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Chapter 1

IN THE BEGINNING

WHEN MY HUSBAND AND I do speaking engagements together, we like to do this little routine:

Vicki: I like to get up early, around 5:30 or 6:00. I love the morning.

Billy: I hate early.

Vicki: I like ballet, and I love the theater.

Billy: I could watch ESPN all day and be perfectly happy.

Vicki: I like the house quiet. If it were up to me, we would not have a TV.

Billy: With nine TVs in our new apartment, a pitch, a pass, a putt, or a punt is not missed.

Vicki: I know that traffic lights are given by God to bring order to my life.

Billy: In New York City, traffic lights are a suggestion only, and I believe they're a tool of Satan to disrupt my whole day's plans.

Vicki: I love to plan in advance.

Billy: I don't understand that. Why would you want to plan in advance when you know the best offer is going to come along at the last minute?

Vicki: At the end of the day I really like to talk about everything we've gone through, every situation we've faced.

Billy: Why do women find it necessary to talk about the stuff that you just lived through all day? It makes absolutely no sense at all.

Billy and I are opposites in so many ways that you might wonder how we ever ended up together and are still married nearly forty years after taking our vows. Throughout this book you'll get to read a lot about how we've managed to stay married. But in order to fully understand our story, it's important that you know where we came from and how we ended up together.

YOUNG BILLY ROSE

William Stuart Rose was born on July 2, 1952, and grew up in a Jewish family in Manhattan. However, Judaism was never a big factor in Billy's childhood. In fact, he went to Trinity School—a private school in New York City—where he attended Christian chapel every day. Billy remembers going to temple as a child only on some of the High Holy Days. The problem was, the High Holy Days occurred during the World Series (which took place in September back then). His mom wouldn't let him miss school to watch his beloved Yankees play in the World Series unless he went to temple first. So to temple he went and then headed off to baseball's temple: Yankee Stadium. Billy remembers watching Mickey Mantle hit a home run to win that game, though the Yankees ended up losing the series.

Billy had a terrific childhood. His parents were his two closest friends and were very dear to his heart. His dad was fifty-six when Billy was born, and he was twenty-five years older than Billy's mom. Nevertheless, Billy and his dad would play ball together all the time—Wiffle ball, that is. They would play in the hallway of their New York City apartment, with Billy's mom yelling at them as antiques crashed to the floor.

Billy dreamed of playing professional baseball, so he worked hard

at his game. He taught himself to bat left-handed, and he consistently hit over .400 after he became a switch-hitter. After his sophomore year of high school, he transferred to a prep school in Connecticut, where he was captain of the baseball team. During his junior year he had verbal offers from two major league teams—the Cleveland Indians and the Boston Red Sox. He was disappointed that the Yankees weren't showing interest, but any interest was good. Both teams told him if he played as well during his senior year as he had during his junior year, they would come back and sign him. Billy was also offered a full scholarship to play baseball at Arizona State University. Unfortunately, during his senior year of high school, Billy had a career-ending knee injury and was never able to play either college or professional baseball.

Since collegiate baseball was no longer an option, Billy headed off to Franklin and Marshall College in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Never one to do much in the way of academics, Billy likes to joke, "College would have been perfect if it weren't for the classes." He changed majors three times before he found one he liked that didn't include any math. He finally settled on political science. Billy and two friends pledged a fraternity, but after their rush experience, they decided to depledge. They convinced their parents to rent them an apartment, which is common now but wasn't in the early seventies. Their apartment became party central, and they practically put the fraternities out of business. Billy graduated in 1974, but he didn't even stick around for the commencement ceremony. His parents weren't thrilled, but he didn't want to go back just for graduation.

Not too long after college, Billy was introduced to George Steinbrenner—then the principal owner and managing partner of the Yankees—through a mutual friend. George presented Billy with two job offers. He could manage the Yankees Class-A minor league baseball team in Fort Lauderdale or take the position of general manager of the Yankees AAA minor league team in Syracuse. He turned them both down, because although he loved baseball and the Yankees, he wasn't sure he could work for George. He was much happier being his friend.

Part of the reason Billy was easily able to turn down Mr. Steinbrenner's offers was that he had a job in the family business, Fabrics by William Rose, a premiere textile company that supplied fabric to Seventh Avenue's top dress and sportswear designers. They imported fabric from Europe and sold it to higher-priced dress designers such as Anne Klein, Calvin Klein, and Oscar de la Renta. However, Billy did become involved in the baseball business in 1976 when he and his dad purchased a minority stake in the Yankees, which we still hold today.

MY TURBULENT CHILDHOOD

I, Victoria Ellen Gage, was born on January 3, 1953, also to Jewish parents in Manhattan. My father was a hardworking stockbroker with little patience for those who didn't work hard. My mother was a full-time, stay-at-home mom as well as a perfectionist with an unpredictable temper. Both of my parents were highly critical.

My older sister, Heidi, and I are four years apart, and though we are the best of friends now and extremely close, we fought bitterly when we were growing up. I was jealous of her beauty, her boyfriends, and her abilities, and I spent a good part of my childhood and early adulthood trying to outdo her in any way I could. We both attended the Spence School, a private school for girls in New York City. There I was known as "Heidi's little sister" and was often called by her name, which I hated. I felt like I was invisible. That experience put in me a desire to be noticed.

When I was ten, my Jewish family joined a Presbyterian church for both social and religious reasons, none of which I understood. I memorized the Twenty-third Psalm and the Apostles' Creed. I went to Sunday school and confirmation class. I was even on a radio Bible quiz show as part of Sunday school one morning. But I did not know God; I didn't have a personal relationship with Him at the time or even know what that was. I knew *about* God. I believed that He was up there in the sky someplace and that I was down here on earth, but that was

about all we had to do with each other. As a result, there was a lot of emptiness in my heart.

All kids have a dream, and I was no exception. But instead of dreaming of becoming a teacher or a nurse or a lawyer or a mother, I dreamed of being noticed, of being rich and famous. I would come home from school each day, and there on the front-hall table was the retail paper *Women's Wear Daily*. I wasn't interested in the retail part; I turned straight to the society pages. As I read those pages and checked out the glamorous people in the photos each day, I became familiar with the names and faces therein. I knew what they did, what parties they went to, what they wore, and who they hung out with. I started to desire to be one of them. I wanted to be famous. I wanted my life to be significant, and that's what I thought significance was. I bought into the belief that if you have enough money and are noticed enough, then you're happy. And even then I believed that if I couldn't provide that for myself, if I married someone who could provide it, then I would be happy.

I knew that in order to be one of those women, I needed to dress like them. But that was a problem. My mother was constantly critical of my weight and would often ground me when my weight was too high for her liking. She would also tell me I couldn't have any new clothes unless my weight was below a certain amount. This was very distressing to me, as I was not overweight. I was five feet tall and never weighed more than 115 pounds. However, Mom wanted me to be less than 102. So when I was visiting a dermatologist for a skin issue, I casually asked if he could prescribe diet pills, which he did. What I didn't realize was that the pills were habit-forming and highly addictive. I was soon hooked to the point that I needed a pill in order to function properly. But the pills did the work that they were marketed to do, and I was easily able to stay under Mom's weight limit and therefore able to buy new clothes.

As a teenager, I often felt that I didn't measure up to other teens, which was a side effect of my mother's critical spirit. I was embarrassed

about how I looked and therefore felt like an outcast. I was uncomfortable around boys and didn't know how to be a good friend. I was constantly trying to fit with the "in" crowd, but I never felt that I was quite good enough for them. Many of them came from extremely wealthy families, and my parents encouraged me to be friendly with them because wealthy people were better than nonwealthy people, so they said. Since we didn't have as much money as many of my classmates, I took my parents' words to mean that I wasn't as good as the others were. This, along with my obsession with *Women's Wear Daily*, caused me to believe even more strongly that being wealthy and having material possessions such as fashionable clothes and beautifully decorated homes was the answer to happiness.

When I was a junior in high school, my mother was diagnosed with an inoperable type of stomach cancer. Medical and privacy laws were different then than they are today, and somehow my father was able to keep Mom, as well as Heidi and me, from finding out about the diagnosis. He wanted Mom to enjoy what time she had left without being consumed with worry and fear. After a few months Dad did tell Heidi and me, but he made us promise not to tell Mom. He wanted us to know so we'd be on our best behavior for the last months of Mom's life.

My mom died eight months later, the week before my high school graduation. Upon her death, my first reaction was fear, but I also felt liberated because she had been so critical, strict, and overbearing. When my dad handed Heidi and me a Valium on the morning of the funeral and said, "Don't cry at the funeral—let's show everyone how strong we are," I didn't have much trouble following his command. In fact, during the funeral I felt fairly disconnected and even relieved, as horrible as that may sound. Mom's illness had been all-consuming, and her temper had been terrifying. I figured it wouldn't be so bad to live without her. Even though my world had been turned upside down, I decided to follow the family pattern of pretending everything was fine, even when it wasn't.

That summer between high school and college was a whirlwind. Dad, Heidi, and I were busy all the time, but the fact that the three of us spent all summer together illustrates that we weren't as strong as we appeared. We normally didn't hang out with each other, but that summer we invited friends over nearly every night unless someone invited us out. We went to our country home every weekend and often took friends along. Dad even started seeing other women. We drank and partied all summer so we wouldn't have to think about what was missing.

That fall I headed off to Pine Manor Junior College. I loved my time there, and my most glorious memory was performing in a dance role in *Brigadoon*. All the people came and told me how wonderful I had been. It felt really good to be noticed like that, and the attention started to fill the empty place that was growing inside me. While there, I met my long-term boyfriend Bruce.

I transferred to Sarah Lawrence College for my final two years. Bruce and I lived together during much of that time. As an unbeliever, I didn't see anything wrong with that arrangement. And, after all, it was the early seventies. Women were liberated! We could live with whomever we wanted!

In the meantime, Dad remarried, and Bobbie, who had three children, became my stepmother. The apartment where I had grown up was too small for everyone, so Dad moved the new family to a different apartment in Manhattan, which just happened to be in the same building where Billy Rose's family lived.



You may now kiss the bride!
I am officially Mrs. Billy Rose!



Cutting the cake as
Mr. and Mrs. Billy Rose
on February 4, 1977.