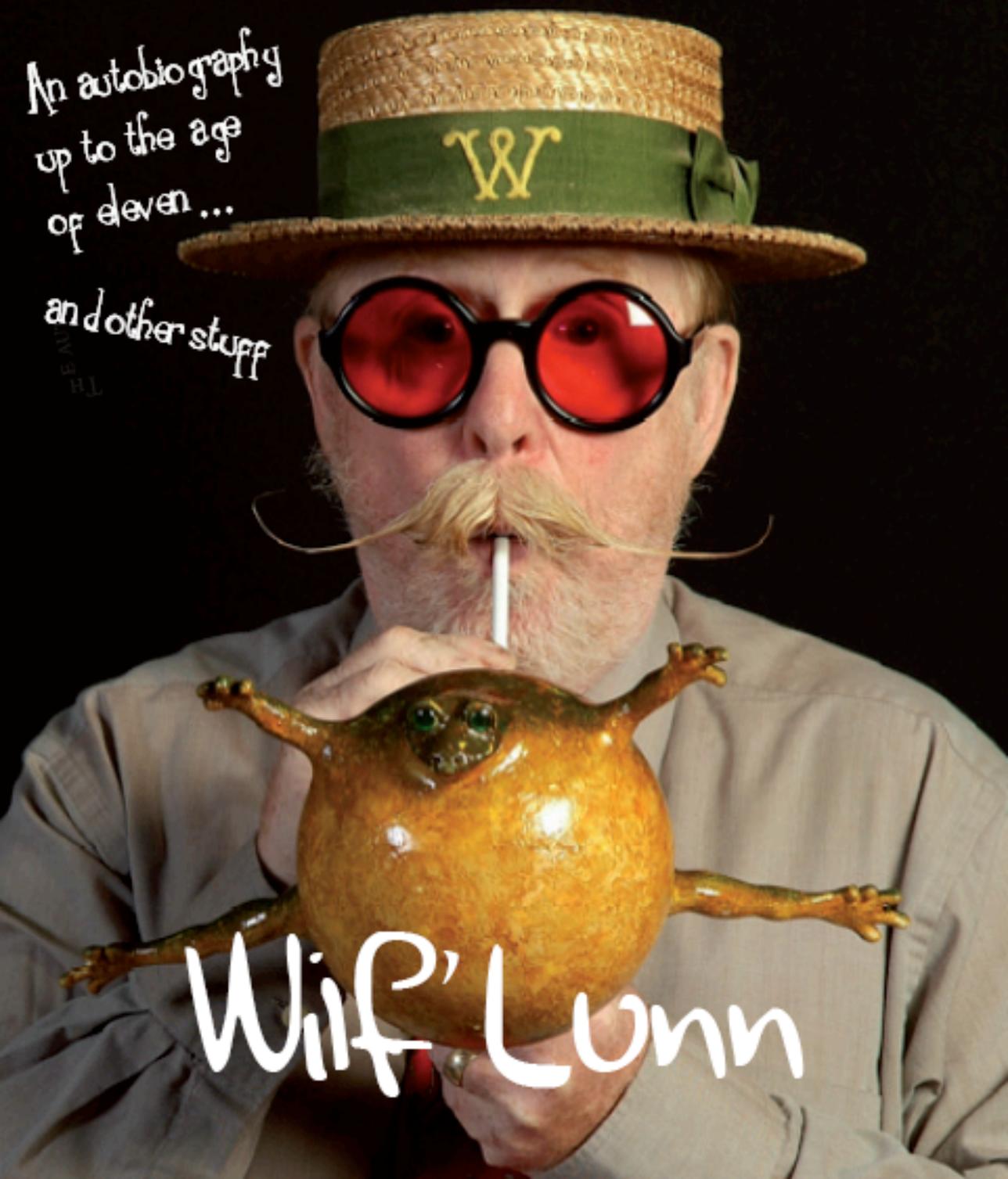


My **BEST CELLAR**

An autobiography
up to the age
of eleven ...

and other stuff



Wif' Lonn



The silence of the Lunnys

My younger sister was born in 1943 during 'The late unpleasantness'. She had a birthmark on her arm. It was not a port wine stain or a strawberry mark. We were working class. It was shaped like a sausage, a very small sausage. It was, after all, during the war and food was rationed. Being a war baby, she had her own gas mask and she was called Doreen. Our mother, Irene, wanted to call her Sylvia. Dad couldn't say Sylvia, so they called her Doreen instead. Which I always thought strange, because he couldn't say Doreen either. Dad never learned to talk. When he was a child, measles had made him deaf. So it didn't really matter to him what we were called. My sister could have been called Sylvia or, in fact, anything. Dad couldn't have said it anyway. He just made noises, usually 'Ergogert'. Not 'Hergogert', always 'Ergogert', without an aitch. He was, after all, a deaf Yorkshire man. He didn't have trouble with his aitches; he just never used them in the correct places. Hever! A dictionary on local district dialects by Walter E. Haigh hasn't a section for words beginning with the letter 'H'. The only words in the book spelt with an aitch are his name, Haigh, and Huddersfield, which, of course, are pronounced Aigh and Uddersfield. Curiously, the word aitch doesn't begin with aitch and is not pronounced 'haitch'. We lived in Brighouse, which we pronounced Briggus, leaving out the dreaded 'H'. I still tend to

leave out aitches but unfortunately everyday speech demands that you use so many. So I put them back. Usually in the wrong places. I once had to speak on a television programme *What's the Idea?* Or, as I put it, *What's the Hidea?* The show was about hens and eggs or, in my case, 'ens hand heggs'. I was explaining how the hegg came out of the en's rear hend, blunt hend first, hand pointed hend last, thus preventing the en's bottom shutting with a bang. People complained. Not about how I was speaking but about what I was saying. This was progress. They all insisted the egg came out pointed end first. Until then I never realised how closely people watched the private parts of poultry.

Back to Dad and names. If he'd uttered at my christening, I could have been called Ergogert Lunn. I like unusual names, like Brefni Hions, my best friend at junior school. Or Banolo Cabalo. Banolo lived at the bottom of Bramston Street, to the left up Thomas Street. His name could have been Manolo but we all called him Banolo. The last time I saw him, he was outside the Albert cinema watching the people coming out. He told me he wanted to be a psychiatrist and he was studying the effect of the film on the audience. In other words, people pretending to be what they'd just seen on the film. Such as walking like John Wayne or galloping off on imaginary horses with their coat sleeves tied round their necks for cloaks. Banolo wasn't like the common herd, just looking at the girls. Then there was Ada Yinka Dada, a woman I taught with. What about Shlikashluka, a girl I once met in London. She said she was an Eskimo. She certainly behaved like an Eskimo: she wrapped up warm and took anything she could from the surrounding environment. It's called 'living off the land' in the Arctic. A kind person would look on her as an over-dressed kleptomaniac. The police call it something else. Shlikashluka! You don't forget a name like that. Ergogert Lunn would have been fine, but it was not to be.

Dad was called Hubert Berry Lunn. A great name, a real mouthful. I think the year he was born must have been a particularly good blackberry harvest. I can't think why else he was called Berry. To avoid the aitch in Hubert, everybody called him Bert. One woman called him dummy, just the once. She and her family lived in such squalor, it was said, if she'd had a door mat, visitors would have wiped their feet when they left her house. Even as a little kid I knew who the dummy was.

It was decided to call me after my Dad's brother, Uncle Wilf, whose full name was Charles Wilfred Lunn. The idea was to reverse the names to Wilfred Charles. Fortunately they dropped the Charles, so in later life I didn't suffer the indignity of having WC on my school satchel. I could, of course, have had a plain satchel, like Susan Helen Isabel Thorpe. So I understand I was named after Uncle Wilf. I sometimes think Dad was thinking about Pip, Squeak and Wilfred in the *Daily Mirror*. Pip was a dog, Squeak was a Penguin and Wilfred was a rabbit with very big ears. Big ears, get it? I wasn't deaf, but strangely all Wilfred the rabbit could say was 'Gung Nunc'. Dad couldn't say Wilfred or Wilf; the nearest he got to it was to mouth 'Whif'. So he called me Whif. Mam called me Whiferd and everybody else called me Willy.

The Silent Snot Dancer etc...



Wilf Lunn first came to public notice in 1942 when he won first prize in a 'War Baby' competition, which he believes was because he was shaped like a bomb. Raised by deaf parents in a cellar in Rastrick, Yorkshire, as a baby Wilf quickly learned that farting was better than crying for attracting their attention.

Reared on 'potted nanny', 'marrowfat pea muffs' and 'corporation pop', and in fear of the Brook Street Gang – who pushed drinking straws up frog's bums to inflate them like balloons – Wilf survived (whilst marvelling at the adhesive power of dried snot) to fulfil his childhood ambition of having a beard.

Many years later, the film star James Mason, advised Wilf to write about his bizarre life. This is part of it...up to the age of eleven!

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