork, metalwork, basic construction, engineering, and so on, but he subbed for other teachers—teaching math, English literature, and grammar. The schools weren't big enough to employ a full-time specialist teacher, so he spent one day a week at each of various schools, bicycling some two hundred miles a week from Hersham to other villages in Surrey. He taught evening classes as well. At one time he owned a motorcycle, but he sold it in order to help my mother and Aunt Joan keep a roof over their heads after the death of their father.

Part-time and substitute teachers were only paid by the hour. At the end of the 1932 term, he took home the princely sum of £11, which had to last until the end of the

following month—two months in all. Eventually he was offered a full-time position at the school in Shere. His pupils were between the ages of fourteen and sixteen; boys, who were old enough to be responsible handling dangerous equipment, but who, in many cases, were mere country lads with plenty of natural teenage aggression. Dad was good with them all. Being an amateur boxer, he could take on any one of them, and a couple of times he almost had to. He played football with them, kept them interested. He earned their respect and was a popular teacher.

My mother augmented their meager income by giving piano lessons and performing. Aunt Joan, ever-present, had started her own dancing school at a place in Walton, which was Miss LeMarchand's Primary School by day, but accommodated her classes in the afternoons and evenings. She, too, added to the coffers by moving in with my parents when they rented a small house called "Threesome"—so named perhaps because of their joint occupancy.

How they managed I'll never know, but somehow they were even able to take the odd vacation—usually on the South Coast around Bognor. More often than not, "Uncle Bill" Wilby went along, too. The old car was stacked high with a tent, cooking utensils, a Primus stove, collapsible beach chairs, food, blankets, and pillows. There are hilarious family stories of their adventures, including the time when the Austin 7 took a countryside humpbacked bridge a little too fast. It sailed into the air and landed hard, breaking an axle and bringing most of the contents down about my father's shoulders, pinning his face to the wheel. They were only halfway to their destination, and I gather my mother was none too pleased, sitting on the luggage at the side of the road and complaining mightily. My father flagged a ride for Mum, Aunt, and Uncle Bill and sent them on ahead, after which he trudged several miles to the local garage to seek help.

I WAS BORN on October 1, 1935, at Rodney House, Walton-on-Thames's maternity hospital.

The very first thing that I can recall was when I was perhaps two or three. I remember standing in the middle of the staircase, neither up nor down, and telling my mother that I wanted to go to the bathroom.

"Well, come on down," she said, to which I replied, "No."

"Go on up then," she said.

Again, "No."

I obviously wanted her to come and attend to me.

"Well stay there, then," she said. So I did. And I peed in my pants.

I was wearing a little brown woolen outfit, which quickly became extremely uncomfortable. I think I had a tantrum, so nothing about the incident was successful.

THERE ISN'T AN awful lot about my mother that I recall from my earliest years, other than it seemed to me she was away quite often.

I do, however, remember very specific things about my dad...wonderful things. He treated me and my siblings as his beloved companions, never dismissing or talking down to us. When one or other of us provoked, he only had to say "Look, Chick—" in a patient, weary voice, and we would understand and back off. He told me later in his

life that he had once whacked my brother Johnny—and when the boy said, pleadingly, “No more, Daddy, please,” he had been devastated and vowed never to do it again. And he didn’t.

Throughout our childhood, he exposed us to the wonders of nature. One of my earliest memories was his taking me outside to view a large ants’ nest, which he had discovered under a stone while gardening.

“See, Chick, how the ants carry things from here to there? Look how busy they are.” I saw them working within their little tunnels, hauling whatever they needed—and we pored over this nest for a good hour or more.

Another time, I remember Dad waking me from sleep. It must have been ten or eleven o’clock at night.

“I want to show you something, Chick,” he said, and he carried me downstairs. “We found a little hedgehog on the doorstep.”

He explained how hedgehogs curl themselves into a ball for protection, and I saw this round spiky object that was lying on the floor in the kitchen.

Dad said, “If I put some milk out, it will eventually uncurl itself and go lap it up...,” which it did. By morning the milk was gone, and the hedgehog was safely returned to the garden.

Dad was not a religious man, and he once said to me that he didn’t think he would believe in God at all were it not for the existence of two things: trees—and man’s conscience. He said that without trees, we would not survive on this planet, for they feed us, clothe us, shelter us, make oxygen. Without a conscience, man would probably never have developed beyond a primitive state.

But Dad was fond of church music, and always listened to the Sunday services on the BBC radio. He had a light, “bathroom baritone” voice of which he was somewhat proud. He sang any hymn or song right through to the end, his diction precise, relishing every note and every word. Certain ballads would crop up often in his repertoire: “Has Anyone Seen My Lady as She Went Passing By?” and “Where E’er You Walk” by Handel. He was a good whistler, too.

More important to him than singing was poetry. All his life he committed poems to memory, reasoning he could then return to them anytime he wished. One of the first books Dad bought me was Palgrave’s *Golden Treasury of English Poems*.

My love of water probably stems from my father, because he adored rivers and lakes. Dad enjoyed hiring a skiff and taking my brother and me for a boat ride on the Thames. Before we left the shore, he’d carefully explain, “Now listen, both of you. This can tip very easily, so keep low as you get in or get out. Do *not* stand up.”

He would let us take an oar beside him and teach us how to feather it across the top of the water. But mostly Johnny and I would sit side by side on the cane-backed double seat, proudly, in charge of the rope on the rudder, watching as he evenly and easily worked on the oars, dipping them in, pulling them out. Wherever we went, he pointed out the beauty of nature: the majesty of a cliff face; the blossoms, the wildflowers. He knew the name of every tree, whether in bloom or in silhouette.

He seemed to know a lot about a lot of things. He loved language and grammar and math. He loved to study, and would sit at his desk, one hand to his brow, as he pored over the pages. Study, for him, was essential.

“If you don’t have a God-given talent,” he said, “it’s your duty to stimulate your