



TIM WALKER THE GRANNY ALPHABET

VERSE BY KIT HESKETH-HARVEY

THE GRANNY ALPHABET

PHOTOGRAPHS BY

TINE WALKER



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The Granny Alphabet

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To Gamma, Louisa Wicks, 1995



I've not been very good at growing up, but as I get older this seems to have been one of the better decisions life has made for me. To retain

a child's eye when peering through the camera's viewfinder is to see the world as half magic, half horror. Old age brings back this childlike clarity of vision, and so children and the elderly have an agreement, a bond, united both by a sense of being out of time and by the brilliantly reckless lack of responsibility that bookends adulthood and allows them to see things as they really are. This is why I've always loved the very old and the very young, whether in age or spirit, and why I've taken the photographs for this book – part photographic love letter to the elderly and part documentation of the dying breed of little old ladies who live down the lane.

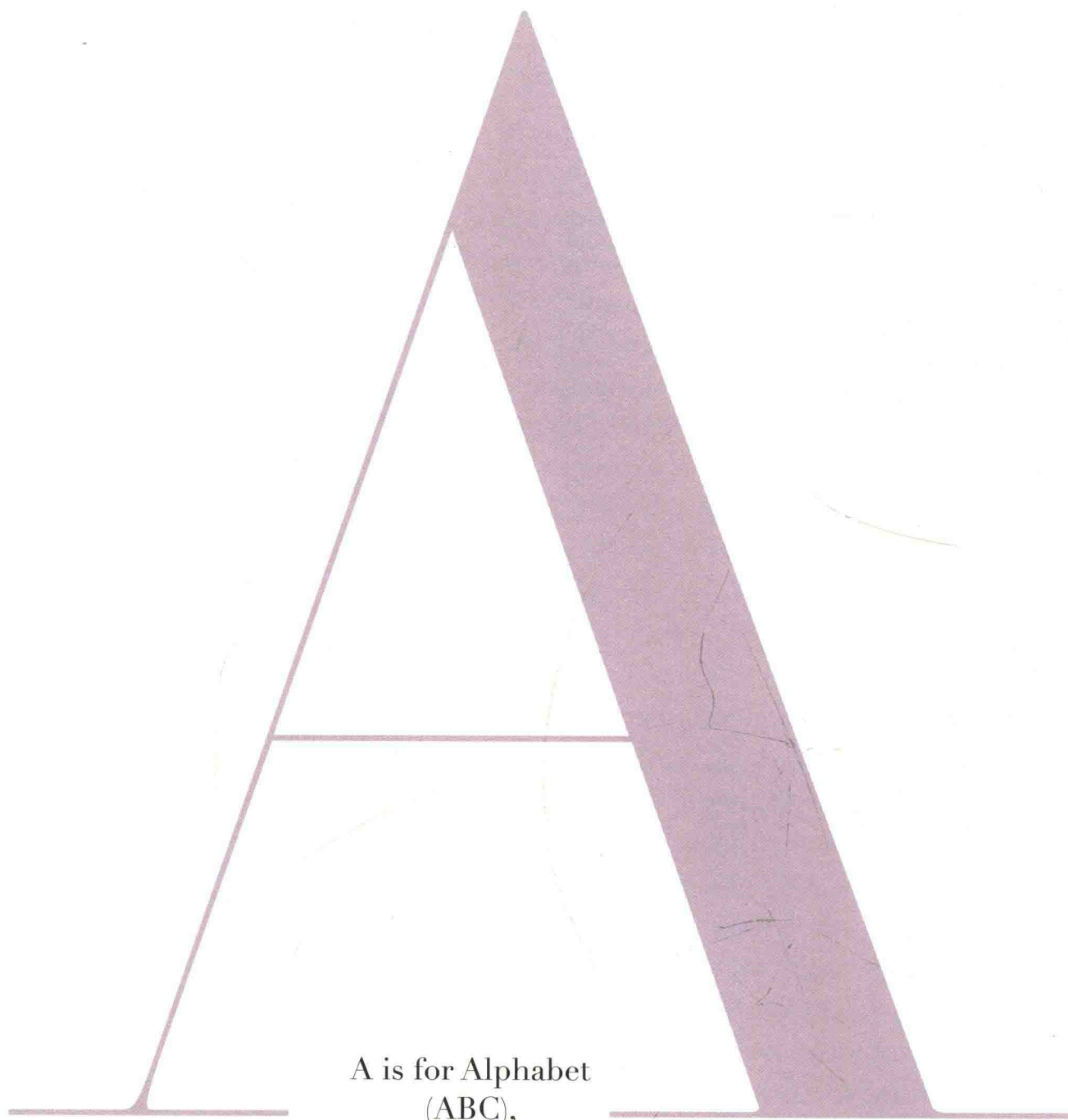
I am fortunate enough to have known both my grandmothers. My father's mother was called Grandma by my brother and me, Kathleen by others. She wore a brown fur coat over a jersey cream dress and when Grandpa took us out in his Triumph Dolomite to explore, she would put on her leather gloves to grip the handles of her shiny crocodile handbag. Their house was full of clocks that went tick-tock and chimed quarterly throughout the day as Grandma smoked her Silk Cuts and read us stories

about Captain Hook and Tiger Lily. In front of my grandparents' house stood a very large lime tree and I would spend hours beneath it searching for four-leaf clovers. Once I found one. I remember Grandma waving from the front door and saying, 'Good luck with your four-leaf clover...' But I'd already found luck.

I learnt the importance of luck from my other grandmother, my mother's mother, who my brother and I called Gamma, and others called Louie. One day Gamma and Poppa took us for a walk somewhere along the south coast of England. At one point, as they worked out from their map how to reach a flour-grinding windmill on a nearby hill, my brother and I were left to play on the edge of a crazy cliff. I can't quite remember how it happened but we ended up clambering and swinging on a rusting fence that hung out over the edge of the cliff – without Holden Caulfield to save us. Cradled in the rusting hammock of wire, I dropped torn pieces of tissue from my pocket and counted how many seconds they took to spiral down into the waves and rocks below. Gamma spotted us and waved her white hankie to get our attention. After inevitably scolding my brother and me for being so stupid, she laughed and said, as she always did, 'Better to be born lucky, than to be born rich...'

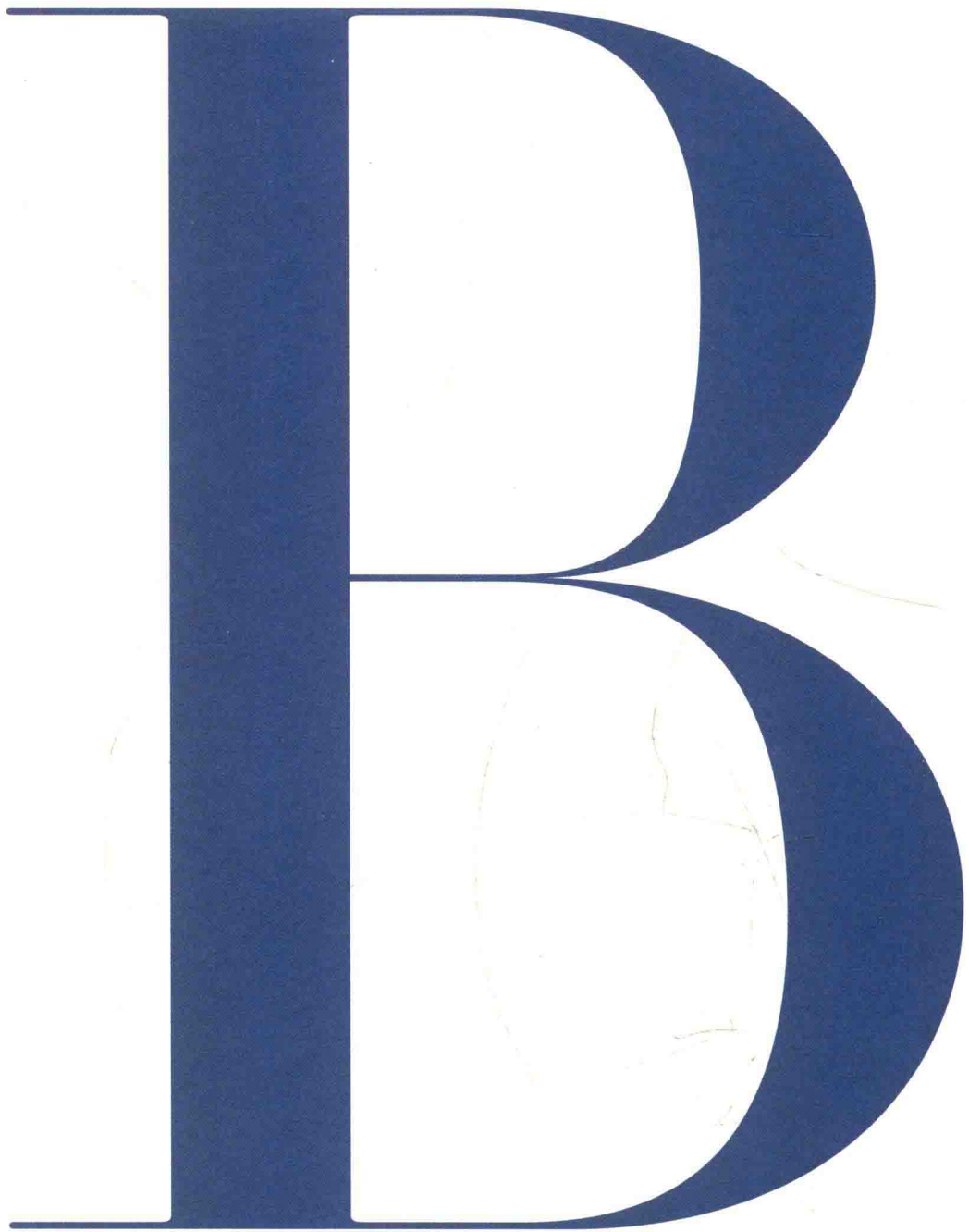
–T.W.



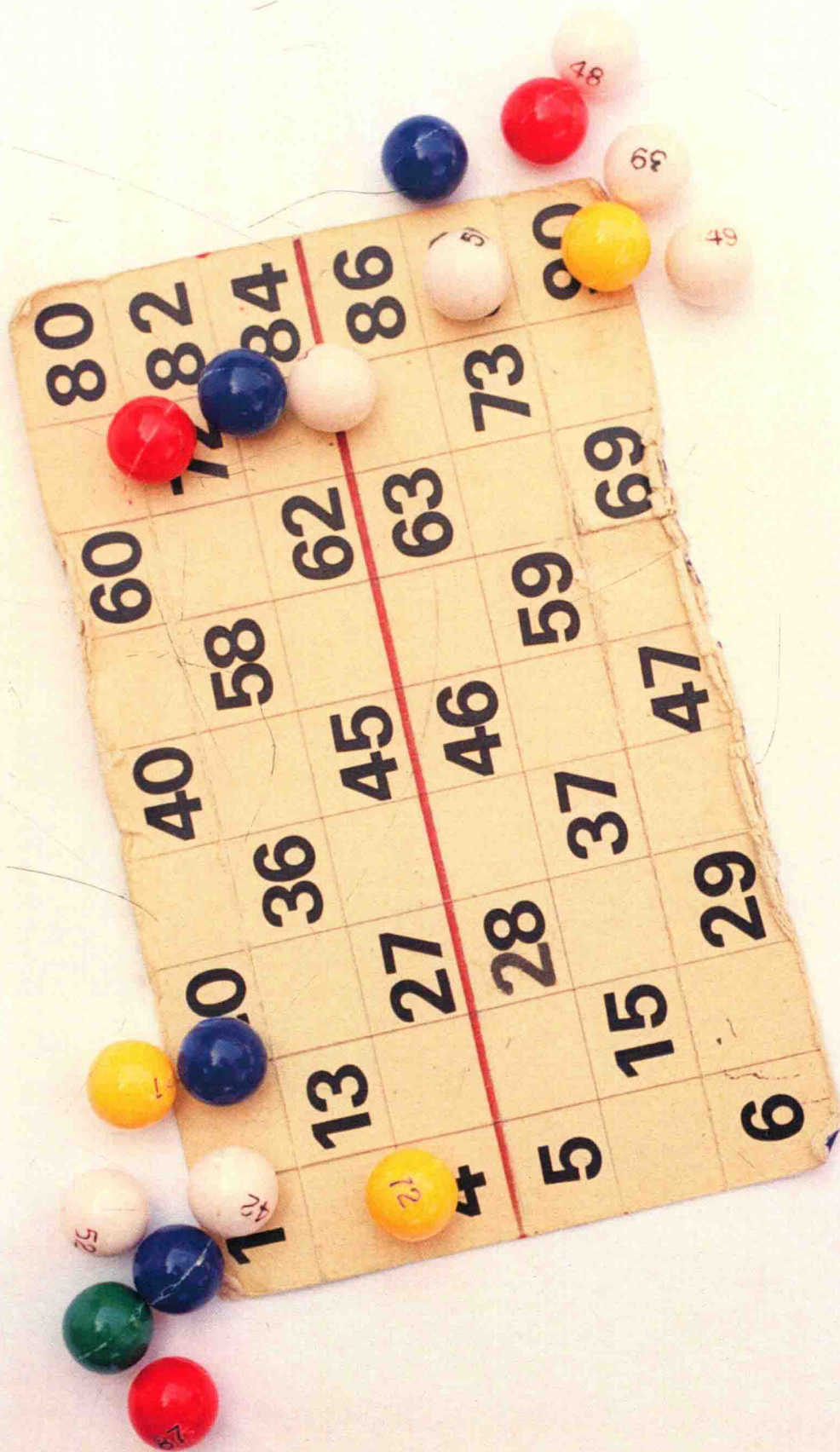


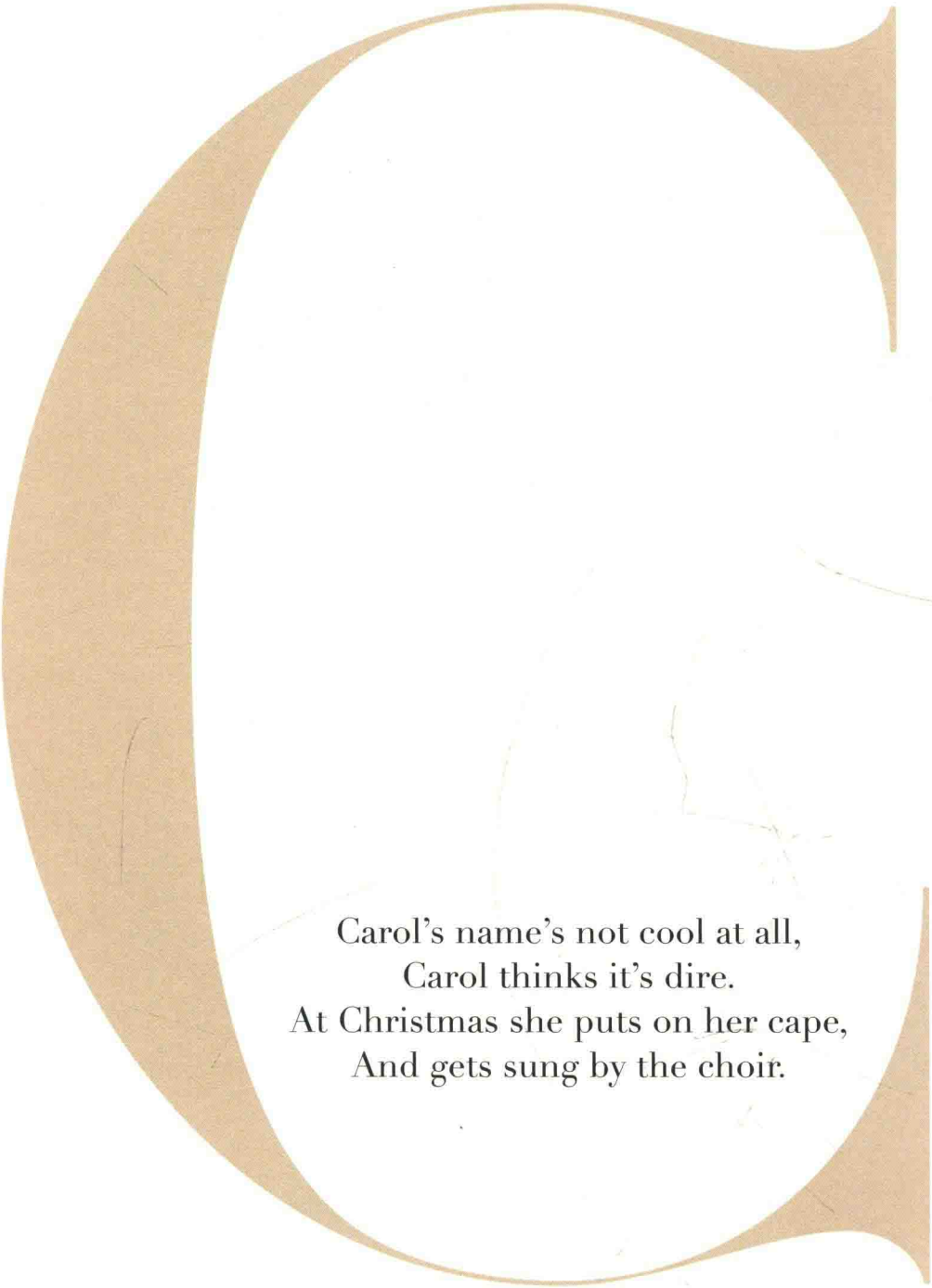
A is for Alphabet
(ABC),
And aged ancestors
(Awfully like me).
Twenty-six letters,
That's twenty-six Grannies.
Twenty-six photographs
(This one is Annie's).





Brenda's bag is bulging,
A bunch of boring bills,
Bus passes and buttons and bright blue burping pills,
A bit of blossom, broken
From a branch at Becky Falls,
And, buried at the bottom,
By Jingo! Bingo balls!





Carol's name's not cool at all,
Carol thinks it's dire.
At Christmas she puts on her cape,
And gets sung by the choir.



