
Opening Extract from...

Jo Malone

My Story

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MY STORY

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To the three great loves of my life:
Gary, Josh and Teri.

And to every entrepreneur who each day
takes one more step of courage and
never gives up their dream.

Man cannot discover new oceans unless he
first has the courage to lose sight of the shore.

André Gide

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PROLOGUE

The journalist is curious, as she has to be. 'So, we know you can create amazing fragrances, but tell us something about Jo Malone that we don't know.'

That question always makes me smile because I have long understood that people know more about my fragrances than they do about me. Such is the power of branding.

So I tell her what she and everyone else never expects to hear. 'Well, I'm not the posh bird everyone thinks I am. I was raised on a council estate, dropped out of school at fifteen, and have zero qualifications. I'm also dyslexic. I struggle to tell the time, often get confused between my left and right, and can barely drive. I've actually never been brilliant at anything except for making fragrances. And I didn't even understand that much when I first started out with four plastic jugs, two saucepans, and a wing and a prayer.'

It's almost become my stock response to the question everyone thinks will stump me – many of my speeches start in a similar vein – and it always elicits a look of surprise.

I'm in Dublin, doing a round of interviews ahead of a breakfast event where I'll be 'in conversation with' Melanie Morris, the editor-in-chief of IMAGE *magazine. On the five hundred chairs at that event, each*

member of the audience will walk in to find a Jo Loves gift bag waiting for them. And that's something else that I find tends to surprise people.

Strangely, it doesn't seem to be common knowledge that I'm no longer a part of the company I first founded, Jo Malone London – and I haven't been since 2006. Jo Loves is a whole new personal venture, which I launched in 2011 after five years away from the industry.

As sure as night follows day, someone will approach me after the breakfast event and say, 'I had absolutely no idea you'd left Jo Malone!' It happens all the time. I don't blame people for not knowing – there was hardly any PR at the time of my departure, and my name remains on product all over the world. But that name and my identity have had to become two very different things in recent years.

'Why did you choose to do it all over again?' the journalist asks.

I've often asked myself that same question.

'The truth is that the hunger and spirit that was there in the beginning still lives within me.'

'Where does that hunger come from?'

'Where does anyone's drive come from?' I ask. 'I suppose it all started in my childhood . . .'

PART ONE

Roots

ONE

Crackling fire. Burnt sulphur. Wet leaves. Charred wood. Toffee apples. And the kind of grimy, wispy smoke that leaves its invisible trace on clothes. In a life to be governed by the sense of smell, my nose likes to imagine that these were the aromas in the air as I arrived in the world on Bonfire Night 1963.

Named Joanne Malone, I was the first of two daughters to Eileen and Andy. Mum, then aged thirty-one, said she was instantly enamoured with me that first night at St Stephen's Hospital (now Chelsea and Westminster). 'You were like this perfect, little French doll, and I used to sit and stare at you, observing every detail.'

Dad, several years her senior, probably didn't envisage becoming a parent in his late thirties but doubtless took it in his stride. I would eventually learn that he had great adaptability when it came to dealing with the unexpected.

For a short while, we lived in a poky bedsit above a garage in Hayes Hill, outside Bromley. Dad was a draftsman at a local double-glazing firm, and Mum, like her father, had worked for the gas board, but their two meagre wages barely covered the rent. I can't imagine what it must have been like, squeezed into

a place not big enough to swing a cat, but my optimistic parents would have likely convinced themselves that their fortunes would soon change. Sure enough, when I was about six months old, we moved to a semi-detached, two-up, two-down in Barnehurst, near Bexleyheath, on the south-east fringes of London's suburbs, then part of the Crayford Urban District of Kent.

A street of uniform, sandy-bricked properties on a council estate would become my home for the next sixteen years. My bedroom was at the front, above the living room, overlooking a small patch of grass and low brick wall. At the rear, above the kitchen, Mum and Dad's room had a view of the oblong back garden, and a neighbouring block of flats. The house must have felt huge compared to a bedsit, but there was only one problem in the week before we moved in – we didn't have a stitch of furniture except for my cot. Dad told Mum not to worry; he'd sort it. And he did, with forty-eight hours to spare.

Mum hadn't a clue what he'd chosen as they drove to Barnehurst, with me asleep in her arms. Ideally, she would have preferred to pick out the furniture as a couple, but Dad had wanted to surprise and impress. Mum figured that if the dapper way he dressed was any measure, then he would choose well.

But she soon discovered that while clothes maketh the man, they don't necessarily maketh the interior designer. 'I walked in with you still asleep,' she told me, 'and my heart sank – he'd kitted out the whole place in *dark brown*. Dark brown sofa, dark brown dining table, dark brown chairs, dark brown armchair. And green and brown cheap velvet curtains!'

As a young woman sensitive to the approval of others, and because she didn't wish to hurt Dad's feelings, she didn't verbalise her displeasure; instead, she forced a smile and learned to live with it. As to where the furniture came from, she preferred not to ask about that either. Dad said he'd bought it on the never-never, to

be paid off in weekly instalments. Mum privately doubted him, suspecting that he'd won it by gambling.

My dad was a dab hand at poker, playing at casinos or the homes of people in his social circle. He was a real wheeler-dealer, too. If opponents couldn't pay, he'd claim the equivalent value in whatever else they could stump up. Like a set of furniture, for example. In the end, Mum needn't have worried – the payment arrangements proved legitimate – but she could never be sure when it came to any new purchase or gift. All that mattered on this occasion was that she had somewhere to put down roots, to feel secure, and to be with the man she loved. When you've made do in a bedsit, landing your own house on an estate is going up in the world.

These humble beginnings illustrate the theme of my childhood: the sense of struggle, the just-about-getting-by, and the resourcefulness of two hard-working people who did everything they could to keep the balls in the air. I wouldn't know any other way to live or be. If we could make ends meet week after week, then we were in good shape.

Mum grew up in Harrow with her parents, Len and Edie, and two sisters, Vera and Dorothy, enjoying a close-knit, contented, working-class life. But as much as she was positively influenced by her parents, she yearned for something more, something unknowable, something beyond the pedestrian pace of the suburbs. No wonder, then, that the bright lights of London proved enticing.

Mum's sense of style belonged in the capital, too. She prided herself on being the best-dressed woman in town. Together with her best friend from the gas board, Irene, she would head into the city to sample its nightclubs as a more stable, post-war era heralded better times for everyone. Regardless of how little money she had, Mum always dressed to the nines. She was a real lady, and I

mean that in a graceful not a grand sense; in the way she carried herself, the first impression she sought to make, and the proper manners she upheld.

For me, this practised poise is illustrated in a treasured photo showing my infant self sitting between her and Aunty Dot in our back garden. Mum is sat on the steps, hands folded on her lap, knees together, looking the epitome of well-put-together grace, with not a hair out of place. Yet, behind that serene demeanour, there existed a restless spirit. And if it's true that she sought something more exciting and unpredictable, she got what she wished for in Dad.

Tall, broad-shouldered, with a Clark Gable-esque panache, he was also someone whose pristine appearance belied his more humble roots – from his hand-made leather shoes, the silk ties, and classical gold wristwatch, to the sharp Chesterfield suits that finished off his look. I can well imagine that when my parents stepped out together, they looked quite the couple, driving around in whatever second-hand Mercedes or BMW Dad drove at the time.

They met in a nightclub in central London. Dad was out with friends and Mum was working part-time in the cloakroom. Apparently, they fell in love the moment she handed him the ticket for his overcoat. Andy Malone was new to London, having recently moved from north of the border, yet he had only the slightest hint of a Scottish accent. Mum would later learn that he was actually English but had moved after being orphaned at the age of seven.

His father had been killed in the Great War and then his mother died indirectly from breast cancer – she suffered a fatal haemorrhage in the days after undergoing surgery to have a mastectomy. Dad was taken in by his grandparents, Ginger and Agnes – the only names I heard him reference.

Ginger was a gamekeeper on a landed estate in the Scottish Highlands, where he created the most idyllic childhood for his grandson. In later years, Dad would regale me with the odd story, telling us how he'd go poaching and 'sit with my hand in the river, tickling the salmon and, as they shot out of the water, I'd catch one and put it in the pocket down the side of my trousers, ready to sell to the local hotels'. Or there was the time, as a nine-year-old, when he was a 'beater', braying a stick on the ground to flush out wild game for hunting parties. During one lunch break on the moors, he ended up sharing a sandwich on a stump, sitting beside the King of Egypt who, apparently, was a guest of the Duke of Buccleuch. Knowing Dad, these may well have been tall tales with a grain of truth – he was a bit Alice in Wonderland when it came to storytelling – but I didn't care. I wanted to hear his stories again and again because the things he spoke of, and the life he'd led, seemed a world away to a girl on a council estate in Kent.

Dad's carefully selected and often repeated anecdotes never strayed into personal territory, though, almost as if he had erected his own wall on the border, keeping his past from encroaching any further. There was obviously a life before us, but it was never a topic I heard him discuss. I'm not even sure Mum asked too many questions, probably because she was focused on their happy-ever-after.

A dynamic couple with similar values, they were young, carefree, and passionately in love. Dad was certainly extroverted, and I think his more gregarious spirit gradually coaxed out Mum's confidence. He spoiled her, taking her to some of London's fancy restaurants and casinos. That's where she first noticed his penchant for gambling, understanding that poker was how he made some extra money. The fact that he seemed to win more than he lost can only have added to his air of apparent invincibility. Andy Malone worked hard and played hard, and was clearly fun company.

By day, they held down regular, nine-to-five jobs, but that was never more than a means to an end. Life for them was about the evenings, weekends and being together: what they would do, where they would go, what they would wear, and the good times they would enjoy. Then came the Arctic, record-breaking winter of January and February 1963.

From New Year's Day onwards, London, like most of the country, was blanketed in a thick layer of snow sealed to the streets by temperatures of minus two degrees Celsius – cold enough to turn the upper reaches of the River Thames into a skating rink. 'The Big Freeze' lasted two months. Buses and trains didn't run, rubbish didn't get collected, and power cuts – aided and abetted by unions issuing 'work to rule' orders – became frequent, which led to the closure of nightclubs, cinemas, casinos, and theatres. People even resorted to wearing their coats at home and work in order to keep warm.

I don't know how Mum and Dad were personally affected because they never mentioned anything but, one thing's for sure, it certainly would have curtailed their socialising. I dare say they had never spent so many nights indoors. Maybe that explains why, one day in March, Mum found out she was pregnant.

And that's where I would come in, eight months later.

Smells unlock my every memory, like I'm moving through a sensory doorway to the past where all my senses translate into a scent or an aroma, conjuring a vivid recall. Transported to a specific time and place, I'm suddenly seeing, hearing, tasting and touching everything around me. This link between the sense of smell and human emotion would be one of the truths of fragrance I would come to understand, and it's well known that Marcel Proust was the first to write about this phenomenon. But no description better sums it up than the one from Patrick Süskind in his novel

Perfume: 'Odors have a power of persuasion stronger than that of words, appearances, emotions, or will . . . it enters into us like breath into our lungs, it fills us up, imbues us totally. There is no remedy for it.'

We breathe them in to be stored in our subconscious, for remembrance, for nostalgia, for the truth of how we once felt. Smells are our olfactory reminders – emotional threads from the past that tug on us from nowhere. And all I have to do is close my eyes, and my nose will take me back.

Eau Sauvage, a cologne by Christian Dior: unmistakably Dad, with his starched collar and crisp, white shirts ironed to within an inch of their life. He's sitting in his armchair, right ankle resting on left knee, creating a cradle between his legs. He called this his 'dip' – the spot where I would sit, listening to his stories, facing his moustached smile, seeing the reflection of myself in his black, thick-rimmed glasses. This was my favourite place in the world.

Joy by Jean Patou: the grace of Mum, and her signature floral fragrance – an invisible vapour trail of jasmine and rose, as much a part of her elegant uniform as the Yves St Laurent-dominated wardrobe, Jaeger velvet skirts and beautiful silk shirts she saved up to buy. And then I'm five again, hugging her legs, not wanting her to go to work, looking up at her as she stands at the mirror in her bedroom, applying her Revlon burnt orange lipstick, setting the pearls in her ears *just so.*

Even as a little girl, I knew from Mum's choice of fragrance what her mood or the occasion was: *Je Reviens* by Worth – headed to work, serious, professional; *Joy* – going to London, feeling confident, out to impress at somewhere fancy; *Ma Griffe* by Carven – summer time, a spring in her step, holidays in Cornwall; and Mary Chess *Tapestry* bath oil – Friday night, unwinding, time to herself, the scent that infused the rest of the house whenever she took a bath. She also used the same talcum powder, and I can

still see those snowy footprints leading out of the bathroom, across the landing, into the bedroom.

Whatever she wore, its composition nearly always contained notes of jasmine and rose, and I could often smell her before seeing her, either as a reassurance that she was close – upstairs or in the garden – or the relief that she was coming home, as confirmed by the sound of her high-heeled boots clipping up the garden path. As soon as she stepped inside, I'd run to her before she had time to take off her forest green, hooded cape, and she'd sweep me up in her arms, eager to express how much she'd missed me. Mum didn't return to work until I was four or five, but I understood the urgency for her to earn a wage.

I didn't smell much money in my childhood.

Instead, I can recall the array of scents from the amazing flowers in our back garden: the apricot, white and red roses; the blue lobelia, the greengage tree, the lemon-scented geraniums, and the fresh mint – the ingredients for my first home-made perfume mixed in a jam jar and left to ferment in Dad's garden shed. This was no flashforward of my future – most girls experiment in this way, I think – but it was perhaps me trying to capture the pleasant smells of days spent in the garden, either with Dad tending the rabbit hutch, or with Mum and Aunty Dot, sitting on the steps on blazing August afternoons. Even as a child, family meant everything to me, but that sense of cohesive togetherness was inconsistent and fleeting.

I could fill that same jam jar today with an abundance of fragrant memories from my early years: the damp wood of the garden shed where Dad found his peace; the tomatoes he'd cut into jagged crowns to place on the salads he'd make; the breaking of a digestive biscuit which, for some reason, reminded me of our dog's paws; the apricot madeleines that evoke the nonstop baking of Nanny Edie, my mum's mum; Sunday roast beef with

gravy, meaning we got to sit together, gathered around the fire, with plates on our laps; the woody tobacco packed inside Dad's roll-ups; the Ajax and bleach that greeted me after school, which meant 'Aunty' Maureen, our neighbour, had cleaned because Mum hadn't the time; the linseed oil and its turpentine scent from Dad's paintings; the fresh carrot from feeding the rabbits in our hutch; pine needles from a tree on Christmas morning; freshly cut grass from summer; and even the musty laundry, which didn't get tackled as much as I'd have liked. Those are some of my happy smells, there to remind me of all the good times. Lest I forget.