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Love, Lucy

by LUCILLE BALL

with

BETTY HANNAH HOFFMAN

LUCILLE BALL

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LOVE, LUCY

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Foreword

One of my mother's favorite things to do, when a small group of people were involved in some ordinary conversation, was to wait until one of them left the room and as soon as she returned, blurt out, convincingly, "Here she is now! Why don'tcha tell her to her face?!!" This was always followed by frozen silence, and then she'd howl (with that depth-of-the-sea laugh she had) to see the look on the poor soul's face, who for one horrible moment thought someone had been saying terrible things about her while she was gone.

I'm not sure why, but I keep thinking about that now as I sit down to introduce you to this treasure.

I lost my father at five minutes after midnight on December 2, 1986, and my mother at dawn, on April 26, 1989. For my brother, Desi, and me, it has been a difficult and complicated mourning period.

Normally, I would think, when an adult child loses her

first parent, there's a parent's spouse there to take over; to handle the technical decisions, to bury and bequeath. My parents were divorced in the late fifties and both were married to others for more than twenty years. My father's wife, Edie, died of cancer the year before he did, so we were his only heirs. And after my mother's death, her husband of twenty-seven years, and our stepfather, Gary Morton, learned from her executors that he had been very lovingly and carefully provided for, but that she had placed Desi and me in charge of her estate.

For *any* children, tending to an estate is an unwelcome and painful process, no matter when the loss comes. Being the one responsible for making all the important "final" decisions can be a great burden and an instant maturing process all at the same time.

The organizing alone is overwhelming . . . from ridiculous details like who gets the gravy boat to selling the house, to *where* are you going to put all the stuff you simply aren't ready to part with, to choosing what kind of service you think your parent would want (without ever having talked with her about it).

Well, we did it, not once, but twice, within three years, *and* these were not ordinary parents. An old hat box with a rusted zipper, filled with graying white gloves, without fingertips, which you'd assume was "toss it" material, hardly worthy of the thrift-shop pile, becomes a priceless museum piece when you realize that those gloves were worn by the "Professor" character my mother immortalized on the *I Love Lucy* show. Every gown or pocketbook, every seemingly trivial possession that happened to be engraved, became instant "memorabilia." We had to think twice before putting it anywhere.

My brother, Desi, and I debated the importance of preserving those things, and (considering the frame of mind we were in at the time) the process often turned into *hours* of discussions about human destiny and the twisted priorities of would-be scavengers, often either reducing us both to tears of longing and numbness, or giving way to hyster-

ical fantasies of building life-size sculptures of Vitameata-vegamin with all the leftover henna rinse. (After watching what happened to the Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis estate, I wish we had sold it by the *ounce* and donated the proceeds to AIDS research!)

Oddly, in some ways, after all these years, life goes on as if they were still here; simply off somewhere, on location perhaps, and unable to get to a phone. If you go by the daily requests for their services, they'd both be happy to know, I'm sure, that they're *almost* busier now than when they were alive! On any given day we field dozens of requests for film clips, memorial awards, memorabilia for charities, documentaries, television specials, movie deals, and countless licenses to merchandise rights . . . which we try to guide gracefully. Unfortunately, some of it translates into bizarre situations that neither Desi nor I enjoy dealing with very much.

I really hate coming into my office in the morning and finding a full set of tiny *bobbing-head* dolls on my desk that look like some Hitchcock interpretation of Lucy Ricardo, with makeup by Salvador Dali. It's a lot to take in before you've had your coffee.

Sometimes you want to get on with your *own* life and not be forced to spend such enormous amounts of time talking about your deceased parents; to be continually liable for making responsible decisions on their behalf; to have to learn how to listen and decode all of the "shyster-meisters" who spend endless amounts of otherwise useful energy weaving weirder and weirder ways to snag their own personal piece of the "Lucy" legend.

And so many times you wish they *were* still here, even if for a few moments, just so you could turn around and ask, "Is this okay? Do you mind if they do this?" But you quickly realize that the voices that once could both calm your fears and drive you *so* crazy are truly silent forever. Until . . .

One day, while trying to sort out some of the complicated legalities of running the estates, Desi and I asked our

mother's former attorney, Ed Perlstein, to sift through some of his old file boxes in search of some contracts we needed, and something remarkable happened!

There, in a dusty box of envelopes and tapes, he uncovered what turned out to be a never-before-published autobiographical work of our mother's. The package, postmarked 1966 from Betty Hannah Hoffman, Los Altos, California, simply said, LUCY. The manuscript was written in the first person, and seemed to span Mom's entire life up to 1964.

I was stunned. When I read it I cried. So many people, including myself, had tried to tell this story, but up until that moment I never knew that my mother had written about her own life. When my brother, Desi, read the manuscript he was overcome with emotions. He said, "I loved it. I *loved* reading it! There's wonderful energy that comes through . . . a fire in her belly, as a young kid, a sense of adventure. Like, 'I wanna make some noise.' Her connections from past to present . . . I salute her for her ability to think in terms of 'what did I learn from the past?' And there's some great straight-from-the-heart advice. I love the way she wrote about her feelings for Dad. It was very powerful for me to hear about when she first met him. Some people prolong their unhappiness by dramatizing it, which, as Vernon Howard used to tell me, was 'like expecting applause for having a headache.' Mom does *not* do this. Instead of overdramatizing what happened in her life, she seems to be trying to understand what her life is all about, to learn to love in a new way. That's what I found most endearing about this autobiography—the way she looked at life."

I have personally read hundreds of accounts of my mother's life over the years and thought I knew it all. But there were so many more *details* in this, especially regarding her earlier memories and what happened during her most formative years that contributed to the kind of woman, actress, and mother she became. I only wished I had had access to all of this priceless information in 1993, when I

was making *Lucy and Desi: A Home Movie,* as it would have saved me a lot of time in research, and would have given me a much deeper understanding of the pain she had to assimilate as a child, and the depth of her struggle to achieve the kind of success she eventually did. Now, along with *A Book,* our father's fascinating, fact-filled reminiscence of *his* life, written in 1976, my brother and I and *our* children, along with the whole Ball-Arnaz clan, have one of the most remarkable, comprehensive family histories ever documented.

Another wonderful discovery was that Mrs. Hoffman had taped all her interviews with Mom, so although this is an "as told to" autobiography, unlike some others I have read, I could *hear* my mother's voice in the phrasing. Later, when I had the chance to listen to the twenty-some hours of original interviews, I realized that was because, for once in her life, my mother was quoted accurately!

I, of course, was tempted every now and then while editing to insert the note "See my father's book for *his* version of this same story"! But even then it was comforting to remember that there *are* always two sides to every story, and to take everyone's account of what happened to them with a grain of *salsa!*

So what happened, way back then, that put this *book* in that *box?*

I called Mom's longtime secretary, Wanda Clark, to see if *she* had any recollection of having worked on something like this, but Wanda was as shocked as I. The manuscript must have been tucked away shortly before she came to work for Mom.

I called my Aunt Cleo, who had been producing my mother's radio shows around that same time, and who, at first, was as puzzled as Wanda had been, but who eventually said, "You know, I *do* have this memory of your mother talking into a tape recorder a lot." I called my stepfather, Gary, my mother's brother, Fred Ball, and longtime family friends like Marcella Rabwin, but no one knew anything about it. So I sent them all copies to help judge the

manuscript's legitimacy and accuracy.

Even though they had known her longer than almost anyone, each in his or her own way found her autobiography "fascinating," "intriguing," and "illuminating," and marveled at her vivid recollections and the wealth of detail. And every one of them said something like, "Boy, you can really hear her voice in it!"

Finally, after many weeks of sleuthing, we were able to contact Mrs. Hoffman, now in her seventies and living in northern California, and as we tried to piece together the hows, wheres, and whens, we discovered some of the whys.

Apparently, in the early 1960s, not long after my mother had married Gary Morton, her dear friend and mentor, the late Dr. Norman Vincent Peale, encouraged her to record her thoughts about her dramatic and challenging life. But, knowing that she was starring in a television series, running a studio, and trying to raise two high-voltage teenagers at the same time, and would probably be unable to complete the task herself, he suggested she work *with* someone and do an "as told to"–type autobiography. I'm sure he must have convinced her that it would be historical *and* healing.

Mrs. Hoffman worked with my mother for about two years, taping and transcribing interview sessions. In addition to these sessions, she traveled to Mom's hometown of Jamestown, New York, interviewed her childhood friends, and then gave shape and order to the information.

Once given Mrs. Hoffman's name, people in my mother's circle began to recall the work's having taken place and remembered it as a difficult process. Aunt Cleo told me of one episode in particular. "I remember Betty used to come to me for help in figuring out ways to loosen your mother up and get her to tell the truth." I'm sure that one of my mother's motives for writing this was to set the record straight. Even by 1964, much had been written about her and my father that wasn't true. But I think in the beginning she was afraid that all Mrs. Hoffman would want to do was dwell on the "D" words (the drinking, the dames, and the divorce), and Mom was deeply concerned

about hurting certain people who were still alive, especially my father, whom she still cared for very much. Aunt Cleo remembered that whenever Betty tried to get a more in-depth response, Mom would say, "Hell, if I talk about all that, I'll lose my General Foods image!" and Betty's smart retort, "Your 'General Foods image' is Jell-O, and I'm not writin' Jell-O!"

Betty was right. This ain't Jell-O. I was riveted. So why write something this good and then not let people read it?

My stepfather, Gary, remembers my mother's turning to him in bed one night to say that the book she was doing was upsetting her, that she "just couldn't finish it right now" because "it might hurt Desi."

Robert Osborne of the *Hollywood Reporter* worked with my mother in the Desilu Workshop and recently told me that he *did* remember when she was working on the book. He recalls she was uncomfortable with writing an "autobiography" so soon because it made her feel as if the rest of her life wouldn't seem as important.

Whatever her reasons, all parties remember that the project was shelved with the understanding that everybody just forget about it, which is apparently what most people did.

Even in early April 1989, when my husband, Laurence Luckinbill, and I and our three children spent that Easter vacation with Mom and Gary in Palm Springs, she was telling us how she had "finally" agreed to begin work on an "as told to" autobiography for Putnam with her friend, and respected journalist, Bob Thomas. Either she had forgotten about the three-hundred-page "head start" she had lying around somewhere or she figured it would be easier to just start from scratch with someone entirely new. We'll never know, but I do remember how much she was dreading the April 1 deadline to start working with Bob.

She seemed completely overwhelmed by the task, couldn't imagine how or where to begin even. She no longer needed to fear hurting my father, since he had passed away two and a half years before, yet she feared *everything else:* that her memory wasn't sharp enough anymore, that

"nobody would want to hear any of this stuff!" All the reminiscing was reminding her that a lot of the friends and loved ones, upon whom she would have liked to call for help, were no longer around.

Unfortunately, no one else had a chance to help her remember, either. She died less than three weeks later.

I remember thinking then how sadly ironic it was that my father should have gotten the chance to tell *his* story during his lifetime, but that we'd never get to hear Mom's—to see her life as she saw it. Sad for the family; sad for the world.

But since my mother *and* my father always insisted on a happy ending, I should have known. . . .

My brother, Desi, and I decided to share this with you now because we believe that's what she would have wanted, and inscribed it to all of you the way she would have signed it—simply, *Love, Lucy.*

So after all the rubber reproductions, the reruns, and the rag-sheet writings, after all those anemic imitations, and with her *impeccable* timing, she's come back . . . to speak for herself . . . in her *own* voice.

LUCIE ARNAZ

In her restless teens,
Lucille was already beginning
to look beyond Jamestown,
circa 1925.

I'm a Leo. I was born on a Sunday, August 6, 1911. Unfortunately, everybody knows my birth date because I told the truth when I first came to Hollywood.

I grew up not on the sidewalks of New York City, as some people think, but in the beautiful resort area of Lake Chautauqua, New York, near the green, wooded Allegheny wilderness.

I used to say I was born in Butte, Montana—I thought it sounded more glamorous than western New York. I was *conceived* in Montana when my father was working for his father as a lineman at Independent Telephone Company in Anaconda. But I was born in my grandparents' apartment on Stewart Street in Jamestown, New York, where I was delivered by my grandmother Flora Belle Hunt.

My mother, Desirée Hunt—or DeDe, as we call her—was of French-English descent, with a touch of Irish from her father's side that showed in her porcelain-fine English complexion and auburn hair. DeDe was so talented musically that she could have been a fine concert pianist, but at seventeen she met and married a local Jamestown boy, my father, Henry Durrell Ball. As soon after my birth as my

mother could travel, she insisted we return to Montana and Henry.

Henry was tall, with intense, penetrating blue eyes. He was a wonderful guy, according to everyone who knew him: full of fun, with a good comic sense. DeDe says I got my sense of humor from him.

People are always asking me if Ball is my real name. As a young model, I tried being Diane Belmont for a while, but that kind of phony elegance wasn't for me. All I know about the Ball side of my family is that they are descended from an English family which owned houses and lands in Herefordshire in some early period. There were Ball mariners, hunters, priests, and barons, but, it appears, no actors. As for the American branch of the family, there was some Ball blood in George Washington; his mother's maiden name was Mary Ball. Ball family records place them in New York, Pennsylvania, Vermont, and Massachusetts, and I found gravestones of several Balls on Arthur Godfrey's farm in Virginia when we visited him last spring.

For almost four years I was an only child. My young parents showered me with affection. I was at the center of the stage; life was a lark. DeDe tried dressing me in ribbons and bows, but I rebelled, never being the prissy doll type. My father roughhoused with me as he might with a boy, tossing me to the ceiling and catching me a few feet from the floor, and giving me piggybacks. I screamed with delight while DeDe worried about the tomboy she was raising.

I'm known among comediennes as a stunt girl who will do anything. Red Skelton flatters me by saying I have the courage of a tiger. I don't think it's a matter of bravery; it's just doing what comes naturally. I do know that if an actress has the slightest aversion to pie in the face or pratfalls, the camera will pick it up instantly. The audience won't laugh; they'll suffer in sympathy. Perhaps my willingness to be knocked off a twenty-foot pedestal or shot down a steamship funnel goes back to my earliest, happiest

days with my father. I *knew* he was going to catch me; I *wasn't* going to get hurt.

DeDe says that I adored my young father. When I was about three, she got tired of the 40-below Montana winters and homesick for the gentle green hills of home, so eastward we went, to Wyandotte, Michigan, a suburb of Detroit, where my father became foreman of a telephone line crew.

Late one day the following January, my father caught the grippe and went to bed. Several days later a whopper of a sleet storm hit Detroit. Being a highly conscientious guy, my father bundled up to get the crews and payroll out. Despite his bad cough and fever, he climbed up poles in the sleet and snow, trying to secure the tangled, fallen wires. He kept going until the emergency was over, only to return to bed, this time with his fever raging.

My young mother was five months pregnant when my father fell ill. To keep me under control she tied me to a dog leash, which she then hitched to the clothesline in our backyard. Every time somebody would pass by on the sidewalk, I'd beg to be released. I must have been pretty convincing, because I was set free a lot. Then poor DeDe would have to frantically search the neighborhood for me.

My mother finally made arrangements with our kindly corner grocery store owner, Mr. Flower. He let me prance up and down his counter reciting little pieces my parents had taught me. My favorite was apparently a frog routine where I hopped up and down harrumphing. Then I'd gleefully accept the pennies or candy Mr. Flower's customers would give me—my first professional appearance!

My father's condition never improved. His grippe turned into typhoid fever. He died not long after that storm. He was only twenty-eight and my mother was almost twenty-three. I was not yet four, but I remember vividly the moment she told me Daddy was gone. I could tell you where the tables were, where the windows were, what they looked out on, where the bed was. And I remember at that very moment, a picture suddenly fell from the wall. And I no-

ticed on the kitchen windowsill some little gray sparrows feeding.

I've been superstitious about birds ever since. I've heard that birds flying in the window are supposed to bring bad luck. I don't have a thing about live birds, but pictures of birds get me. I won't buy anything with a print of a bird, and I won't stay in a hotel room with bird pictures or bird wallpaper.

From Wyandotte, on a cold March morning, we returned to Jamestown with my father's coffin, and DeDe says I showed very little emotion until the funeral service. As they lowered his coffin into the ground and began filling in his grave, she says, I let out a bloodcurdling scream she'll never forget and wouldn't stop until she carried me away. After that, my mother and I returned to her parents' home in Jamestown. The next few years were very difficult ones for DeDe. She had practically no money and her parents had little to spare. I think she was a little stunned by her unhappy circumstances. I can remember her shaking her head, saying softly, "Married before I was eighteen, a mother before I was nineteen, and widowed before I was twenty-three." The future must have looked very bleak to her. She had been deeply in love with my father. I know she missed him very much.

DeDe's parents, my grandfather and grandmother Hunt, were then living in a small place on Buffalo Street in Jamestown. Their only son, my uncle Harold, had died of tuberculosis just a few years before, when he was only eighteen. They hadn't yet recovered from that loss, so when DeDe gave birth to a fine baby boy four months after my father's death, they were overjoyed. My brother arrived on Saturday, July 17, 1915, and was christened Fred Henry after Grandpa Hunt, who passed out cigars at the furniture factory that day and boasted to everyone about his fine boy, Freddy. He really thought of Freddy as his very own.

I was largely ignored and I became very jealous. It's always hard to go from being an only child to having an infant sibling in the house. Since my father had just died,