

CONTENTS

Preface / 9

CHAPTER 1:
Humble Beginnings / 13

CHAPTER 2:
No Respect / 37

CHAPTER 3:
Stockholm / 68

CHAPTER 4:
Use, Abuse and the British Empire Games / 92

CHAPTER 5:
Into the Depths / 127

CHAPTER 6:
Death, Demons and LSD / 151

CHAPTER 7:
Saved by the Barbell / 163

CHAPTER 8:
Starting Back Up / 180

CHAPTER 9:
Crooning and Creating / 191

CHAPTER 10:
Look East, Young Man / 210

CHAPTER 11:
Challenge to the World / 229

Afterword / 242

APPENDIX 1:
My Complete Drug-Free Strength-Building System / 245

APPENDIX 2:
Doug Hepburn's Lifting History/ 255

APPENDIX 3:
Doug Hepburn's Awards and Acknowledgements / 261

APPENDIX 4:
Official 1952 and 1956 Olympic Weightlifting Results / 263

APPENDIX 5:
Doug's Exact 1953 World Championship
Training Program / 265

APPENDIX 6:
Doug's Exact 1954 British Empire Games
Training Program / 269

APPENDIX 7:
Doug Challenges the World / 274

APPENDIX 8:
Choosing your Strength Exercises / 277

APPENDIX 9:
Scheduling your Strength Workout / 285

APPENDIX 10:
Exact Poundage and Repetition Increases
for Doug's "A" and "B" Programs / 287

CHAPTER 1

HUMBLE
BEGINNINGS

*Conforming is being ordinary.
But then how do you do the extraordinary?*

– DOUG HEPBURN
(*National Post*, online, December 13, 2000, p. 3)

When I, Douglas Ivan Hepburn, was pulled into this world on September 16, 1926, in the Vancouver General Hospital in Vancouver, British Columbia, it was anything but smooth.

My mother Gladys, small and pretty at twenty-one with slim hips not made for childbearing, needed help, so the doctor clamped forceps on my newly-formed head and pulled, causing my pliable cranium to stretch into a high cone resembling more a rocket ship or an ice cream scoop than a braincase.

My father Ivan, tall, muscular and a year older than my mother, studied me through bleary, slightly inebriated eyes and half-jokingly voiced what everyone present was probably thinking but too polite or embarrassed to say: “My God! You’re not going to make him go through life like that, are you? Can’t you just put him out of his misery right now?”

The skull eventually shrank back to normal, leaving only two small scars above the temples, which I cite as proof that I never wanted to be born in the first place. However, there were other impediments that were not so easily rectified. I was born with a club foot that could be corrected only by an operation that my parents could not afford. I also had a severe alternating squint, where my eyes would lock in place if I looked either too far left or right.

My most serious setback was that my parents were on the verge of divorce after less than three years of marriage. My father's excessive drinking was the main cause, but if opposites do attract, perhaps their union was fated for failure from the outset.

My mother, born Gladys Alberta Rundle in Port Perry, Ontario on September 13, 1904, was a five-foot-four, 130-pound farmer's daughter full of the aspirations normal for women of that time and station: work hard, be happy with your lot in life, get married and have children as quickly as possible. She was strong-willed, rarely cried or showed emotion, and although she had many suitors, was more embarrassed than flattered by male attention. She made it clear that she would only marry a man who could provide the security and dependability she was searching for.

My father, born Ivan Clifford Hepburn in Hope Bay, Ontario on April 20, 1903, seemed to fit that bill. He was a six-foot one-inch, 220-pound, good looking ex-semi-pro baseball player who had a way with people that gave him a successful insurance sales career and the nick-name "Happy." He drank a bit, but this had not appeared problematic to Gladys and since his outgoing personality complemented her more reserved nature, they married in a small wedding in Edmonton, Alberta, then moved to the West Coast to set up modest housekeeping in Vancouver's West End.

For a while things went well between them. They held down good-paying sales jobs — my mother in a dress shop and my father with a life insurance company — and spent happy times together. They even made plans to have a child in the near future. It soon became apparent, however, that fun-loving Ivan had more than a passing fancy for the "dram." He would go on binges that lasted

days, sometimes weeks, without so much as a thought for his job or family, and by the time I appeared, mother and father were well on their way to a breakup.

My earliest recollection of my mother is of her bouncing me on her knee and singing “Redwing” in her soft, melodic voice. To this day the memory is clear in my mind and can bring me to tears. “Sing with me, Douglas,” she would prompt as she balanced me with her strong hands. I did and always felt secure.

My earliest recollection of my father is of him jack-knifing a foul-smelling and improperly applied cast from my right ankle and throwing the stinking plaster out the window. Its purpose had been to straighten the club, but the constant chafing on the top of my foot had resulted in an intense pain coupled with a large open sore, thick with infected tissue. As he sliced away the plaster he shouted, “Next things I buck off will be the heads of the idiot doctors who monkey-rigged this here! And I don’t mean the heads their hats are on!”

Unhappily, he was unable to mend his failing marriage as easily. As his drinking became worse, so did the confrontations between him and my mother. They finally parted for good.

I was only three years old at the time but I remember it vividly and with extreme sadness. My mother, her face solemn but determined, was coaxing me to sleep in my bedroom crib when my father entered, quite inebriated, and they began to argue. The argument turned heated and my father shoved her. Grabbing her by the throat, he slammed her against the light switch and plunged the room into darkness. I wanted to cry but I was too afraid. I sat in shock, clinging to my pillow.

When the light finally came back on, my father had left and my mother was crying. It was one of the few times I had ever seen her break down. She cried for a long time and when she stopped, it was as though she had washed away every memory of the man who had caused her so much grief and disappointment. Standing, she lifted me from the crib — prompting my tears — and proclaimed with conviction, “Everything will be all right now, Douglas. You will see.” She garbage-canned her wedding picture and

everything else that reminded her of her failed marriage and set out to forge a new and better life.

Her first step was to approach Ivan for a divorce. When it became obvious that he would never agree — he would always love her though she no longer loved him — she and I moved back to Edmonton to be with her family.

The Edmonton Rundles were a tightly knit clan who lived close to one another a few miles from town. My grandparents, Bertha and Hi, shared a large house with my Uncle Fred and his family; my other two Uncles, Gordon and Clayton, occupied separate houses with their families a few miles down the road. Since my grandparents' house had the most room, my mother and I moved in with them, taking over a large bedroom on the upper floor. It was a tight squeeze but, to the Rundles, family was family, so we all made do.

For my mother it was the opportunity she needed to regain control of her life. She found a sales job in a nearby dress store, gained confidence from the support of her friends and family and looked forward to a better life without an alcoholic husband.

I also fared well. I breezed through school, excelled in art and sports despite my pretzelled eyes and twisted foot, and took great delight in exploring my new surroundings: moody streets, dark alleys and the flat, bare prairie that stretched for miles in every direction.

I also managed to get into the minor scrapes that were usual for a boy of my age. Once, when I was six and visiting a turkey farm with my mother and uncles, I was asked if I wanted to help with the feeding. Having begged to do it myself, I loaded a bucket with feed, stuffed more in my pockets and headed into the pens. When I realized how large the turkeys were and how excited they grew at the prospect of food, I suddenly changed my mind. I tossed the feed pail into the air and bolted for the house. The turkeys, aware of the feed in my pockets, chased me all the way to the front door, and it was a long time before I again ventured outside alone — even longer before I quit jumping when one of my uncles sneaked up behind me shouting, “Gobble, gobble!”

Another farm incident proved less humorous. Since the farmhouse was without refrigeration, butter, cream and other perishables were placed in a bucket and lowered into a deep well to keep them cool. Once a day the bucket was cranked up, the required rations removed and the bucket lowered again. Although I was barely seven, I loved to watch the muscular arms of the menfolk crank the bucket up and down and decided one day to try it on my own. Waiting until everyone had gone into the house, I removed the well covering and cranked. The bucket was heavier than I had anticipated, but after a good deal of time and sweat I managed to crank it to the top. Bubbling with pride, I looked for someone to show off to and lost my grip. The cream, butter and other perishables splashed down into the water, and it took months to get the water potable again. No one said too much about the incident, apparently chalking it up to the greenness of youth, but my mother made it clear that she wasn't pleased. We were guests in someone else's home and had to act the part.

A short time later, when a bed became vacant in the Shriners' Hospital for Crippled Children in Winnipeg, Manitoba, my mother immediately, and against my frantic wishes, admitted me to have my club foot straightened. Why I was so terrified to go, I'm not sure. Perhaps I was remembering the cast that gave me so much pain or feared what would happen if I acquired another infection without my father around to save me. Whatever the reason, I fought like a demon whenever doctors or nurses came near and I actually kicked the face of the operating surgeon. As it turned out, my instincts had been correct. One operation turned into many, resulting in a fused ankle, an atrophying calf and a right leg an inch shorter than my left, leaving me permanently crippled. When my cast was removed, there was more extreme pain and infection.

Upon my release from the hospital, my mother and I moved back to Vancouver where she met Bill Foster, a tall, fair-haired, nonsense Englishman with the striking good looks of Paul Newman. Bill had a steady job in sales and no apparent addiction to alcohol. They immediately launched a romance and, since the

quickest way to the mother's heart was through the son, Bill made a point of wooing me as well as my mother. He took me to the park and to ball games on a regular basis and bought me two spectacular presents within the first two years, the first a big red wagon that I pushed and rode all over the neighbourhood, honking and hooting, the second a brand new two-wheel bicycle that I pedalled all over the city and beyond, taking great pains to make each outing more rugged than the last. On one such occasion I pedalled so hard and long that my nose bled and my legs and backside seized up. It was two full days before I could walk without wincing, and two more before I could sit on a hard bicycle seat.

Another time, while pedalling down a particularly steep street, I lost control, slid underneath a parked truck and slammed into a row of garbage cans on the other side. "You okay?" asked a couple of breathless passersby who had witnessed the near-fatal display. Nodding, I brushed myself off and offered to do it again for money. When they declined, I shrugged, hopped onto my bike and pedalled away.

After a two-year courtship, Bill and my mother decided to marry. But there was a problem: she was already married and my father, Ivan, was not about to step aside. Many times he and my mother discussed divorce — sometimes quietly, sometimes heatedly — but always his answer was no. He would always love her and that was that. Since the United States' divorce laws at that time were much more lenient than Canada's, my mother decided to move to Seattle for a year and apply for a divorce there. It was not a move that she or Bill relished — she would have to quit her job and Bill could not afford to quit *his* — but it was either that way or no way. Mother and son would move to Seattle for the required year and Bill would commute from Vancouver on weekends.

Within the month, my mother had taken a bookkeeping position with a large Seattle retail store, enrolled me into Seattle Elementary, and was doing as well as could be expected for a young woman in love and alone in a strange country. Not so for myself. Being a Canadian among Americans immediately made me dis-