



## Spilling the Beans

*Clarissa Dickson Wright*

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## **Spilling the Beans** Clarissa Dickson Wright

As a child, Clarissa Dickson Wright was surrounded by wealth and privilege. Her mother was an Australian heiress, her father a brilliant surgeon to the Royal family. But he was also a tyrannical and violent drunk who used to beat her and force her to eat rotten food. When her adored mother died suddenly, Clarissa fell into a mind-numbing decade of wild overindulgence that eventually cost her entire fortune. After a long, hard road to recovery, Clarissa finally faced her demons and turned to the one thing that had always brought her joy: cooking. Now at last she has found sobriety and peace, and her TV partnership with the beloved late Jennifer Paterson as the *Two Fat Ladies* brought her fame and success. With stark honesty and brilliant wit, this is Clarissa's own story of a life lived to extremes.

## **Spilling the Beans Details**

Date : Published January 1st 2009 by Hodder & Stoughton (first published 2007)

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Author : Clarissa Dickson Wright

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## **From Reader Review Spilling the Beans for online ebook**

### **Sarah says**

A frank autobiography by the surviving "Fat Lady". She pulls few punches as she writes about her abusive childhood, her debauched twenties and thirties, her recovery from alcoholism and her eventual television fame.

CD-W writes just as she speaks - you can almost hear her voice as you read. Unfortunately, the book suffers from poor or nonexistent copy-editing. There are errors throughout - not what I would have expected from Hodder & Stoughton.

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### **Cath Russell says**

An unflinchingly honest account of her life from Clarissa Dickson Wright, one half of The Two Fat Ladies. Her childhood was, quite frankly, awful but she never uses it as an excuse for the many things that went wrong in her life. I thoroughly enjoyed this book, her character and determination shine through and I feel full of admiration for the way she has picked herself up and started again on numerous occasions. Well worth reading if you like a well written, good autobiography.

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### **Susie says**

What an extraordinary life! An incredible, frank and honest account of her life with its extremes of highs and lows, you couldn't make it up!

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### **Chris Walker says**

Whether your interests are the history of farmers' markets and English cooking, the arguments for hunting in Britain, religious faith, the existence of ghosts, the demon drink and AA's 12 Steps program, recovering from child abuse, or simply insider knowledge about various politicians and the royal family, this book has it all. The author shows herself to be someone of considerable intelligence, sense of humour and pluck and this book should be read for more reasons than just that she is well known as the one of the Two Fat Ladies.

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### **Pippa says**

What a colourful life. She certainly didn't wait for the storm to pass to dance in the rain. What strength it must have taken to get over her addiction and lead a happy life eventually.

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## **Douglas says**

A very frank autobiography by the surviving Fat Lady chronicling her passage from dysfunctional childhood to early legal success followed by her sinking into total alcoholic dissipation when she blew her 2.8 million pound inheritance and descended to the depths followed by her drying-out and rehabilitation leading to TV fame. She is a remarkable woman with a deep love of the countryside and tells a good story.

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## **Caroline says**

I am not a keen cook, so was only vaguely aware of the highly successful television cooking duo, "Two Fat Ladies", who thundered around Britain on a motorbike creating meals in various unusual venues.

This is the story of one of that duo - Clarissa Dickson Wright.

She was born into a highly successful family, with perhaps with more than its fair share of eccentrics. Her father was one of these. He was a lauded London surgeon, and also a violent alcoholic, and he was violent towards Clarissa, as well as his wife. She says the only times she felt safe was when she was at boarding school, or her father was abroad. This book describes, with very little sentiment, the drastic upheavals of her childhood, as well as her closeness to her mother.

Clarissa was very bright, and went on to become a barrister to spite her father, who wanted her to become a doctor. Then her mother died, and she descended into alcoholism. For the most part it seemed to be quite a jolly experience - she sure knew how to enjoy herself, and has always had lots of friends. She had also inherited a fairly huge family fortune, and she had fun working her way through that. But alcoholism has of course got a sting in the tail, however luxuriously you experience it, and eventually she became desperate. She booked into Promis - a well known drying-out centre for alcoholics and other addicts, which works on AA principles. I found this one of the most interesting parts of the book - it was inspiring to hear how much Promis and then the AA meetings helped her. Her levels of drinking had been extraordinary. (view spoiler)

(hide spoiler)] But she got clean, and remained so for the rest of her life.

The last part of the book deals with her various adventures as a cook, and her passionate involvement with the Countryside Alliance, with its enthusiasm for fox hunting and hare coursing. She was also an extremely keen carnivore, eventually receiving the rare accolade of being asked to become a member of The Worshipful Company of Butchers. None of this appealed to my vegetarian heart...but I ploughed on. Her story is so fascinating, and you cannot help but want to cheer her on, for her sheer courage, tenacity and bravado. It was also good for me to hear the other side of the story. It has made me want to do a bit more research into fox hunting for instance.

All in all a wonderful book. Clarissa died in 2014. She led an extraordinary life, and she writes about it superbly well. One last thing - her dedication for the book reads "To survivors everywhere, and to their friends who keep them sane." I think it works both ways. Clarissa was obviously a wonderful friend to many people, and I have no doubt that they miss her enormously.

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## **Karen B says**

Clarissa certainly had a colorful and sometimes tragic life. She triumphed over adversity and always kept her sense of humor. This memoir made for very interesting reading.

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## **Eve says**

**"All of us have something we can do, some more than others, but everyone has a natural gift; it is just a question of discovering it."**

I remember watching my first episode of *Two Fat Ladies* back in 2009. Netflix kept recommending it based on my interests, and back in the day when people had discs mailed, I took a big gamble by using all three of my movie slots for the show, on a weekend no less. I was bowled over by the unique concept of the show! What *didn't* these women do?! They cooked, baked, rode motorcycles, hunted, fished, and were extremely knowledgeable about history and politics.

Each time Clarissa went into one of her anecdotes, I always wished she'd go on and on, but then she'd casually return to the pheasant she was baking. "There's a story there," I'd think, especially when she neither drank nor smoked at the end of each episode, which was Jennifer's signature end to the day a la *Now, Voyager*.

In *Spilling the Beans*, Wright tells all, and I do mean everything! Thus far, she's lived a monumental life! I can't help but think of the Apostle Paul who said he'd enjoyed times of joy and plenty, and times of hunger and even shipwreck. Raised in a wealthy English family of Australian lineage, by age ten Clarissa had traveled the world. What many people didn't realize was that at home, she was subjected to emotional and physical abuse, the effects of alcoholism.

I don't want to go into too many specifics, but Wright's path to discovery was very bumpy. Some of the chapters are entitled, "Sunk in Gin," "Homeless" and "Dark Night of the Soul." You get the idea. Alcoholism is a very real disease, and I so valued her authenticity in relating her experiences. No doubt she is an inspiration for people of all sorts, but especially to recovering addicts, which makes her dedication especially touching:

**"To survivors everywhere, and to their friends who keep them sane."**

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## **Maureen says**

Fascinating memoir but terrible editing. I felt I should have had a red pen with me but this Fat Lady does tell her story very well otherwise.

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## **Patti Weissler says**

This is a very entertaining auto biography...I was always fascinated but the PBS Show Two Fat Ladies and now the story of Clarissa ...she was a wounded child and smart ...very smart...growing up privileged in England is a different type of life ...fox hunts,boarding school and all that.  
She was a crazy alcoholic but by 40 became sober and really recovered ....the end of book bogs down on Brotains stoppage of fox hunts..which she was pro on  
Overall a light summer read.

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## **Inken says**

Wright was one half of the TV cooks "Two Fat Ladies". This is her autobiography and it's fascinating to see how much of her early life paralleled mine: a family connection to Singapore, an abusive home life, a best friend in boarding school called Caroline :-). Clarissa is unflinchingly honest about her life, growing up in a highly dysfunctional family, becoming a lawyer just to spite her father, her 6-year long descent into alcoholism after losing her mother and the love of her life and how she dragged herself back (with the help of her loyal friends) to become a highly successful bookseller, TV cook and presenter. She and Jennifer Paterson created a cooking show that was hilarious, innovative and educational. You may not like or agree with her opinions or politics but when Wright died just a couple of weeks ago she was sorely missed by a great many people.

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## **Ali says**

This really is a fascinating and uncompromising autobiography. Clarissa is very honest about her difficult and often violent family life growing up, and later her own alcoholism. Her life during the 1970's and 80's seemed a constant round of parties, pubs and drinking buddies and at one point Clarissa admits that the Falklands war had passed her by - she'd had no idea it had happened. Although this does make for difficult reading on one level - it was strangely fascinating on another and it is part of what makes this a real page turner. I'm afraid I left very cold by Clarrissa's rabid support of hare coursing, and fox hunting, granted it is a way of life for many people and it does get people's passions up, but it is not for me - and never will be - and so reading about it spoils the later stages of the book for me a bit. Over all though I enjoyed this book very much, Clarissa Dickson Wright, writes well and honestly, and she has certainly packed her life full of incident - all of which makes for very entertaining reading. I also really enjoyed reading about Christine Coleman, Clarissa's good friend for many years (someone I have come to know through bookcrossing of which she is a great supporter) - how funny to meet someone you know in the pages of a book.

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## **Margaret says**

Despite her difficult childhood and alcoholism this is an upbeat autobiography, ending on a positive note:

"Believe me on one thing: I have a splendidly enjoyable life"

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### **Sephie says**

From a privileged beginning, the author suffered huge family problems in her formative years. Having 'gone off the rails' early in a promising career at the bar, she preferred to spend time in the bar. This book outlines her fight back to normality, her unplanned friendship with the other 'fat lady' Jennifer Paterson, and her passion for the countryside.

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### **Alumine Andrew says**

Clarissa of "Two Fat Ladies" fame has written a very good and entertaining autobiography. This is an insightful look into the devastating effects of alcoholism through many generations of her family and her own downward spiral into this disease as well as the climb out of it to recovery.

She grew up in a privileged English family but in perpetual fear of her father and his physical abuse of her and her mother. The youngest of the children, she has a lot to bear and feels very responsible for supporting her mother.

Clarissa studied law and was a successful barrister, lived the high life and seems to know anyone who is anyone in London! Alcohol took hold and finally destroyed her physically, mentally and professionally. Eventually as a form of recovery she worked part time in a bookshop specializing in cook books and her foodie career was born (unbeknownst to her). One thing lead to another and eventually, once she was running her own bookshop in Scotland, she was approached to star in the "TFL" series. Things seem to snowball. Clarissa became a passionate advocate for the farmers of the land and in educating people on fresh, locally grown produce.

A very readable and funny book which I thoroughly enjoyed.

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### **Katarina says**

Well written, frank, amusing, shocking, gossipy. I did briefly mourn over her lost 2,8 million pounds and career in law (she did have talent!) but heck why - Clarissa didn't seem to cry over spilled beans. A lesson we should all learn.

The campaigning for fox hunting went on a bit, but otherwise no objections.

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### **Felicia says**

"All of us are an accumulation of the traits, genetic tendencies, geographicals and peculiarities of our forebears. These are the ingredients that we and the adventures and misfortunes of our lives process into the finished dish that becomes ourselves."

Not the greatest writing style, but definitely a very gripping read.

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## **John says**

I was familiar with the author from the Two Fat Ladies cooking program, so recently listened to her narrate Clarissa's England, which was terrific. After that, I was truly intrigued by her life story, but the audio version comes highly abridged, so I read a print copy instead -- what a ride! Clarissa squanders early advantages many couldn't begin to imagine for the life of such a dedicated alcoholic it's amazing she made it through; at one point she's diagnosed with quinine poisoning from all the gin-and-tonics (six pints a day!) she'd knocked back. Her television stardom was almost a fluke, as she and Jennifer didn't really think that the Two Fat Ladies proposal would be picked up by a producer. If you're reading the book primarily for that experience, she covers it in a couple of chapters near the end. I had no idea Jennifer was twenty years older than Clarissa, nor (sadly) that she was a very rigid Pre-Vatican II Catholic, pining for the Good Old Days. I can see why they found the show exhausting as each episode had to be shot three times! The final section deals mostly with hunting issues and such, which as an American reader I found very difficult to follow.

I can see why the audiobook was so heavily edited, since many, many names are thrown about; I think I honestly would've lost patience with that format after a while with an unabridged version. The print book itself was a cracking good read, with Clarissa's brutal honesty, and lack of self-pity, carrying the darkest hours. I was a pleasantly surprised that her sense of humor works as well on the page as it does in spoken form.

Highly recommended!

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## **Fiona says**

Very frank autobiography. Often quite painful to read. There's much about her lifestyle now that I disagree with, e.g., support of blood sports, but I can't help but have enormous respect for what she has overcome personally to reach this stage in her life.

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