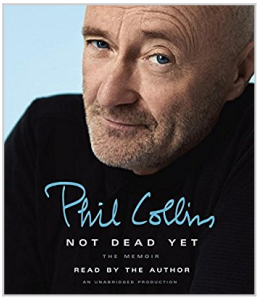

Not Dead Yet: The Memoir

By Phil Collins

Not Dead Yet: The Memoir By Phil Collins

Phil Collins pulls no punches—about himself, his life, or the ecstasy and heartbreak that's inspired his music. In his much-awaited memoir, *Not Dead Yet*, he tells the story of his epic career, with an auspicious debut at age 11 in a crowd shot from the Beatles' legendary film *A Hard Day's Night.* A drummer since almost before he could walk, Collins received on the job training in the seedy, thrilling bars and clubs of 1960s swinging London before finally landing the drum seat in Genesis. Soon, he would step into the spotlight on vocals after the departure of Peter Gabriel and begin to stockpile the songs that would rocket him to international fame with the release of *Face Value* and "In the Air Tonight." Whether he's recalling jamming with Eric Clapton and Robert Plant, pulling together a big band fronted by Tony Bennett, or writing the music for Disney's smash-hit animated *Tarzan*, Collins's storytelling chops never waver. And of course he answers the pressing question on everyone's mind: just what *does* "Sussudio" mean?

Not Dead Yet is Phil Collins's candid, witty, unvarnished story of the songs and shows, the hits and pans, his marriages and divorces, the ascents to the top of the charts and into the tabloid headlines. As one of only three musicians to sell 100 million records both in a group and as a solo artist, Collins breathes rare air, but has never lost his touch at crafting songs from the heart that touch listeners around the globe. That same touch is on magnificent display here, especially as he unfolds his harrowing descent into darkness after his "official" retirement in 2007, and the profound, enduring love that helped save him. This is Phil Collins as you've always known him, but also as you've never heard him before.

From the Hardcover edition.

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Not Dead Yet: The Memoir By Phil Collins Bibliography

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Editorial Review

About the Author
Born in the United Kingdom, Phil Collins rose to fame as the drummer and frontman of Genesis, before establishing himself as a solo artist, and selling hundreds of millions of records throughout his career.

From the Hardcover edition.

1

Not Drowning but Waving

Or: my beginnings, my childhood and how my relationship with my dad was a bit tidal

We think mums and dads know it all. But in fact they're making it up as they go along. Every day, busking it, winging it, putting on a brave—sometimes false—face. It's something I suspect throughout my childhood, yet it's only confirmed in adulthood, and only with a little help from the Other Side.

One gray autumn evening in 1977, I go to see a medium. She lives in Victoria, central London, round the insalubrious back of Buckingham Palace, in a flat near the top of a tower block. It's no gypsy caravan, but I suppose it does mean she's nearer the heavens.

I don't have a particular affinity for spirits—that will come much, much later, and be less an affinity than an addiction—but my wife, Andy, is somewhat that way inclined. My mum, too, is no stranger to the Ouija board. At our family home on London's suburban western edges, my mum, nana and auntie, along with my so-called uncles Reg and Len, enjoyed many a happy late-fifties and early-sixties evening summoning the dearly departed from beyond the veil. Better that than the meager monochrome offerings flickering from the newfangled television set.

The reason for my and Andy's visit to this high-rise Madame Arcati: a naughty dog. Ben, our beautiful boxer, has a habit of dragging from under our bed a pile of electric blankets. We're holding on to these for our kids—Joely, five, and Simon, one—for when they stop wetting the bed and need a bit of extra warmth. It has not dawned on me that the folded electric blankets promise more than a toasty bed—bent filaments can break and catch fire. Maybe Ben knows this.

Andy comes to the conclusion that there's a supernatural element to Ben's nightly ritual. He's probably not clairvoyant but there's clearly something we humans don't know.

At this time I'm manically busy, touring with Genesis—we've released our album Wind & Wuthering and I have only recently taken over singing duties from Peter Gabriel. I am, accordingly, often an absent husband and father, so I feel perennially on the back foot when it comes to matters domestic and familial. I duly offer no opposition to this unorthodox course of action.

So off to a medium we go. Into bustling Victoria, up in the tower-block elevator, a ring on the doorbell, small talk with the husband, who's watching Coronation Street. It couldn't be any less spiritual. Finally he

pulls himself away from the TV and gives me a nod: “She’ll see you now . . .”

She’s an ordinary-looking housewife, perched behind a small table. No sign of any other-worldly virtues. In fact she appears totally normal, in a matter-of-fact way. This completely throws and somewhat disappoints me, and my skepticism now comes with a topspin of confusion, and just a shade of grumpiness.

As Andy’s I Ching readings have informed her that it’s the spirits on my side of the family that are the dog-botherers, I draw the short straw and enter the chamber of the supernatural. Through gritted teeth I tell the medium about Ben’s nightly antics. She nods gravely, closes her eyes, waits for a meaningful length of time, then finally replies, “It’s your dad.”

“Pardon?”

“Yes, it’s your dad and he wants you to have a few things: his watch, his wallet, the family cricket bat. Do you want me to ask his spirit to speak through me? Then you could hear his voice. But sometimes the spirits don’t want to leave and that becomes a bit awkward.”

I splutter a no. Communication with my father wasn’t at its best when he was alive. Talking to him now, nearly five years after his death at Christmas 1972, via a middle-aged housewife in a disconcertingly drab domestic setting in a tower block in the heart of London, would just be weird.

“Well, he says to give your mum some flowers, and to tell her he’s sorry.”

Of course, being a fairly rational twenty-six-year-old who likes things to be down-to-earth and regimented—I am a drummer, after all—I should have discounted this as mumbo-jumbo con-artistry. But I agree that our dog habitually dragging electric blankets from beneath our bed is behavior possibly not of the mortal plain. On top of that, Madame Arcati has said some things about my dad that she couldn’t possibly have known, not least that stuff about the cricket bat. That cricket bat has been part of the Collins clan’s meager sports equipment for as long as I can remember. Outside the family, no one would know about it. I wouldn’t say I’m convinced, but I am intrigued. Andy and I depart the anteroom of the afterlife and re-enter the real world. Back on terra firma I tell her the news. She replies with a look understood on both sides of the veil: “I told you so.”

The next day I phone my mum and relate the previous evening’s events. She is blithely spirited, and unsurprised by both the message and the medium.

“I bet he wants to give me flowers,” she says, half laughing, half harrumphing.

This is when she tells me everything. My dad, Greville Philip Austin Collins, was not a faithful husband to my mum, June Winifred Collins (née Strange). Having been recruited at the age of nineteen, he was a lifelong employee, like his father before him, of the London Assurance Company in the City of London. “Grev” had used his quotidian, bowler-hatted, nine-to-five suburban commuter’s existence to maintain a secret life with an office girlfriend.

Dad was not a particularly obvious heart-throb or lady’s man. He was a little tubby round the middle, and his RAF mustache topped off his patchy head of hair. I got all my looks from my mum, clearly.

But it seems that behind that mild-mannered insurance-man exterior lurked something more Lothario-shaped. Mum tells me about a particular incident. Alma Cole was a lovely lady who worked with my mum in

the toyshop she managed on behalf of a family friend. Alma was from the north of England and there was always a conspiratorial tone to whatever she said.

She and my mum were close, and one day a slightly miffed Alma sniffed, “I saw you with Grev in the car on Saturday and you didn’t wave back to me.”

“I wasn’t in the car with him on Saturday!” The passenger, patently, was Dad’s lady friend, being taken for a romantic spin in our black Austin A35.

Now, nearly five years after Dad’s passing, while I find it wonderful that my mum is confiding in me in this manner, hearing these revelations makes me simultaneously mad and sad. I now know that my parents’ marriage didn’t so much dissolve as fizzle out, partly due to my dad being, shall we say, distracted elsewhere. His infidelity was very much news to me.

But why wouldn’t it be? I was a very young boy back then and, to me, my parents seemed deliriously happy. Life at home had appeared normal and quite calm. Straightforward, simple. To my mind, Mum and Dad were happily in love for all their long married life.

But I am very much the baby of the family, almost seven years younger than my sister, Carole, and nine years younger than my brother, Clive. Certain, grown-up aspects of home life would have gone straight over my head. Now, when I consider the facts before me this evening in 1977, I think I can divine an undercurrent of unrest in the house, something to which I was completely oblivious at the time. That said, perhaps I felt it in my water: I was a chronic bed-wetter to an embarrassingly old age.

When I later relay this earth-shattering news to Clive, he gives it to me straight. All those sudden long walks I was taken on by my siblings? Those lazy, hazy strolls past the post-war prefab housing on Hounslow Heath with my brother and sister? Not the cheerfully nondescript norm of a simple late-fifties and early-sixties suburban English childhood. In fact I was being unwittingly complicit in the papering over of cracks.

My father acting a little fast and loose with his marriage vows is something I still have trouble coming to terms with. His disregard for my mum’s feelings is beyond me. And before anyone steps forward to state, “That’s a bit rich coming from you, Collins,” let the record show: I hear what you’re saying.

I am disappointed that I have been married three times. I’m even more disappointed that I have been divorced three times. I am considerably less bothered by the fact that these resulted in settlements with my ex-wives to the order of £42 million. Nor am I fussed that those sums were widely reported and are widely known. In this day and age, nothing is private anymore. The internet has seen to that. Additionally, while three divorces might seem to suggest a casual attitude toward the whole idea of marriage, this couldn’t be further from the truth. I’m a romantic who believes, hopes, that the union of marriage is something to cherish and last.

Yet certainly that trio of divorces demonstrates a failure to coexist happily and to understand my partners. It suggests a failure to become, and to stay, a family. It shows failure, full stop. Over the decades I’ve done my diligent best to make every aspect of my life, personal and professional, work like clockwork—although too often, I have to acknowledge that my “best” just hasn’t been good enough.

Still, I know what “normal” is—it’s in my DNA; I grew up with it, or at least the semblance thereof, in the London suburbs—and that’s what I strove for while trying to make a living playing music.

I have endeavored to be honest with all my children about my personal history. It involves them. It affects them. They live with the consequences of my actions, inactions and reactions every day of their lives. I try to be as straight and forthright as it's possible to be. I will do the same throughout this story, even in the parts where I don't exactly come out smelling of roses. As a drummer I'm used to giving it some stick. I've had to become used to taking some stick, too.

However, to return to my mum: her stoicism, strength and humor in the face of my dad's straying (to use that very English word) says a lot about a wartime generation who would go through thick and thin to maintain their marriage commitments. It's something we all could learn from, myself very much included.

All that said: when I consider my childhood from the vantage point of my advanced age, perhaps close-to-the-bone emotional upset and turmoil seeped into my young self, without my even knowing it.

I was born in Putney Maternity Hospital, southwest London, on January 30, 1951, a belated—and by all accounts surprise—third child to June and Grev Collins. Apparently Mum initially entered West Middlesex Hospital to have me, but they weren't very nice to her, so she crossed her legs, left and headed to Putney.

I was the first "London" child, as both Carole and Clive had been born in Weston-super-Mare after the entire family had been relocated there by London Assurance prior to the Blitz. Carole was not best pleased by my birth. She'd wanted a girl. Clive, though, was over the moon—finally, a little brother to play football with, wrestle with and, when all that got a bit boring, to pin down and torture with his smelly socks.

With Mum and Dad aged thirty-seven and forty-five respectively, my arrival made them, for the times, old parents. This didn't bother my mum in the slightest. She remained a generous and loving woman her entire life, without a bad word for anybody until the day she died on her birthday in 2011, aged ninety-eight. That said, she did once call a London policeman a "dickhead" when he chastised her for driving in a bus lane.

Dad, born in 1907, came from then-fashionable Isleworth, a riverside neighborhood on London's western edges. His family home was big, dark, musty, quite imposing, not a little scary. Ditto his relatives. I have no recollection of my paternal grandfather, a time-served London Assurance man just like his son would become. But I do have vivid memories of Grandma. She was warm, embracing and very patient with me, but seemed stuck in the Victorian period, and as if to prove it was permanently clad in long black dresses. Maybe she was still mourning Prince Albert, too.

She and I were very close. I spent a lot of time in her constantly damp below-stairs rooms, watching her paint watercolors of boats and the river, an enthusiasm I've inherited.

Dad's sister, Auntie Joey, was a formidable woman, armed with a cigarette holder and a rough throaty voice, a little like the baddie in Disney's The Rescuers: "Dahling, doooo come in . . ." Her husband, Uncle Johnny, was also a case. He had a monocle and always wore heavy tweed suits, another Collins from the land that the twentieth century forgot.

Family history has it that a couple of Dad's cousins had been incarcerated by the Japanese in the notorious Changi Prison in Singapore. Great store was put by them—they were war heroes, men who survived the pitiless Far East campaign. Another cousin was apparently the chap who first brought launderettes to England. In Dad's family's eyes, they were all, each of them, "somebody." Or, in other words, toffs. H. G. Wells was said to be a regular caller on the Collins household.

Clearly Dad's family formed his attitudes, not to mention his working life—although after he died I

discovered that he had tried to dodge conscription into London Assurance by running away to become a merchant seaman. But the ocean-going rebellion was short-lived and he was told to snap out of it, pull himself together and fall in line under the insurance-salesman yoke imposed by his own father. Conformity was the order of the day. With this in mind, it could be suggested that Dad was a little bit jealous of the freedom the sixties offered Clive, Carole and myself in our chosen fields: cartoonist, ice skater, musician. Call them proper jobs? Dad didn't.

There's little proof that Grev Collins ever got used to the twentieth century. When North Sea gas came on stream and all the boilers in the U.K. were converted, Dad tried to bribe the Gas Board to leave us out of the conversions, convinced that somewhere there was a gasholder that would provide fuel just for the Collins family.

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