

Through It All I've Always Laughed

(An autobiography of myself)

by

Count Arthur Strong - The well known Celebrity.

↖  
Bolder that up!!  
Bigger as well

**ff**

FABER & FABER

and Maker!  
Shoddy!!!

fill this up with  
something

## FRONTISPIECE

I don't really know what a 'Frontispiece' is? Or if that's how you spell it? Or if we're having one? No one's said anything to me. Is it where you get someone people will know to write something nice about you? Because if it is, I might get Barry Cryer to do it? For a fiver or something? He could make something up. Get back to me on that. I'll move on. You'll have to pay the fiver by the way. That'll not be coming out of my wages for doing this. If you can call it 'wages'.

*get a necl pen*

## AN INTRODUCTION

BY

COUNT ARTHUR STRONG - THE AUTHOR HIMSELF

Good afternoon. Firstly, can I thank you for purchasing this book. I'm sure it will prove to be a wise investment. Books do accrue in value and some of THE BOOKS OF Charles's Dickenses, for instance, can exchange hands for a nice bit of money. If you're not buying it, and you've no intention of buying it, and you're just looking through it because it's raining outside and you're early for the opticians, would you mind putting it neatly back on the shelf please, because you're spoiling it for someone else by thumbing all the pages and everything. I never buy the book at the front of the pile because of that. I take the third or fourth one. Also, some people don't wash their hands when they've been to the toilet. And that's not a very nice thought to have in your head when you're buying a book. I remember reading in the paper that you

shouldn't eat the nuts that they put in a bowl, in a bar because other people might not wash their hands after they've 'paid a visit'. In fact in this article, it said they tested the nuts off a bar and found traces of twenty eight different types of urine in the bowl. So if you're reading this and you haven't washed your hands after urinating, then I think you should do the decent thing and purchase this wonderful book.

You know, when the people at Faber and Faber and Faber signed me up to write this memoir, I only had one stipulation and that was that in this book I would set out to write the truth. This book wouldn't be a dressed up version of events. This book would tell it like it was. This book would have Oliver Cromwell's warts and all in it.

But at the same time I wanted this book to be more than Oliver Cromwell's warts. I wanted this book to be a guide for people embarking on the showbiz journey. An aid. But not a manual of do's and don't's for aspiring performers, like Peter Barkworth's now sadly very dated book, 'About Acting', once was, once. Whilst I like Peter, and applaud him for what he was trying to do, that's

just too rigid a format for someone like I am (me). So what I'll try to do, after I've been to Lidl's, is write from the heart, with the great honesty and humility that's got me where I am today.

*pickled  
onions*

I've been very lucky in my life in that I've probably achieved everything I set out to do and very much more on top of all that. If someone would have told me when I was a baby that one day I would have been in close proximity to the Queen Mother, accidentally standing on one of her bunions, I would, quite frankly, have looked at them as though they were mad. If I could have understood what they were saying to me. I must admit, I'm never quite sure how much a baby can understand. Some of them look quite bright, as if they know what's going on, yet others look as though they haven't got a clue. For arguments sake, let's say I was amongst the former, that did have a clue.

Now, there are many, many people to thank for helping me with this book. My wonderful editor, who's name has just escaped me for the moment, without who's tireless help this book wouldn't have been half the book it is/was. Barry Cryer

for his encyclopaedic memory. Thanks Barry! The drinks are on me! (No they're not. I'm joking). I wish I could mention them all but honestly the list is just too long to remember anyone.

Before I leave you though, I'd just like to say this, and that is, that in this profession that I've spent my life in, I have been blessed to have two of the most wonderful parents someone like me, or indeed 'me', because that's what I meant, could have. It was whilst under their care and guidance that I flourished and grew. They nurtured me as you would a flower and I bloomed and turned into the huge plant that stands before you today. So I'd just like to say a thank you to my Mamma and Father, wherever they went. Without them this book would not have been possible. It goes without saying that if they hadn't met I would have not been conceived. I suppose I might have been conceived by one of them with someone else, but I would have been quite different. For instance I could have been a woman. I suppose if they'd not met each other and had a baby with two different people, there could have been two of me, with half of me each in them, wandering around. However, sadly for

me, they did meet and there is only one of me, I think.

So, sit back everybody, get your glasses on, open this book, (I know you've already opened it, but you know what I mean), and laugh, cry and the other one, at the sometime hilarious, sometime touching and sometime moving, but always entertaining collection of my life's lives lives's? memories.

Could I just say before I stop typing this, if you enjoy the book, and frankly, there'd have to be something wrong with you if you didn't, could I ask you not to lend it on to a friend, or give it to the charity shop? Because that would only mean that someone wouldn't buy it at full price. And that's not very nice for me if you flood the market with cheap used ones. Also lending the book on to someone could lead to a wider urine/hygiene problem, as outlined earlier. So I am really thinking of other people.

Anyway, whatever happens everybody, one thing's for sure, everybody, 'Through It All I've always Laughed'.

*And I've got the title in!*



PREFACE

Are we having a preface? I'll move on for now.

*What is a preface?*

## CHAPTER ONE

### THE EARLY YEARS!

"Wah! Wah!" Went the cries of the one minute old new born baby.

Had the midwife possessed a tuning fork she would be able to tell you that this precociously talented child, by now some one minute and thirty seconds old, had hit a pitch perfect top 'C'. A talent I still possess to this day.

For you see, I was this small precocious and, by now, pushing two minute old child. But perhaps I should explain to you how this miracle birth came to be. Let me take you back in time to a night some nine months prior to the birth of myself.

Mother and Father, as I called them, were in pantomime at the Watford Palace doing a dog act. After the act they went home and had sexual relations. And that's how a baby like I was is born.

*ginger nuts  
cabbage  
bacon  
stamps*

10-15 Wednesday  
biting  
Advice

He was always good with dogs was Father. I think that's why he married my Mother. She had a nice cocker spaniel. A ginger and white one called Nuts. I don't know why she called it that. Perhaps it liked nuts? There's nothing wrong with that. I like a nut myself. Apart from Brazil nuts, ever since I had a chocolate Brazil stuck in my throat in 1960 something, which led to a near death experience. Luckily for me though, I coughed it up and finished eating it. Not the last time I would go on to cheat death.

Bureau  
Mr  
Ellis

Anyway, that Mother and Father would meet, fall in love and form a dog act, was inevitable and they enjoyed some moderate success on the variety circuit.

However, when I came along that fateful day that changed the course of so many people's lives, myself included, it was decided that Father would go solo and do an act of his own, until Mother recovered from my birth and her stitches healed up, because of my hat size.

The act Dad decided to do, was playing the 'William Tell Overture' by hitting himself on the head with a mallet, with two cymbals strapped

to his knees. After a few performances though he realised that he hadn't quite thought it through properly, and he had to stop, because it quite hurt and he kept blacking out and he was spending a lot of time in casualty.

However worse was to come. Much, much, much, much worse. And I make no apologies for using 'much' a lot in that sentence, because it was much worse. Much, much, much, much, much worse.

In 1939 Adolf Hitler started the war. Why? Well we can only guess at that. He must have been absolutely mad.

Carried away with the thrill of it all, my Dad enlisted as soon as the magistrate made him. My Mother, as I called her, was left on her own at a very vulnerable time.

Now everybody, If you're not already sitting down, I want you to sit down for this bit, because what I'm about to tell you next will be a huge sock to you and I don't want you to keel over then send me a solicitor's letter making out I did it.

What it is is that I later learnt that whilst my Father, or 'Dad' as I sometimes called him, I

*I'm very pleased with this bit.*



*disguises for Hitler.*

forget which now, was off 'hanging his washing on the Seigfried Line', that my mother took solace in the arms of another -- a variety turn called 'Wee Billy Bugle and his Hoop of Flames', or Uncle Willy as I came to know him as.

Oh, he could make that bugle talk could Billy and he was always very good to me, God rest his soul. He's no longer with us. I remember his last words as though it was tomorrow. "Put me out! I'm on flipping fire".

Uncle Willy went up like a bazooka. They do say there's still some bits of him on the ceiling at the Bradford Alhambra. They haven't the heart to clean him off. Or a long enough ladder, if truth be known.

Anyway, all I know is, he was like an Uncle to me was Uncle Willy.

*Stamps*

With Dad away at the Maginot line, or whatever it is, and Uncle Willy all over, firstly my mother, and secondly the Alhambra ceiling, things were very hard for us. I helped as well as I could, tried not to cry too much and soiled as few nappies as was physically possible.

The war years were terribly, terribly hard for a young child like myself and all the other people in the country too. Every night when I went to bed I could only pray that the war would last another eighteen years so that I could sign up and fly a Spitfire, like Kenneth Moore did in that film about Douglas Bader's Bouncing Bombs. But at the moment I had more pressing things to do, like learn to walk.

You'll be happy to know that through my dogged perseverance and a few false starts, I did learn to walk, and to this day it's something I still have great success success success success doing. So stick that up your pipe and smoke it Mr Hitler! While the Blitzkrieg raged this precocious talent, writing this, was getting on with it!

During these war years I took great solace in all the postcards my father managed to hurriedly pencil. I still couldn't read, obviously, but I used to like ripping them up and chewing them etcetera. I would wait by the letterbox for the postman and rip anything up that came through. Mother would sometimes lose her temper

[15]

*Remember picture  
of cat mess on  
path. Mr Ellis*

with me but I was a beautiful, lovely child and would just look at her with my big . . . . eyes and any anger she felt would melt away. Plus most of the time now she was on the gin.

*hazel!*  
*Do possibly blue?*

After Uncle Willy had blown up, there was only Mother to support the two of us and she needed a new act. She'd heard there was a job going with a contortionist in Doncaster. So we packed our bags and moved up there, to stop with my Auntie Irene.

Being a contortionist really suited mother and I don't think I've ever seen her as happy as when she was bent over backwards doing the splits and eating grapes with two dislocated arms. She had always been supple. In fact she could still sit on the floor at ninety. Which was remarkable . . .

She couldn't get up mind.

She always looked younger than she was, did Mother. In fact we're all like that in my family. My Uncle Earnest looked like a toddler right up into his seventies. We all look younger. We've all got elastic skin, like my Mother had. Oh yes. I've never had any of my buttocks siphoned off and squirted in my forehead like some of them, thank you very much! Cliff Richards has it done

*Guinness Book of Records*

once a fortnight! It's a wonder he can sit down.  
His bottom must be red raw some nights. Lulu,  
she's another one. Oh dear. It would be dreadful  
if they got the syringes mixed up and you ended  
up with Cliff Richards buttocks in your face.  
I wouldn't know where to put myself. I mean I  
liked, 'Mistletoe and Wine', but I wouldn't want his  
buttocks in my face.

Count Arthur Strong

Best Wishes!

Arthur

Arthur x Count

Arthur  
Strong

A  
Gracious

I accept this award with  
gracious thanks!  
Thank you so much!



## CHAPTER THREE

### MISSING PRESUMED DEAD!

I'll never forget the day that telegram came . . . 'Missing presumed dead' it said. Which, coincidentally, is what this chapter is called, if you look at the top of the page. I wondered where I'd heard it before. Mother opened the envelope, read the contents, then howled like a 'ban shea'.

*check  
date*

'Why! Why!', she shrieked! 'Why! has this happened to us?' She sunk to the floor with her head in her hands, (a variation of this move she would later use to great success in the act). 'Curse you Adolph Hitler! Curse you!' I had never seen the old girl like this before and I consoled her as best as a just coming up to one year old that couldn't speak could.

It was this day that I resolved, that even if this accursed war lasted until armistice day on the 14 August 1945, I would not rest until I had brought Hitler to book at Nuremberg.

Hitler! The very word would bring me out in nappy rash. It still does. I would imagine him stood at the other end of where the channel tunnel might come out, if it'd been invented then, hands on hips, head tossed back, laughing like a hyena while we starved. Eating a three course meal of, perhaps, Prawn Cocktail to start with, followed by maybe a nice bit of Liver and Onions with Apple Pie and custard for his pudding, or perhaps rhubarb? The unfairness of this was not lost on me despite my tender years. Or year.

*ground  
nutmeg  
on top*

And so here I was, the Fatherless son of a contortionist Mother. One year old, living in war torn Doncaster, in the South Riding of Yorkshire, starving for some dinner.

In later years I would immortalise this moment in song, set to the music of Ronnie Conway. Not his real name. He made it up because he thought it made him sound big. Which I think is a little bit sad. And when I say, 'set to the music, of Ronnie Conway', I actually hummed and la'd all the tune to him to start with. Something that he consistently chooses to ignore as he travels around most of Lincolnshire, making a fortune off the back of my back.

*Stegness  
Ingomells*

Stamp

And if I wasn't involved in an ongoing copyright dispute with Ronnie (or Colin as his real name is) at the moment, I was going to put that song up for the Eurovision Song Contest. So it's highly likely Ronnie Colin is responsible for us not winning that as well for the last fifty years.

Anyway, my contact at the Citizens Advice says he can't stop me reproducing the lyrics for your enjoyment, because I am the sole lyricist of it. The song in question is just below this sentence you're just finishing reading. It's called 'Doncaster'.

Doncaster!

A small talented child in ...

Doncaster!

Afraid and alone in ...

Doncaster!

Laughed at because of the posh way I talk in ...

Doncaster!

At the house of my Auntie Irene in ...

Doncaster!

(spoken bridge)

Please don't make me eat tripe Aunty Irene,

I promise I'll be good!

(now back to singing it)

And then like a flower that blooms in the garden,

I bend in the breeze,

That blows through the trees, in . . .

Doncaster!

A man can walk tall in . . .

Doncaster!

Your worries are small in . . .

Doncaster! In . . .

Doncaster! In . . .

Doncaster!

*Mention they can  
bury the V.D.!*

And incidentally everyone, I have recently been in communication with someone who will have to remain nameless, for obvious reasons, about them releasing that song out in time for Christmas one year. Because I think it could be as big a hit as 'Candle in the Window' was for him. And I'm expecting a reply any day now, to my stamped, self address letter I sent to him, c/o Watford Football Club, where he is the goalkeeper.

*Stamps*  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

So when Elvis John finally deigns to get back to me, I might not have to finish this book, should 'Doncaster' go to number one in the hit parade and I make millions. Which I apologise in advance for, if you've bought it and are disappointed because it stops suddenly.

But I digress. For a naturally inquisitive, talented and precocious posh sounding posh small child like I was, wartime Doncaster wasn't all all bad news, and growing up around the variety theatres of the north proved to be the making of me, although I didn't know it at the time. And frankly, if you'd tried to tell me that at the age of one and a bit I would have probably told you that you were mad. If, A, I could have talked, or B, I could have understood what you were going on about in the first place, in the first place.

*Posh.*

*Shoes*

It took Mother a long while to get over the bad news about Father and for a time she turned to spiritualism to try to ascertain once and for all whether Father was dead or alive or had just deserted again.

I had always had, 'special feelings', shall I call

*Stamps*

them, that I was not alone and could see through walls and read minds etcetera, like Doris Stokes does. Or did, if she's dead. Mother was aware that I was attuned in to the 'other side'. By the 'other side' I don't mean ITV. I mean the spirit world. Which I always think would be a good name for an Off License. 'Spiritworld'. It's nearly as good as 'Bargain Booze'. Anyway, sometimes mother would use me as a spirit guide at her seances I forgot to tell you about.

I recall at one such seance channeling the spirit of Henry the Eighth, and do you know to this day I can still remember his eight wives off by heart, without even thinking about it. Anne Boleyn, Anne of Cleaves, Ann of a thousand days, Katherine of Argon, Katherine Parr, Katherine Hepburn, Audrey Hepburn, Felicity Kendall and Glenda Rogers. There you are! That's at least seven. And Glenda Rogers is definite before you say anything, because she was on telly doing it with Keith Michel.

*Bargain Hunt,*

So deep were these Mamma induced trances that the only thing that would bring me back from the spirit world was our parrot pecking me on

the head. I was very close to that parrot. In fact I could probably remember it's name if I put my mind to it, and was devastated that when rationing bit deep, we had to eat him. With a few of last nights potatoes. In fact even now when times are hard I will talk to that pigeon as if it's there, and I find this a great comfort. To a point. Not pigeon, parrot. Pigeons can't talk. Some people refer to them as vermin. In fact some other people call them rats with tails. Or is that squirrels? And what does that even mean? 'Rats with tails?' Rats are rats with tails surely? Squirrels are squirrels with tails. Pigeons don't have tails. Only an idiot would go round saying something like that. Plus, last time I looked pigeons and squirrels don't talk. Apart from 'Tufty' who wasn't real.

Anyway, so here I was, the Fatherless son of a contortionist Mother. One year old, living in war torn Doncaster, in the South Riding of Yorkshire, starving and parrotless. I remember thinking what would life hold in store for me as I approach chapter three of my book?

