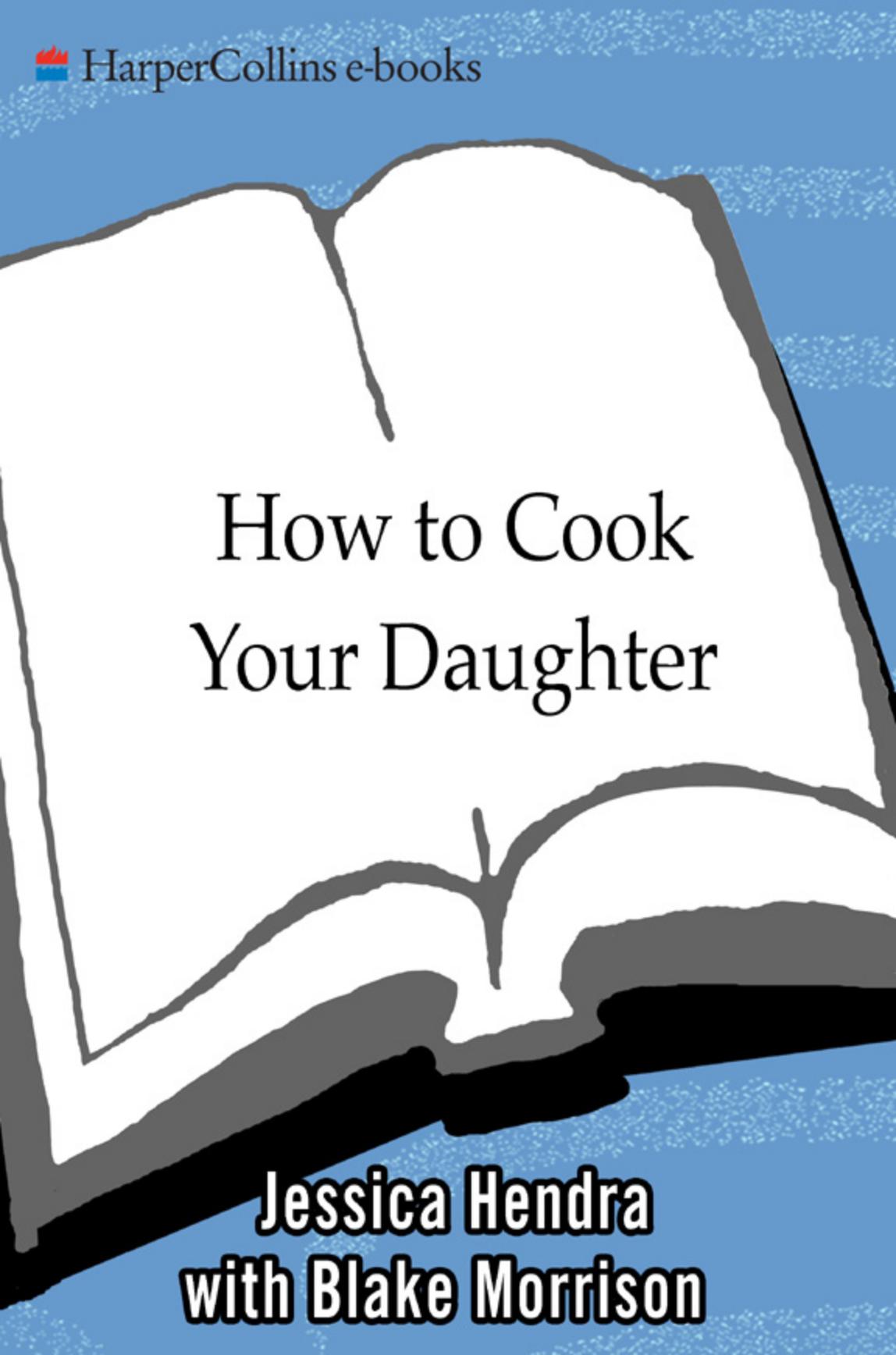


 HarperCollins e-books

How to Cook  
Your Daughter

**Jessica Hendra  
with Blake Morrison**

HOW TO  
COOK YOUR  
DAUGHTER



A MEMOIR

Jessica Hendra

WITH BLAKE MORRISON

 HarperCollins e-books

FOR MY DAUGHTERS,  
JULIA AND CHARLOTTE,  
WHO CHANGED EVERYTHING.

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ABOUT THE PUBLISHER

# PART I

MAY 2004

I PULLED THE BOOK FROM THE SHELF AT BORDERS and read the names first. The title: *Father Joe: The Man Who Saved My Soul*. Then the author: Tony Hendra, my father.

That's when I noticed the hands.

There is no face on the jacket of my dad's memoir. Just a casocked body of a monk, shot from the shoulders down, hands folded across what looks like a Bible. They are strong, sinewy hands, and they may belong to a priest or perhaps just a model posing for the cover. Still, I couldn't help but see something different.

They reminded me of hands that had once held a child. That had pushed back her white-blond hair and carried her off to bed. That had felt beneath her nightie. That had explored a little girl.

They reminded me of my father's hands.

*Of course they couldn't be his, I thought. He wouldn't have volunteered to dress up for the cover just to save the modeling fee, would he?*

Donning religious garb had been something of an obsession with my father. It had been his way of sticking it to the Catholic Church, an institution that he simultaneously revered and resented, and I could remember at least three or four pictures of him playing a priest or a cardinal, or even the Pope.

But this book wasn't billed as a parody. In fact, it had just been described by the nation's most influential newspaper as one of the greatest spiritual memoirs ever written.

A day earlier, I had come home to a phone call after a long and sweaty run, the sort I take every morning, no matter the weather or occasion. I ran on my wedding day and the morning after, never mind that it was below freezing and snowing. Running was my obsession, and my husband, Kurt, a character actor whose face you'd know quicker than his name, had grown used to my many foibles. He even helped me laugh at them. He understood that I couldn't cook more than maybe four dishes, and that, if we ever had dinner parties, I'd just buy something from the store and guiltily accept whatever compliments came my way. He knew that I never bought a hair dryer because, for some reason, I could never quite figure out how to use it effectively. He accepted that, at thirty-nine, I still struggled knowing my right hand from my left, and that my dyslexia made it difficult for me to read even my own handwriting. He even figured out my secret: I tried to compensate by making my writing illegible (if I couldn't read it, no one would!). And Kurt loved me anyway.

On the phone was Rudy Maxa, a former newspaper reporter and columnist better known to National Public Radio listeners as "The Savvy Traveler." He had been the best man at our wedding and is a dear family friend. "Listen, have you seen the *New York Times Book Review* this morning?" he asked.

“No Rudy.” I smiled. “I live in Los Angeles now, remember?”

Rudy didn’t laugh. “Well I think you should take a look at it. There’s a lead review of your dad’s new book. And it’s a rave. I mean a *rave*. You may find it surprising.”

I wiped my forehead. “Surprising in what way, Rudy?” I felt as though he was trying to tell me something without really wanting to say it.

“I know you said your dad was writing a book about a priest,” he said, “but this book . . . well, it sounds like a confessional.”

“A what?”

“A confessional. The review says, quote, ‘It belongs in the first tier of spiritual memoirs ever written.’”

*The first tier of spiritual memoirs?* “What else does it say?” My voice had grown weak. I was reluctant to ask but too curious not to. When my father had first mentioned the book to me in passing two years earlier, he had called it “a biography of sorts.” I should’ve known to attach more meaning to the last two words—“of sorts”—rather than the first two. “Of sorts” was the sort of caveat my father loved to offer.

“Just go online and read the review yourself,” Rudy said. “You might have something to say about the book. If you do let me know. I can get you to the right people.”

The offer seemed odd, but I suspected Rudy knew more than he wanted to share. It was no secret to him that my dad and I had a difficult relationship. I wasn’t sure exactly what my husband had told him, but he had told him something, if not the whole story. Rudy had been in the newspaper and magazine business for years, and at one time—coincidentally—he was the Washington writer for *Spy* when my father was its editor-in-chief. If he said I should read the review, then I would.

Kurt downloaded and printed it for me. “You read it,” he said. “I’ll go amuse the girls.” Our daughters, Julia and Charlotte, were six and three years old.

And so I closed the door and sat down in our playroom/office to read a review that began this way: “Saints are perhaps always best evoked by sinners. And it would be hard to think of someone more at ease in the world of modern sin than Tony Hendra.”

*Modern sin? At ease? Did the reviewer really have any idea the nature of my father’s sins?*

The book indeed was a biography—of sorts—about a Benedictine monk named Father Joseph Warrilow. For most of his life, my dad had known Father Joe, first meeting him when he was fourteen on a trip to an abbey off the coast of England on the Isle of Wight. Since then, the two had remained friends, and the book told the story of how Father Joe helped my dad, now sixty-two, come to terms with all he had done wrong.

I had met Father Joe twice before he had died a few years ago, and I knew him to be as my father—and the review—described him: an incredibly special man. What I didn’t recognize were the descriptions of my father, of his life, or of the sins that he had confessed. The reviewer wrote of my father’s sexual adventures and how none of them was truly “sinful.” How Father Joe’s great gift was to relieve him of misplaced sexual guilt. And I asked, incredulous, as I read it, *How could my father write about this? About sex and sin and misplaced guilt?*

Then came the phrase that I could not forget. Tony Hendra, it read, “spares us no details of his own iniquities as a parent. . . .” I reread it a few times. *Spares us no details of his own iniquities. What does that mean?* For a moment, I thought: *He’s finally come out with it.* But I saw from the rest of the review that, of course, he had not. All I

wanted to do was to call this reviewer and shout, “How do you know he spared no details! Oh, he spared you *a lot* of details because if people knew the details, no one would have published this ‘biography of sorts!’”

I paced in circles holding the review in my hand, ignoring the cries of “Mommy, we’re hungry” coming from outside the door. I had locked it so I could cry without scaring the poor girls who were now rattling the door handle. Finally, I pulled myself together enough to go outside. I had been a professional actress for about twenty years, and though never as accomplished as my husband, I’d met with some success when I first came to Hollywood. But after I had Julia, I focused more on mothering than acting, and my most unforgettable role—as Dejar in *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*—is remembered less for my acting and more because of the audience: Trekkies who log every character. That’s not to diminish my convincing portrayal of a “Cardassian female . . . [who] posed as a scientific colleague of Ulani and Gilora and attempted to sabotage a joint Cardassian-Bajoran scientific effort to place a subspace relay in the Gamma Quadrant.” At least, that’s how StarTrek.com describes it. Now, a much tougher role awaited me. I had to put on a happy face for my daughters. But as I mixed and poured pancakes and talked with them, distracted, I couldn’t escape the review, the book, and what, if anything, I should do about it.

Of course, I had to read *Father Joe*. The book sounded so different than the one Dad had told me about in France two years earlier. But maybe there was something that alluded to bigger “iniquities.” Or maybe . . . maybe there was some note that made it clear that the author left some events out of his “confession” for the sake of those he hurt. *Yes, that would be enough*, I decided. Some eloquent version of “I

omitted details of my first family's troubles to protect my children's privacy." So my husband, my daughters, and I headed to the local Barnes & Noble.

As we walked into the bookstore, I asked Kurt, "What section do you think it's in?"

"Try fiction," he deadpanned.

In fact, the book had been in the biography section . . . before it sold out. "We had a few in," a clerk offered, "but they all went today. Should have more in next week. Can we hold a copy for you, ma'am?"

"No, thank you," I told him. "I'll try somewhere else."

Maybe it was better this way, Kurt reasoned. "At least you can sleep tonight without it burning a hole in your bedside table, Jess."

But I was up for hours anyway. I simply couldn't shake that phrase: "Tony Hendra spares us no details of his own iniquities as a parent." I imagined my father in his Upper West Side apartment reading the review, the phone ringing all day with calls from friends, his agent, his publisher. "Congrats on the fabulous review, Tony! You deserve every word of it. It's just such a wonderful book!"

Did he experience even one moment when his conscience pricked at him? Was he lying awake too, thinking about what he hadn't mentioned? Did part of him squirm because he knew that not all of the praise was deserved? Or had he justified what he had done, had he buried it so deep that he was sleeping soundly, basking in the glory of the writer's dream, a rave in the *New York Times*?

First thing the next morning, Memorial Day, I dragged Julia and Charlotte out to get the book. We tried Borders this time, and I went straight to the biography section. That's where I first saw the hands.

I carried the book to the checkout counter, my two little girls trailing me. The clerk was in his early fifties—a friendly face, maybe the

manager—and I handed him the book face down. He turned it over. “I just read a great review of this book in the *New York Times* yesterday.”

“Really?” I answered flatly.

“Yeah, I was a big fan of the *National Lampoon* back in the 1970s. Been following this guy Tony Hendra for a while.”

“Oh.”

Without thinking, I handed the clerk my credit card. “That’s weird,” he said. “Your name is Hendra too. Any relation?”

“No, no relation,” I said quickly. For the first time in ten years, I regretted not taking my husband’s name.

“Just a coincidence, huh?”

“Yeah, just a coincidence.”

“Well, enjoy,” he said, bagging the book and handing it to me.

As I walked from the store, I heard the little voice, the one that told me I had lied. But it was coming from beside me. “Mommy, doesn’t ‘relation’ mean someone in your family?” It was Julia, my six-year-old fact-checker.

“Yes, it does mean that.” What else could I say?

“Why did you tell that man you were no relation to Grandpa Tony? Didn’t Grandpa write that book?”

“Uh, yeah.”

“So you lied to that man?”

“I guess I did.”

“Why?”

“I don’t know honey. I just didn’t want to talk about Grandpa Tony right now.”

“Oh.”

I was safe. Then: “Mommy, was it a white lie?”

*Help!*

“Yes, I suppose it was a white lie,” but Julia looked troubled, and I felt awful. I was almost forty, but I had become that little girl again—vulnerable, anxious, and lost. My feelings about my father had been in remission. I was happily married with two wonderful daughters. I’d beaten an eating disorder or at least tamed it. I’d pulled my life together. And now, like a complicated cancer, those feelings were back.

For that, for how I felt at that moment at Borders and in the weeks that followed, my father would call me a victim, a member of what he cleverly termed the “Sally-Jessy-Raphael culture.” A person determined to live in the past. Of course, it was easy for him to say that, and at times, I wasn’t sure he was entirely wrong. When he’d call the house in the years before *Father Joe* was published, just the sound of his voice on my answering machine started an emotional chain reaction that made me feel crazy. “Hey Jessie. It’s me, Dad,” he’d say. “Give me a call, will you?” A simple message. But for me, nothing that involved my father was simple. Like the “biography of sorts” that became my father’s “confessional,” every phrase that he uttered seemed meant to be parsed. Every inflection told a story. I couldn’t help myself, and each time I heard his voice, I was reminded of how very complicated our relationship had become.

One day it might have been the way he said “Dad,” drawing out the sounds and ending strong on the last “d.” Or the fact that he continued to call me Jessie, the name I had as a little girl. In my teens, I had dropped the “ie” ending, just as my sister had gone from Kathy to Katherine and my mother from Judy to Judith. When my father left us, we had, without a single word between us, shed the names we knew when my family lived together, as if signaling some metamorphosis. That’s what it *had* been, a metamorphosis. We had all grown up—my

mother, my sister, and me. But not my father. Responsibility was never his strong suit, and only my grandmother, his brother, and his two sisters ever called him by his Christian name, Anthony. To the world, and no matter how old he became, no matter that he became a best-selling author, he preferred to remain, simply, Tony.

Or maybe I'd feel inexplicably thrown by the message he left: *Give me a call, will you?* It wasn't so much a question. My dad seldom asked anything. It was just an assumed command, as though through charm or force of personality, he could simply will the response he expected, the response he felt he deserved. Years ago, when their accents hadn't yet dulled from decades of living in the United States, my parents' voices fell somewhere between the Rolling Stones and the royal family. Now, his voice had mellowed, like my mother's, and retained just a slight British accent. The closed "a" sound. The silent "l." The enunciation that comes from using the front part of the mouth and the lips to form the words.

And if it wasn't his voice, it might be the hands on the cover of his book—hands that probably weren't my father's but seemed to taunt me nonetheless.

It all seems so ridiculous, doesn't it? So horribly tedious when I think about it. But maybe things will make more sense when you hear the rest of my story, when you learn how I got to this place. I knew in my heart that it was never really about what he said or how he said it, or even whether he modeled for his book. But every time I heard his voice, each time I saw him, I would simply try to preoccupy myself by focusing on the trees to avoid the forest, to try to escape the question that nagged at me: *Should I have this man in my life at all after what he did? Wouldn't it be better, wouldn't it be less agonizing, to never talk to him again?*

When I brought home *Father Joe* that Memorial Day, I felt as though my dad had left me another message, this one long, involved, and unavoidable. I needed to know whether something beneath those folded hands might somehow help me finally understand him, whether something in those pages might help me reconcile the events that, sadly, had come to define my life.

1.

# RED MILL ROAD

FOR MANY CHILDREN, DEATH IS ONE OF THEIR FIRST vivid memories. Usually, it's a grandparent or great aunt, someone distant, someone old. You see your parents cry, perhaps for the first time. And it startles you. But they console and soothe you, they reassure you because they know that you can't possibly understand death, not when you are just four years old.

For me, the man who died was in his twenties—about the same age as my mother and father. And though I was four and too young to understand exactly what had happened, I was old enough to be scared.

They found him in his Hollywood apartment, and those who knew him—my parents included—gathered the next day in the living room of a friend's house. I was sure—absolutely convinced—that his body lay somewhere in that house. I still remember how I clung to my mother, my wide eyes searching the pale, shocked faces. They seemed at least as scared as I was, huddling on the couches as if they were telling secrets—whispering and hushed, as though whatever killed their friend lurked just around the corner. They said he'd "OD'd," but

of course, that meant nothing to me. Then “choked on his own vomit.” Then: “Poor Chris. Heroin killed him.” What I saw, what I was *sure* would happen in just a few seconds, was the man walking toward me, covered in vomit, snarling with his nose and mouth and body dripping with this black goo “heroin.” Behind him there’d be a trail.

Heroin. I wanted nothing more than to get away from that house, to go play with my sister, Kathy, in the sun, to go home to Laurel Canyon. But I had to stay here with adults who seem as bewildered as me. And I was terrified: *Would Heroin get me too?*

It’s not the most ideal of childhood memories. But you have to consider the time (1969) the place (California) and of course, the parents. Mine had come thousands of miles from England to experiment with the Southern California scene of the late 1960s. They were born during the Second World War, part of the generation that would be responsible for the Swinging Sixties. My mother grew up in Wimbledon, a suburb of London. Her father, Alfred Christmas, owned a chemist’s shop. She, her sister, and her brother lived with my grandmother and grandfather in a mock Tudor house built on a lot leveled by a V-bomb in the waning years of the war. My grandfather spent his time growing roses and humming. Kind but emotionally reserved, he had a habit of walking with his arms behind his back, his right arm bent with the hand clutching his left arm, as if holding himself back. My grandmother proved warmer than her husband. On our visits, she played with us and baked jam tarts and Victoria sponge cakes for afternoon tea.

One of her great sorrows was her name: Doris. My grandmother said my great-grandparents had planned to name her Kathleen. But at her christening, when the godfather was asked to name the child, he announced—much to the horror of the assembled relations—“I name the child Doris.” And Doris she would stay. When I heard the story

some years ago from my mother, I asked, with a degree of skepticism, what any American of my generation would: “Why didn’t her parents say anything?” At the same time, I was saying to myself: *because they were English*. As I can attest, the value of keeping silent for the sake of maintaining family peace seems to run in our veins.

Doris and Alfred named their second child—my mother—Judith. But for much of her life, Judith was Judy. I imagine it must have been hard being called “Judy Christmas.” As I told my mother during one of my more obnoxious moments as a teenager, it seemed a name more suitable for a stripper than for an intellectually gifted and talented girl like my mom, who became the bright light of her family by earning a place at Girton College, University of Cambridge.

Anthony Hendra, my dad, was born the son of a stained-glass maker and raised in rural Hertfordshire, the region in which Jane Austen set *Pride and Prejudice*. Even as a child, he seems to have been eccentric. My grandma Georgina told me how little Anthony used to ram his tri-cycle at top toddler speed into a brick wall over and over and over again. “All day long, just riding right into the wall,” Grandma Georgina said with a smoker’s laugh. My uncle recounted how my father, then a teenager and obsessed with becoming a monk, instructed his brother and sisters to send letters to the Pope recommending one Anthony Christopher Hendra for sainthood. The Pope failed to respond.

My father, like my mother, was tremendously gifted intellectually. To his family’s surprise (but no one else’s), he easily won a scholarship to Cambridge. Initially, he resisted accepting the place, having already decided on his vocation as a novice in a Benedictine monastery. But at the insistence of the more senior monks, he went off to the university.

It was at Cambridge in about 1962 that my parents met. By this time, my father had put his monastic aspirations in the deep freeze

and instead embraced the world of earthly delights. By the end of her senior year, my mother was very pregnant. At twenty-two and dreaming of success as a comedian, my father was understandably reluctant to marry. My mother, more in love with my dad than he was with her, could neither face an abortion nor give the baby up for adoption. So, unsure of what was going to happen, she continued on with her pregnancy. In her Cambridge graduation pictures, though unmarried and visibly with child, my mother wears her gown and rounded stomach with pride. She smiles into the camera defiantly, holding her diploma over the spot where her illegitimate baby—my sister, Katherine—grows. She is beautiful, her long hair untidily looped in a Bronte-like bun, a concession to the formality of the occasion. My grandparents stand awkwardly on either side of her: my grandfather in his gray Sunday best, my grandmother in a Queen Mother hat. To me they look confused, caught between the pride they feel in their daughter having graduated from the best university in England and their mortification over her obvious “condition.”

In the end, sometime after my sister’s birth, my parents did marry, and they spent their honeymoon night in Paris. My mother said it was wonderful. My father said it rained and called it the worst night of his life. And so their marriage began.

In 1964, a year before I was born, my parents immigrated to America—first to the East Coast, a place where my father had visited to test the comedy waters. He and his stand-up comedy partner, Nick Ullett, had met with some success there, and the opportunities in the States seemed greater than in London. I was born in New York, where my parents had a fifth-floor walk-up apartment on the Upper East Side of Manhattan.

Not ones for baby-naming books, my parents turned to the pages

of the *Collected Works of Shakespeare*, just as they had when my sister was born. She was named Katherine after the long-suffering but tough-as-nails Katherine of Aragon in *Henry VIII*. I became Jessica from *The Merchant of Venice*.

Our names foretold our futures. Kathy spent a childhood as “Thunder Thighs,” a name my father coined for her. She persevered by throwing herself into her studies. Today, she’s a doctor.

My name seems even more prescient. At the end of *The Merchant of Venice*, Jessica faces a decision a daughter dreads: to follow her heart, thus betraying her father, or to stay true to him and betray herself. And so I was given not a name that I hated, like my grandmother’s, or a diminutive one as unfitting as my mom’s, but one that foreshadowed a future that no one in my family could have imagined.

By the time I was born, my father had begun his career as a satirist and comedian. At Cambridge he performed with John Cleese and Graham Chapman. Soon after coming to America, the comedy team of Hendra and Ullett appeared on *The Ed Sullivan Show* (Dad and Nick believed Sullivan understood less than half of what they were saying but loved their accents). Dad was brilliant, charming, witty, and gregarious, especially to those who didn’t know him well. But he struggled. Despite his talent, he couldn’t crack the TV world. What he wrote was too racy, too clever, or just not right. And so, Hollywood wouldn’t be for us—or, more aptly, for him.

I have only two other vivid memories of California—whirling around and around on the Mad Hatters Tea Party Ride until I threw up all the treats I had consumed for my sixth birthday and waking up in a shaking bed to the sound of breaking glass and the eerie rumble of an earthquake. For me, death by overdose, Disneyland, and earthquakes summed up L.A. in the late 1960s.