

Dame Julie Andrews

Julie was born on Oct. 1, 1935, at Walton-on-Thames, Surrey, to parents Ted and Barbara Wells who christened her Julia Elizabeth. In 1939 Barbara, a pianist, met another Ted (Andrews), a tenor, and they became a double act touring the country. In 1943, 'Uncle Ted' (as she called him) decided to give Julie singing lessons. He and Barbara were surprised to discover that Julie's singing voice had extraordinary strength and range, and a doctor told them that their seven and half year old daughter had an almost adult larynx.

Later that year they moved into 15 Cromwell Road, Beckenham which became their home for the next five years. On November 25th, 1943, shortly after her mother's divorce from Ted Wells, Julie agreed to call Ted Andrews 'Pop' rather than 'uncle' and her name was officially changed from Julia Elizabeth Wells to Julie Andrews.

The Cromwell Road home had room for a baby grand piano housed in the parlour - a back room leading onto the garden which had a square pond and a green mound covering an Anderson air raid shelter, in frequent use during the doodlebug attacks during 1944. Standing on top of, Julie used her four octave voice to alert the neighbourhood when V1s approached.

From her 9th birthday, it was decided that Julie commute to London for music lessons. This was a punishing regime of education and commuting, and Julie became so exhausted that Barbara enrolled her daughter at Woodbrook School for girls in Hayne Road, Beckenham, starting in September 1945.

Before entering the school, Julie had joined her parents' vaudeville act, thus already a 'professional' performer. However, at the school she was treated like all the other pupils, some of whom became friends - the first of her own age. Jane Smith recalls that it was a great pleasure to have known Julie and to have heard her coloratura voice hit high C at our end of term concerts.

She found Woodbrook to be a very fine girls' school run by Miss Mead and Miss Elvin, who provided Julie's first formal academic education. Julie loved the senior girls voices singing hymns in assembly and the opportunity to act in the school plays. She also enjoyed cycling to school with her satchel in a basket on the front. With her friends, she went to Saturday morning pictures at the Regal cinema.

In 1946 her parents were performing at the legendary *Stage Door Canteen* theatre in Piccadilly that was run by the NAAFI for service personnel during and after the war. One day at school Miss Mead came to find Julie to tell her she would leave school early because she was going to sing in London that evening.

It was not until she reached Piccadilly that she learned that the Queen Mother and Princess Margaret would be attending the show that evening. Julie sang the *Polonaise - Mignon* and after the show she was introduced to the Queen. Julie's remarkable voice can be heard on YouTube singing this number.

Misses Mead and Elvin were eager to learn more from their star pupil, and the other girls were impressed by Julie's celebrity status. The Daily Express and Daily Mail had rave articles about her performance. Soon afterwards, Julie had to say goodbye as her parents moved to a new, bigger house - formerly the servants' quarters for a manor house near Walton-on-Thames - but she is still remembered by local people who knew her in Beckenham.

Dorothy Webster-Thomas, Director Of The Beckenham Ladies Choir, remembers Julie as child in Beckenham. The choir celebrated Julie with two songs from each of *My Fair Lady* and *The Sound of Music*



Cover of Julie's *Memoir*.

This book about her early years was published in 2008. (author's collection).