As a Perfectly Foolish Young Man I Wanted 16

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As a Perfectly Foolish Young Man I Wanted - Book Five - Where the Halling Valley River Lies - Miss Ann Watt Had Stars In Her Eyes

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The Scots-Irish Sept of Watt

My father Patrick Clancy Halling joined the London Philharmonic Orchestra while still a teenager during the Blitz on London. And during this time, he served in the Sea Cadets as a signaller, seeing action as such on the hospital ships of the previously mentioned Thames River Emergency Service.

Following his time with the LPO, he played with the London Symphony Orchestra with his cellist brother Peter, before going on to specialize in Chamber music.

His chamber career included eight years with the Hirsch quartet, led by Dublin-born violinist Leonard Hirsch, and the formation of his own Quartet Pro Musica in 1955, with Roger Raphael, Peter Sermon and his brother Peter, while Ernest Scott and Gwynne Edwards joined at a later date. And three years later, this resulted in an extraordinary event taking place in the Recital Room of the Royal Festival Hall.

On the 2cnd of November 1958, the Quartet convened to take part in a reading of TS Eliot's *Four Quartets* by four giants of the arts, including the then poet laureate Cecil Day Lewis, together with his wife, the actress Jill Balcon, fellow actress Maxine Audley, and Shakespearean scholar George Rylands. By which time, Lewis' and Balcon's son, future Hollywood superstar Daniel Day Lewis, would have been a little over a year and half old. And this was interspersed with a rendition of Bela Bartok's Sixth Quartet.

He also played with the Virtuoso Ensemble, whose distinctions are believed to have included first UK performances of works by major British 20th Century composers, such as Elizabeth Lutyens, Humphrey Searle, Peter Racine Fricker and MÃ¡tyÃ¡s Seiber.

And among his recordings from the late 1950s currently featured on the internet are *The History of Music in Sound, Vol. VI: The Growth of Instrumental Music (1630-1750)*, on which, with Richard Hadeney on flute,

Basil Lam on harpsichord, and Terence Weil on cello, he interprets Vitali's *Trio Sonata in E Minor, Op. 2, No. 3*, Legrenzi's *La Cornara* and Jenkins' *Fancy in G Minor*.

In June 1949, he wed my mother, the Canadian singer Miss Ann Watt, who through marriage became Mrs Ann Halling, thereby substituting a Scottish surname for a Danish one.

In Ireland, the Watt surname is allegedly exclusive to Ulster, home province of my grandfather James Watt, having been carried there by the Scottish and English planters of the late 1600s. It's common in the Scottish Lowlands, especially in the counties of Aberdeenshire and Banffshire.

As might be expected it's affiliated with that of Watson, and both are what is known as septs of the Forbes and Buchanan clans. A sept being a family that traditionally followed a particular chief or clan leader in the Highlands or Lowlands of Scotland, either through being related by marriage or resident on his land, and so helped to make up a larger clan or family.

Kindred septs include those of MacQuat, MacQuattie, MacQuhat, MacQwat, MacRowatt, MacWalter, MacWater, MacWatson, MacWatt, MacWatters, MacWattie, Vatsoun, Vod, Vode, Void, Voud, Voude, Vould, Walter, Walterson, Wasson, Waters, Waterson, Watsone, Watsoun, Wattie, Wattson, Wod, Wode, Wodde, Woid, Woide, Wood, Woyd and Wyatt.

She'd been born Angela Jean Elisabeth Watt in the city of Brandon, Manitoba, the youngest by 7 years of the six children of James and Elisabeth Watt from Ulster, Ireland and Glasgow, Scotland respectively. And the only one not to be born in Britain...the others, Annie-Isabella, Robert, James, Elisabeth, who died in infancy having been born in Glasgow, Catherine in Ireland.

While still an infant she moved with her family to the Grandview area of East Vancouver, whose earliest settlers tended to be shopkeepers, or tradesmen, in shipping or construction work, and largely from the British Isles. Such as James Watt himself, a builder by trade from the little town of Castlederg in County Tyrone, Ireland, then part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland.

Grandview underwent massive change following the First World War when Italian, Chinese, and East European immigrants moved in, and still more after World War II with a second wave of Italian immigrants. Today its part of the Grandview-Woodland area of East Vancouver.

Ann's mother was from the Springburn area of Glasgow. And she's believed to have been born there possibly to an Englishman, from either Manchester or Liverpool; while her mother was allegedly a Scot. And if so, my mother is of mixed Lowland Scottish, Ulster-Scots and English ancestry, not that any real difference exists between these three ethnicities.

As to my maternal grandfather...he was almost certainly a descendant of the Planters sent by the English to Ulster in the 1600s, many of them originally inhabitants of the Anglo-Scottish border country and the Lowland region of Scotland.

According to some sources, Lowlanders are distinct from their Highland counterparts, being of Anglo-Saxon rather than Gaelic ancestry, although how true this is I'm not qualified to say. Certainly, the region straddling the Scottish Lowlands and Anglo-Scottish Borderlands, is one traditionally perceived as Sassenach, which is the Gaelic term for Saxon, or person of Anglo-Saxon origin.

Whatever the truth, the sensible view is their bloodline contains a variety of kindred strains including - as well as Anglo-Saxon - Gaelic, Pictish, Norman and so on, depending on the exact region. Moreover, all Caucasian inhabitants of the British Isles - including the independent sovereign nation of Ireland - partake of a fairly homogenous ancestry, which certain experts are claiming to be more Iberian than anything else. In the end, though, are we not all of the same single human race created by God? As a Christian, I can't believe anything else.

The Ulster Scots reportedly began to emigrate to the US in sizeable numbers in the early 1600s, and their descendants are to be found all throughout the country. But most famously perhaps in those regions which are culturally Southern, which is to say those states situated beneath the Mason-Dixon Line. Indeed most of the original European settlers of the Deep and Upland South are widely believed to have been of British and especially English and Scots-Irish origin. Today, many of them describe themselves as merely "American", while others continue to claim either English or Scots-Irish ancestry.

The Theatre Under the Stars

By the time he'd moved his family to Grandview in the autumn of 1924, my grandfather James Watt had, according to my mother's account, forsaken the Presbyterian Calvinism of his Ulster boyhood and youth for the Wesleyan theology of the Salvation Army. Yet, in keeping with the Army of that time, his approach to Scripture was what would be described as fundamentalist today; and he was accordingly opposed to worldly pleasures such as dancing, the theatre, and movie-going.

Moreover, I think it's fair to say that alcohol was anathema; while even the drinking of tea and coffee was frowned upon.

Some years after moving to Grandview, James Watt built his family a house in Kitsilano on the city's West Side, but a reversal of fortune in terms of his business meant that the family was forced to return to Grandview.

Then at the age of 14, Angela joined her friend Marie and Marie's mother on a car trip just beyond the US-Canadian border into the state of Washington, where she saw her very first movie, a romantic civil war picture entitled *Only the Brave* starring Gary Cooper and Mary Brian. Its effect on her was little short of seismic, as by her own admission it introduced worldly ideas into her psyche for the very first time.

Despite an intensively Christian upbringing, from then on, she became consumed by the glamour of the movies and show business. In other words, she'd allowed the camel's nose into her life, and it only remained for the rest of the camel to follow.

At high school, she'd been a diligent but not exceptional pupil; and her sole and only sporting distinction consisted of being part of her school track team. While her closest friend, the universally popular Margaret Stone, was an exceptional young sportswoman. However, Angela came into her own in the Glee Club, where presumably she first started using her beautiful singing voice beyond the confines of the Army.

When she was 17, her father became very seriously ill and she was forced to take time off school to do her share of looking after him. She spent long periods of time by his bedside, weeping for a man who when she was still only a little girl had a habit of affectionately flicking the back of her hair and she'd scolded him to make him stop. She was off for so long that Margaret Stone had come calling for her with another friend, concerned by her protracted absence. James Watt died after a short illness, and Angela, utterly heartbroken, wept openly at his funeral.

In her final year at high school, she learned short hand and other tools of the secretarial trade, while working part time at F.W. Woolworth's on Commercial Drive.

After leaving, she started work answering telephone enquiries on behalf of a laundry business by the name of Pioneer Laundry, where her sister Cathy ran a branch specialising in the washing and starching of men's collars.

And it was during her time at Pioneer that Angela received her first big break, when one of her co-workers, presumably after discovering Angela had ambitions to sing professionally, suggested she accompany her to a singing engagement at a gentleman's club in the city.

Angela promptly took her up on her offer, and as a result of having done so, was tendered details of a singing teacher by the name of Avis Phillips by a member of the club.

Soon after having made contact with Avis, Angela became her pupil, and ultimately also her friend, and this association brought her into contact with Avis' regular accompanist, Phyllis Dilworth, whose uncle Ira Dilworth just happened to be regional head of the Canadian Broadcasting Company.

It was through this family tie that Angela secured her first professional engagements as a soprano, indeed her entire singing career, with many of its greatest triumphs taking place at Vancouver's famous Theatre Under the Stars, which officially opened on August the 6th 1940. And where Miss Ann Watt played the lead in such classic operettas as Oscar Straus' *The Chocolate Soldier*, *Naughty Marietta* by Victor Herbert, with libretto by Rida Johnson Young, and *The Student Prince* by Sigmund Romberg, with libretto by Dorothy Donnelly.

And for the CBC with full orchestra, she broadcast many popular classics. Such as, to the accompaniment of Percy Harvey and the Golden Strings, two songs by Victor Herbert with the baritone Greg Miller, viz., *A Kiss in the Dark,* from *Orange Blossoms,* and the lovely title song from *Sweethearts.*

As well as *Neath the Southern Moon*, another breathtakingly romantic melody by Herbert, *Strange Music* from *The Song of Norway*, adapted from Grieg by Wright and Forrest, and *Can't Help Singing* by Kern and

Yarburg from the 1944 movie of the same name.

Such was the loveliness of her voice, to say nothing of looks so glamorous she was likened to Betty Grable, she became something of a sweetheart of the Canadian Forces. While her irresistible vivacity and charm caused both audiences and press to fall in love with her not just in Canada but parts of the northern US as well.

Among the Classical songs she broadcast during the North American phase of her career were Schumann's *Dedication,* Brahms' *The Vain Suit,* Delibes' *Les Filles de Cadix,* Debussy's *Mandoline*, Rachmaninov's *Before My Window,* and Vaughan Williams' exquisite musical evocation of Rossetti's *Silent Noon*...with all liede rendered in English due to wartime restrictions on the German language.

After the war, she hoped to expand her career either in the US or the UK, but despite a successful audition for the San Francisco Light Opera Company, she ultimately opted for England, once a ticket to sail had become available to her.

She left for Britain laden with letters of recommendation from Avis Phillips, as well as numerous press cuttings from her brilliant Canadian career, possibly persuaded that once in London, success would be hers for the taking, at Drury Lane and elsewhere. Sadly though, soon after arriving, she failed an audition for the internationally famous Glyndebourne Opera House, home of the annual festival of the same name.

However, she did land a small role in the Ivor Novello musical, *King's Rhapsody*, which opened at the Palace Theatre on the 15th of September 1949, with its author, one-time matinee idol Novello, in the title role. It ran for 841 performances, surviving Novello who died in 1951.

And she broadcast for the BBC, with *De Fleurs* from Debussy's *Proses Lyriques*, *Stars in my Eyes*, an unutterably poignant love song by Fritz Kreisler, with lyrics by Dorothy Field, and the popular Harry Ralton standard, *I Remember the Cornfields*, with lyrics by Martin Mayne, among the songs she performed for them.

She also appeared in an early television show called *Picture Post*, of which there remains no record.

Sadly though, it wasn't long after her arrival in London that she realized her voice was deteriorating - this being especially true of her top notes - possibly as a result of sleeping difficulties; although she was a smoker.

And she had enjoyed a somewhat hedonistic lifestyle at the height of her fame in Vancouver, when she was Miss Ann Watt. And a fairly wealthy young woman at that, with a passionate love of beautiful clothes and shoes.

She went from one singing teacher to the other in the hope that her once near-perfect voice might be restored to her but little came of her efforts; although one of her tutors, who just happened to be the great German soprano Elisabeth Schumann, did offer some hope.

Schumann suggested that once her time in England was over, for she was recording her final *liede* 78s in London with the British pianist Gerald Moore, she accompany her back to New York City, where she'd been resident since 1918.

However, my mother turned her down, perhaps feeling she'd already spent enough money on lessons. And besides, she'd only been married to my father, the London-based musician Patrick Halling, since June 1949, and uprooting would not have been easy.

Pat and Ann spent the next seven years pursuing what I've been led to believe was a semi-Bohemian existence in London and on the continent, where they vacationed by both car and motorcycle...during the early years of that relatively innocent period between the end of the Second World War and the onset of the Youth Culture of the sixties, after which things would never be quite the same again.

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