



# Grace

A Biography

Thilo Wydra

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**GRACE**

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THILO WYDRA

# GRACE

A BIOGRAPHY

Translated by Rachel Hildebrandt



Skyhorse Publishing

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*To my parents—in memoriam*  
*Ursel Wydra & Siegfried Wydra*

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*Fairy tales tell imaginary stories.*

*Me, I'm a living person. I exist.*

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*If the story of my life as a real woman were  
to be told one day, people would at last discover  
the real being that I am.*

—Grace Kelly<sup>1</sup>

*Only Grace Kelly could have created Grace Kelly.  
It must have been a concept in her head.*

—John Foreman<sup>2</sup>

*Her very name—Grace—could not have been  
more fitting.*

—Louis Jourdan<sup>3</sup>



# — FOREWORD

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## Reflections: The Two Lives of Grace Kelly

*Grace Kelly's apparent frigidity was like a mountain covered with snow, but that mountain was a volcano.*

—Alfred Hitchcock<sup>4</sup>

The last thing that she may have ever seen was the view from her car of Monaco. Of her principality. Of the azure sea. Of its shimmering, bright light.

Then all must have suddenly gone dark around her.

It is the morning of September 13, 1982, shortly after 9:30 a.m. It is a Monday, a glorious late summer day on the French Riviera. The sun beams. A new week is beginning.

As he follows behind the brown Rover 3500 on the small serpentine road that leads from La Turbie high in the French highlands, down to Monaco, the truck driver Yves Raimondo notices at some point that he can no longer see the brake lights of the car in front of him.<sup>5</sup> At this speed and incline, the red brake lights should have been burning for a while already. Suddenly the car begins to skid and skid along the rock wall. Observing all of this, Raimondo honks repeatedly. For a moment, the car seems to right itself. It accelerates down the hill, and the next sharp, hairpin turn is already in sight. There is still no indication that the driver of the Rover 3500 is slowing down to brake. Then, Yves Raimondo witnesses how the Rover, at full speed, races out over the curve. The car plunges off the steep, 130-foot cliff and comes to rest in a clump of trees and bushes in a private garden. A pile of steel. A wreck. Grace Kelly is in this brown Rover.

Alongside her sits her 17-year-old daughter, Princess Stéphanie, who survives the fall, crawls out from the left side of the car, and implores the passing motorists for help: *Maman*, her mother, lays in the car. *Maman*—the Princess of Monaco.

First, cars stop above. People scurry around. One farmer calls for two rescue vehicles, which soon arrive at the scene. Grace Kelly lies across the interior of the car, her head toward the rear, her legs near the front. One of them seems twisted. Her eyes are glassy, she is nonresponsive and clearly unconscious. On her forehead is a gaping wound. The emergency personnel must pull her through the bushes, and she is immediately placed into one of the ambulances and transported to her namesake hospital, Hôpital Princesse Grace. Her daughter lies in the other ambulance. At the hospital, Grace Kelly is examined and undergoes a four-hour emergency surgery. She urgently needs a CT scan of her head. However, the only CT machine in the principality is not located in this hospital, high on a craggy hill, but is instead in the office of Dr. Mourou, at the Winter Palace on the central boulevard of Moulins 4, at the opposite end of the district. Thus, the gravely injured woman is transported there. However, when the stretcher does not fit horizontally into the narrow elevator, it is carried up the stairs to the third floor. Valuable time is lost. At this point, thirteen hours have lapsed since the accident.

The night between September 13 and 14 is a night of uncertainty, a night of trepidation and hope for one husband, Prince Rainier III, and his two children, son Albert and daughter Caroline. The third and

youngest child, Stéphanie, is completely unaware of this. She is in the hospital, suffering from a serious vertebrae injury and concussion, and Rainier wishes to spare her the shock. It is several days later when she first learns the full measure of the tragedy. Only after the burial, in the company of her family, will she be taken to the grave of her mother in St. Nicholas Cathedral.

On the next day, neither the Monegasque people, nor the world at large, know exactly what has happened to the princess.

Now the doctors finally share with Prince Rainier how things truly stand with his wife. They had operated on her the day before, opening her chest cavity as well as the abdominal wall. The bleeding from her head wound is very heavy. Her brain damage is serious and permanent. She lies in a coma from which she will never awake. Since 6:00 a.m., she has been, for all intents and purposes, clinically dead. There is no hope.

The family comes to bid farewell. After son Albert and daughter Caroline have said their good-byes, Rainier stays behind, alone with his wife. They had spent 26 years together. At noon, Rainier gives the doctors permission to turn off the life support machines, which have until now kept his wife's body functioning. It is a difficult decision in a lonely hour.

On September 14, 1982, at 10:35 p.m., the actress Grace Kelly, the Princess of Monaco, Gracia Patricia, dies. At the age of 52, she is much too young.

Only at this point does the world learn of what has occurred.

A legend is born.

In the chapel of the Prince's Palace, high on a rocky point, Gracia Patricia's open coffin is visited by countless people who wish to have one last look at her. They have come to say farewell to their princess, the mother of their country. It is also a farewell to a legendary actress and beauty icon. Three days later she is buried. On September 18, the coffin is ceremoniously carried several hundred yards to the Notre-Dame-Immaculée Cathedral, Saint Nicholas, and at regular intervals, a bell sounds a single tone. The solemn sound echoes through the streets, landing heavily upon the slow, advancing funeral procession.

About 100 million people worldwide sit in front of their televisions. In terms of viewers, this media coverage is unparalleled.

Among the 800 funeral guests are dignitaries from around the world, old friends, and relatives from Philadelphia. Princess Gracia Patricia of Monaco is finally laid to rest in the choir of the cathedral. It is the same cathedral in which Grace Kelly and Prince Rainier III had married 26 years ago on April 18, 1956.

The Monegasque people are in a state of shock, and the small principality sinks into mourning. The world reacts in empathy, a phenomenal wave of mourning, comparable only to that which followed the death of John F. Kennedy in November 1963 or the tragic car accident in Paris that killed Lady Diana in August 1997. And just as Kennedy and Diana were icons of the modern age, so were James Dean and Elvis Presley, Marilyn Monroe and Romy Schneider, and later: Michael Jackson, Amy Winehouse, and Whitney Houston. For them, death came all too soon. Their legendary status, their iconization, is solely due to the fact that they never grew old, that they were in the prime of life when it abruptly ended. Their singularity distinguishes all of them, separating them from others of their generation; their lives are exceptions. Such is the case with Grace Kelly.

For the millions of sympathetic people, Grace Kelly was, like few others, "a perfect canvas for everyone to paint a dream on," as noted by her old friend Don Richardson.<sup>6</sup>

The world press outlets tried to outdo each other in their coverage of her death, reporting facts both actual and unsubstantiated. How could the princess lose her life in a simple car accident? This seeming

banal, dark end did not adequately fit her ostensibly bright, glamorous life—not to mention the irony that she had been killed on that same serpentine route she had once taken, at the age of 24, with Cary Grant in Alfred Hitchcock's *To Catch a Thief* (1955). Even then she had driven that road at an excessive speed.

Before the actual cause of death emerged, there was much speculation over the details of the crash. One rumor claimed that 17-year-old Stéphanie had sat at the wheel. Other rumors presumed that Grace and her rebellious daughter had been arguing heatedly with one another, a typical occurrence at the time, during the drive. Even following the royal family's release of the official cause of death—a stroke (a nonlife-threatening stroke that under other circumstances would have only caused dizziness but, in this case, had caused her to lose control of the car)—speculation swirled to suggest suicide, an intention to swerve around the hair-pin curve. Additional rumors attributed her death to political intrigue—assassination attempt, perhaps. Others whispered that, from the very beginning, the doctors had not treated her properly, and that with the right medical care she could have survived. Regardless of all these sensational theories, the only person who can actually speak to their truth or falsehood is Princess Stéphanie herself.

A myth was born with the death of Grace Kelly, the myth of a woman who held various roles and who lived various lives. Her life, which can be divided into two halves, each exactly 26 years long, was dominated by an involuntary discrepancy between appearance and reality—a dualism that caused her great suffering.

Despite being surrounded by the facade of beauty, she strove for an authentic reality. Within herself she carried a core that ultimately did not correspond with the artificiality and pretension of Hollywood.

Above all, Grace Kelly was a woman whose complex personality was colored by a pronounced ambivalence. The characteristics that Grace Kelly embodied—an unwavering pose and a flawless, almost cold facade on one hand, and a tender emotionality and warmth on the other—function, even today, as a surface against which millions of people create identities. It is not inconsequential that contemporary luxury brands continue to use her image to advertise their watches, jewelry, and high-end fountain pens.

The so-called *Kelly Bag* is among the most famous of these accessories. Its name originated on a day in 1956, when Grace used "*le petit sac haut à courrouies*" (the little bag with straps)—a leather handbag by Hermès, one of her favorite designers—to conceal her first pregnancy from the paparazzi. The photograph that captured this moment was widely publicized in *Life* magazine, and with the permission of the royal family, the *Kelly Bag* from Hermès has borne her name ever since. The *Kelly Bag* combines elements of simplicity and nobility, just like its namesake.

Grace Kelly—the fragile girl from Philadelphia who worshiped her all-powerful father, the ethereal actress from Hollywood, the classic fashion and style icon from New York and Paris, the benevolent Princess of Monaco—spent her entire life preserving her legendary poise, both inside and out. She did this to keep from losing herself, and to keep from burdening others. Perhaps also, to sometimes help someone else.

After her death, her image became timeless—a stylish woman who functioned as a role model for others. A woman who was shaped by inner and outer class. Despite her inner fractures.

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*She had that inner strength, that ability to stand on her own and to stand by her convictions, but yet she was incredibly sensitive to the world around her, to other people, to other people's unhappiness or stress. She tried to help other people in a very genuine way. But also to other friends of hers, if they had problems in their lives. She had that great sensibility, this loving nature.*

*—Prince Albert II of Monaco on his mother <sup>7</sup>*

1870

## A German-Irish (Pre-)History

*We were German girls.*

—Peggy, Grace Kelly's older sister

The ancestral history of the woman, who became one of the most admired actresses of the 1950s and 1960s and who was ultimately named the Princess of Monaco, reaches far back into the past. It is not only the story of the seemingly fragile, blonde girl from Philadelphia who came to marry the Prince of Monaco. Neither is it merely a realization of the American Dream. In its origins, it is also a German-Irish story.

In the second half of the seventeenth century, the surname Berg was first chronicled in the Oden Forest of southern Hesse. The first Berg seems to have been Johann Berg, who was born in the 1650s and who died in 1731. Descending from him, numerous Bergs lived in this area through to the turn of the twentieth century. Among these were two women named Margaretha, one born in 1688 and the other born in 1742, and two men named Johann Georg, who, from time to time, were called Johann Georg I and Johann Georg II. This family line can be traced from the 1650s to the late 1800s, the time in which the roots of this particular story begin.<sup>9</sup>

The Bergs lived in the small villages in the vicinity of the Oden Forest—in Heppenheim, Sonderbach, Wald-Erlenbach, and Erbach. One half of Grace Kelly's German ancestry is directly tied to the Hessian village Heppenheim, located on the Bergstrasse.

At the time that Grace Kelly's German grandmother, Margaretha Berg, lived there, Heppenheim was a small, perhaps somewhat dreary locale. The village was primarily shaped by agriculture and manufacturing. Additional industries included a stone quarry, a clay manufacturer, and several cigar factories supplied by the local tobacco farmers. However, above all, Heppenheim's most valuable asset was its mountainside location. Though a lovely site, it was never possible for the town to become wealthy from farming. Residents mainly pursued careers in old industries that had been established in the 1800s as opposed to the newer, more modern ones which were coming of age in the 1900s. In and around Heppenheim, no smoking chimneys could be seen; however, the town did try to attract the attention of those with wealth.

Even though Heppenheim has 25,000 residents today, and is the last town and county seat on the border of the states of Hesse and Baden-Wuerttemberg, back in the early 1900s, the town was little more than a kind of southern Hessian annex to the grand duchy. Shaped by Catholicism, this area primarily belonged to the greater Mainz region. With the influx of Protestants of higher social standing, the natives felt "occupied," a sentiment that remained in place for a relatively long time.<sup>10</sup>

For this reason, a tension existed between the established local residents and the newcomers of high status, who largely settled in the villa neighborhoods on Maiberg Hill. These people were neighbors, but they did not mingle with each other. Most of the native townspeople were Catholic, and were predominantly employed in the long-established local professions and industries. Meanwhile, the

Protestants (many of whom came from the Protestant city of Darmstadt, which was then ten times bigger than Heppenheim) were engaged in the administrative offices for the local schools and other institutions. A stratified social system emerged from this reality, and the members of the upper class gathered regularly in the most prominent building on the market square, named “Zum Halben Mond” (“At the Half Moon”). Those residents who had carried out their small livelihoods in this town for many generations were not welcome there.<sup>11</sup>

This situation is somewhat similar to that in Philadelphia, where the Majer-Kelly family later lived and where again the emigrant Catholics of German-Irish heritage belonged to the minority. True acceptance was hard to come by. The Catholic element, rooted in her German and Irish background and refreshed through her association with Monaco’s devoutly Catholic, Vatican-oriented culture, accompanied Grace Kelly her entire life. It was both her mainstay and her burden, her blessing and her curse. However, that story begins much later.

Grace Kelly’s maternal grandmother, Margaretha Berg, first entered the world on a Sunday, “in the year of our Lord 1870, on July 10 around 9:30 a.m.,” in Heppenheim.<sup>12</sup> According to the baptism register: “On this Sunday, the Heppenheim ‘Liderzweig’ choral society and the ‘Instrumental Society’ gave a major concert to benefit the local beautification society in the restaurant ‘Zum Halben Mond.’” On July 15, only five days after Margaretha’s birth, war with neighboring France broke out. According to the “Excerpts from the Baptism Register for 1870 of the Roman Catholic Parish of Heppenheim,” the child was baptized only ten days after her birth, on July 20.<sup>14</sup>

Margaretha’s birthplace still stands today, House Number 8 on the Great Market (as clearly marked on the house) in the historic center of this quaint village. In 1869, Georg Berg II and his wife Elisabeth purchased this two-storied house, which had been built in the first half of the eighteenth century, and attached a barn. The Great Market, with its well dedicated to the Virgin Mary, is ringed with restored Hessian, timbered houses, all painted white and decorated with red or brown timbers. One of these is the Berg house, while one of the others is the town hall with its bell tower. The Great Market rests on a hill that rises a little above the town. From behind the Berg house, one can see the ruins of the medieval Starkenburg Castle, built around 1065. The scene is as perfect as a postcard.

Margaretha was the daughter of the prospective master saddler, seller of architectural moldings, and wallpaper hanger Georg Berg II. He was born on October 17, 1841, in Erbach, near Heppenheim, and his wife Elisabetha Roehrig was born in Sonderbach, also near Heppenheim, on January 23, 1841 (Today Erbach and Sonderbach, as well as other neighboring villages, are incorporated into Heppenheim.) They were married on July 28, 1868, in Heppenheim, and two days later, Georg Berg opened “a saddle business. He also registered a grocery shop, a brandy tap over the street, an unparalleled wallpaper business, and a salt shop.”<sup>15</sup>

During the 1870s and 1880s, the Catholic-baptized and educated Margaretha grew up in the household on the Great Market along with her thirteen siblings. She completed her schooling in 1884, when she turned fourteen. Following her oldest brother Georg Nikolaus, Margaretha was the second-born child and in such a large crowd of fourteen children, individuality was sacrificed in order to remain part of this confined, familial group, where no exclusive place or space existed.

However, the young unmarried Margaretha did not choose to stay in this town of 5,000, where her personal development would have been suffocated, her horizon forever ending at the hilltop ruins of Starkenburg Castle. She broke out of this narrow life in 1890, leaving her Hessian homeland and abandoning her historic roots. At this point, Margaretha was twenty, and she immigrated to America, vast and unimaginably far away.



Two of her thirteen siblings, her brothers Franz and Philipp, decided to follow in her footsteps.<sup>16</sup> It is unclear if the three of them made the long trip together or if Margaretha undertook the voyage separately from her brothers. Often, at this time, families changed location or actually emigrated as groups. However, in 1890, Franz was only eleven years old, having been born in February 1879, and Philipp, born in May 1881, had only just turned nine. Therefore, it is likely that Margaretha attached herself to a larger group of emigrants and then left her homeland with the aid of an emigrant agent.

Beginning in the 1870s, emigration from the region was a common occurrence.<sup>17</sup> Even in sleepy Heppenheim, there was an emigration agent, who could, in emergencies, aid in the booking of ship passage and the arrangement of arrival details. These agents and ship lines advertised their services publicly in the local newspapers, frequently including a small image of a ship in their logos. Thus, there was a regular tide of legal emigrants who sold off their property and goods to collect enough money to cover the costs of provisions and passage across the Atlantic.

Only several decades later, at the start of the 1930s, did it become customary to leave one's homeland illegally, vanishing in a proverbial swirl of darkness and fog. This way one could easily leave behind a catastrophic financial situation or personal debts.

A journey in this period—especially from the Old World to the new promised land of America—meant undertaking a trip that lasted several weeks, accompanied only by the most essential goods and the uncertainty of what waited at the end of the voyage. This trip first entailed making one's way from south Hessian Heppenheim to one of the port cities, traveling up the Rhine River to either the Netherlands or Belgium. Ultimately, one needed to reach a port, such as Rotterdam, in order to catch the transatlantic ships. The large steamers that traveled westward across the ocean usually docked in New York, and from here, the immigrants who did not wish to remain in New York could reach their destinations by train.

In 1890, Margaretha Berg's destination was Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Besides the Italians, the Germans made up the largest immigrant group to this city, and from this ethnic reality, the Philadelphia neighborhood Germantown drew its name. The neighborhood of East Falls is located south of Germantown, and it, too, was a haven for newly arrived immigrants. In the 1920s and later, the Kelly family made its home here, at 3901 Henry Avenue, a road that directly bordered the University of Pennsylvania.

Margaretha's parents remained in Heppenheim. They never left, staying there until their deaths. Her mother, Elisabetha Roehrig, died in March 1886 at the age of forty-three. Her father Georg Berg lived into the twentieth century and passed away in August 1908 at the age of sixty-six.

When Grace Kelly married Prince Rainier III of Monaco in April 1956, the small birthplace of her grandmother wanted to give a suitable, personalized wedding gift to the couple. The current political independent mayor, Wilhelm Metzendorf, prepared the present and sent it through the protocol chief of the German foreign office, Dr. Mohr. The gift comprised a heavy book about Heppenheim's 1,200-year history, illustrated with black-and-white photographs, and an original engraving by Matthaeus Merian from 1645, bound in red leather, decorated with gold leaf, and nestled in a silk slipcase. Today, one can see an accurate reproduction of the book in the municipal archives of the South Hessian county seat of Heppenheim, the Bergstrasse.

After presenting the gift to the royal palace on May 2, 1956, Dr. Mohr delivered a written account to the mayor, in which he wrote: "Miss Kelly was delighted by the personalized present. As I found out in a subsequent conversation with Miss Kelly's parents, she had originally planned to visit Germany and also Heppenheim with her family. Because of the wedding between Miss Grace and Prince Rainier, the

plans did not come to pass. She hopes to resume her travel plans next year.”<sup>18</sup>

Almost exactly two years after the wedding, Margaret Majer-Kelly visited Heppenheim during the last week of February 1958 without her husband. Before her marriage, she had been here once before, in 1914, in the company of her mother, Margaretha Berg. At that time, the visit was brief, with the outbreak of World War I already at hand. For this reason, their visit ended abruptly, since both mother and daughter had to immediately leave Germany and return to America.

What must it have been like for Margaretha Berg, at the age of forty-four, to be back in her German homeland, almost twenty-five years after her emigration? What did she feel standing in front of her birthplace at Great Market 8? This time, in February 1958, there was more time. Grace Kelly's mother landed at the Frankfurt Rhein-Main airport, where she was greeted by a Heppenheim delegation and “surprised with several bottles of fine wine.”<sup>19</sup>

“In Heppenheim, Mrs. Kelly walked around, tracing her ancestor's footsteps and looking extraordinarily fresh and youthful.”<sup>20</sup> She carefully explored her family's hometown and the outlying areas. From the great hall on the second floor of the town hall, she gazed up at the market square as far as she could see, to the right, the birthplace of her mother Margaretha: the house at the intersection of Muehlgasse and the square. Accompanied at all times by Madame Cornet, the spouse of the then Monegasque press chief, she visited the open-air theater on Kappel Hill and took an excursion up to the ruins of Starckenburg Castle. She dined at the Winzerkeller restaurant and strolled through the old city district. From the old black-and-white photographs, one can see her standing in front of her mother's birthplace, visiting the town hall, and receiving a bouquet of flowers, often in the company of the Mayor Metzendorf as well.

One resourceful, local journalist found out that during her Germany tour, Margaret Majer-Kelly wore a golden charm bracelet. Each of the eight charms was decorated with jewels, and one of the charms was in the shape of a crown. The charms represented Margaret Kelly's grandchildren, whose names and birth dates were engraved on the backs. The one with the crown was for Grace Kelly's firstborn child, her daughter Caroline, born on January 23, 1957. Already by this time, a ninth charm had been ordered again with a tiny crown. In March, the birth of another grandchild was anticipated. This would be Grace Kelly's second child, Prince Albert, who was born in Monaco on March 14, 1958.<sup>21</sup>

In departure, Mrs. Kelly spoke in fluent German, which she modestly and unnecessarily described as ‘housewife German’: “During this visit, it seemed to me as if time stood still, because here one can encounter the Germany which might have existed for my mother in the ‘good, old days.’ I will tell the royal couple that it is worth coming to Germany, specifically here.”<sup>22</sup>

After a thorough tour of her mother's birthplace and several additional days in Germany, Margaret Majer-Kelly traveled on to Constance and Immenstaad, to the birthplace of her father, Carl Majer.

On May 26, 1999, twenty-one years later, Prince Albert visited Heppenheim and toured the family home of his great-grandmother.

Almost seven years before Margaretha Berg's birth, another young life began. Carl Majer was born on December 11, 1863, in Immenstaad on Lake Constance, and was baptized into the Lutheran church. His parents were Johann Christian Karl Majer and Luise Wilhelmine Mathilde Adam who originally came from Tuebingen, where they were both born in 1837, and married in 1860. The young Majer family lived in Helmsdorf Castle on Lake Constance, which Johann Christian Karl Majer had acquired in March 1860 for 25,000 guilders. A wine merchant in Immenstaad and Constance, Johann remained the estate owner of Helmsdorf Castle until 1872, when he was compelled to sell the estate to cover his debts.



Along with his two older siblings, Emil (born in 1861) and Frieda (born in 1862), Carl Majer, grew up here, ~~directly on the lake, several hundred miles southwest of Heppenheim, where his future wife~~ Margaretha, was born six and a half years later.

Carl also emigrated to America from Germany. In his case, he traveled with his mother Luise. And he, too, stayed permanently in his new country. Carl and his mother followed his father Johann Karl Majer, who had emigrated before them. According to family lore, Father Majer died in Fredericksburg, Virginia, on April 27, 1888. Carl's mother Luisa died sixteen years later in New York on December 26, 1904.

They eventually met in Philadelphia, the young Margaretha from Heppenheim and the young Carl from Immenstaad. Philadelphia was where more than a few Germans found a new home, albeit a home in which respect for the immigrants from the Old World was not very great. On January 22, 1897, Margaretha and Carl were married in a traditional Lutheran ceremony in St. Paul Lutheran Church in Philadelphia. From this point on, the Majers lived in the northern part of the city in a solidly middle-class neighborhood.

They had three children over the years. The firstborn was son Carl Titus, whose birth on January 29, 1897, almost coincided with the Majers' wedding anniversary. Two years later, another winter child was born, this time Grace Kelly's mother, Margaret Katherine Majer. She was born in Philadelphia on December 13, 1898 (in some publications, her birth year is listed as 1899, but this is inaccurate<sup>23</sup>). The last child, son Bruno Majer, was born at the turn of the century.

Grace Kelly never knew her grandfather, since Carl Majer died in 1922. However, she did know her German grandmother, Margaretha from Heppenheim, well. She was described as "a round, laughing, bouncy little woman,"<sup>24</sup> and was always addressed by her Kelly grandchildren as "Grossmutter." In 1949, Margaretha Berg died at the age of ninety-seven in Philadelphia. Her granddaughter Grace was only twenty years old at the time.

Grace Kelly's father, John Brendan Kelly, was born on October 4, 1889, in Philadelphia. (His birth date is often given as April 10, 1889, but October 4 is the actual date.<sup>25</sup>) John was the last and youngest of ten children—six boys and four girls—born to Irish immigrant parents, John Henry Kelly and Mary Ann Costello.

John B. Kelly's parents both came from County Mayo, Ireland, but they first met each other in America, in Rutland, Vermont. In 1869, one year after both had arrived in the United States, they married in this small New England town. She was only seventeen years old; he was five years older. In order to find work, the Kellys had to move multiple times, and at one point, they lived in Mineville, New York. With the help of one of Mary Ann's cousins, they finally settled in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The cornerstone for this family's future was laid when they moved here.

John B. Kelly's father, John Henry Kelly, grew up in County Mayo, in northwestern Ireland, during the 1850s and 1860s. As part of the Connaught Province, County Mayo is located several miles from the western Atlantic coast. This landscape is dotted with numerous lakes. In this area, close to Newport, John Henry Kelly was born in 1847. The Kellys worked as farmers, and their farm could be found in Drumilra. Their lives were hard and shaped by extreme poverty. On their struggling farm in Drumilra, they possessed only a house and two outbuildings.

Besides rivalries with, and uprisings against, the British authorities, the 1850s and 1860s were dominated by poor harvests, a dearth of potatoes, and hunger, especially among the Irish farming class. Within a few decades, the population of County Mayo had dropped to one-third of its original size.

Above all, these two reasons are what motivated John H. Kelly, the third of four Kelly brothers, to undertake the trip to America in 1868.

John Henry Kelly ultimately sought work in the textile factory owned by the Dobson family, who had emigrated from England. This must have seemed to him an ironic trick of fate. After all, it was because of English authority and persecution that his family had emigrated from Ireland. Here, in Dobson's factory, Carl Titus and Bruno Majer also worked. They were Margaret's brothers, and they would eventually become the maternal uncles of young Grace. For the first time, the lives of the German Majers and the Irish Kellys crossed paths.

Margaret Majer and John Kelly initially met in the Philadelphia Athletic and Social Club, a kind of sports club and society located at the intersection of Columbus Avenue and Broad Street. They were both swimmers. She was fourteen. He was twenty-three. They were separated by almost a decade.

Margaret was a lovely girl: blonde with blue eyes and an athletic figure. In the coming years, this energetic, young woman with the expressive face, the wide cheekbones, and the healthy, athletic nature would be featured on the cover of various American periodicals, including *The Country Gentleman*. After two years of study at Temple University, she received her degree as a sport and swimming instructor and became the first woman to ever be hired at the University of Pennsylvania as a physical education lecturer. Ten years later, she married the successful Olympic athlete, swimmer, and building contractor, John Kelly, and they had four children, which she raised strictly and sternly. Considering her education and her employment as a teacher, this was an unusual life course for a woman during this period, especially for the daughter of an immigrant family.

Margaret Majer was a strong-willed and attractive young woman who knew what she wanted; and she got what she wanted, professionally as well as privately. It was an attitude she passed on to her children, including her daughter, Grace.

Grace Kelly's son, Prince Albert II of Monaco, recalled his German grandmother: "[I remember her] very well. In fact, I was one of the last of the family to have seen her. She was in a nursing home. So I went there once, before she passed away. But she was an incredible lady, too. Very strong, very sort of no-nonsense with us kids. We visited her mostly in the summer time. She would always welcome us and cook for us, and be there for us, but she'd discipline us, too, so . . ." <sup>26</sup>

In describing the essential character of her background, Margaret Kelly wrote: "I had a good strict German background. My parents believed in discipline and so do I—no tyranny or anything like that, but a certain firmness." <sup>27</sup>

Similarly, Robert Dornhelm, director and longtime friend of Grace Kelly, described her mother as "a good, typically stern German, orderly, strict, Prussian." <sup>28</sup> And furthermore: "When I met Grace Kelly's mother, she looked at me and said, 'Why do you look like that?' I asked, 'What do you mean?' 'You cannot run around with your hair being so long,' she said, and then she was gone. Grace's father was stern as well, in his own way. It would seem she inherited her straight-laced nature from both sides." <sup>29</sup>

Peggy, Grace's older sister, described the discipline of their family life as follows: "We were never allowed to sit with our hands empty. We just knew we were expected to knit. We had to knit and crochet from the time we were three or four years old. We had to because we were German girls . . . it was expected of us, and we had to do it." <sup>30</sup>

At first it was very important to Margaret Kelly that she share her heritage with her children, specifically the German language, which had been spoken in the Majer home. She spoke German for the first six years of her life, until she began to learn English. Margaret Majer hoped to pass her beloved

mother tongue on to her four children. In the end, she failed in this goal, lacking support from her husband, from society at large, and not insignificantly, from her own protesting children. As the youngest, Lizanne, explained: “We gave her such grief when she tried to teach us German; we’d hide the grammar books. This was around the time of World War II and we’d complain how unpatriotic it was.”<sup>31</sup>

“Most of the people in Philadelphia, as well as I, had no idea that Grace Kelly’s mother was German. I had friends of the same age who, before they entered school, were told by their parents: ‘Do not speak a single word of German, only English. You cannot speak German here!’” recalled Mary Louise Murray Johnson, a contemporary of Grace Kelly who was born and raised in Philadelphia, until she moved away in 1958.<sup>32</sup> “Once, when a friend of mine spoke something in German, the other children began to throw rocks at her. I can understand well why the Kelly family did not want the children to speak German outside. It was forbidden.”<sup>33</sup>

The German and the Irish, the mother and the father. The duality upon which Grace Kelly’s complex personality was based undoubtedly had its roots in the strongly shaped characters of her parents, as well as their very different ethnic and sociocultural backgrounds. The German element stood for discipline, self-control, and perseverance, for willpower and industriousness, for modesty and frugality, and also for reliability and commitment. The Irish element emphasized drama and humor, romanticism and love of nature, wildness, and dreams. Two polar opposites. Margaret Majer and John B. Kelly could not have represented these any better.

These two equally weighted and contrary—as well as complimentary—forces tugged Grace in opposite directions her entire life. On the one hand, one could argue that this dichotomy was the root, in part, of her intrinsic inner strife. From this struggle sprang her two faces: the private and the public, the open and the closed, the accessible and the shy, the romantic and the disciplined, the dreamy and the ordered.

On the other hand, these two forces complemented each other almost perfectly. They instilled in Grace qualities of gentleness, tenderness, softness, and yearning. These were never expressed externally; however, they were well hidden behind a facade of composure. When she appeared in the public realm, whether as the actress or as the princess, she did not expose her true self. This tendency toward privacy distinguished her from others.

Prince Albert described how his mother also spoke some German with him and his two sisters: “Yes, a little bit. You know, I think she explained it, of course my grandmother tried to teach them German. I think there was a lot of resistance to the war at that time. So, especially in the war years, it was a different attitude. But I think that’s why she encouraged us, her kids—Stéphanie not so much, although she understands a bit, but Caroline and myself can speak more. She encouraged us to speak German all the time because she probably felt she gave it up too soon. So I wound up saying a few words, every so often, in German, to my grandmother but she didn’t want to speak it; she didn’t want to have one conversation. I guess she had fallen out of practice over the years, although she sort of humored us once in awhile.”<sup>34</sup>

Even today, the fact that the actress Grace Kelly, later Princess Gracia Patricia of Monaco, had a German mother is often forgotten. This has been the case for decades, and the majority of American and English biographies of Kelly circulated partially false information, handed down simplified stories, and negated the facts altogether.

Even the first Grace Kelly biography, which was published in the United States in 1957 on the occasion of her marriage, only mentions her mother’s heritage in a single, short sentence: “Mrs. Kelly was born Margaret Majer, of Philadelphia, of German parents (themselves talented and strong

individualistic) is a woman whose beauty equals that of her three daughters, and who has achieved success in many ways.”<sup>35</sup>

In the subsequent, more comprehensive American biography by Gwen Robyns, which was published in 1976 when Grace Kelly was still alive, the author describes in detail John B. Kelly’s Irish heritage over several pages but handles her mother’s heritage briefly and offhandedly: “Princess Grace has inherited her mother’s clear-cut bone structure, which comes from the Majers’ Teutonic background.”<sup>36</sup>

Only first in 2007 did an American biography appear that was more explicitly and critically focused. “Back in the early fifties, however, just half a decade after the end of World War II, with the majority of Americans still viewing the Germans as the enemy, it was crucial to Grace’s success that the studio publicists promote her as an all-American girl of Irish extraction—completely suppressing the fact that her heritage was as German as it was Irish.”<sup>37</sup>

Just as Margaret Majer’s German heritage was marginalized to a very few sentences, it is not surprising that through a lack of substantiated sources, the claim has been made occasionally that her family supposedly came from Düsseldorf.<sup>38</sup>

Because Grace and her three siblings grew up in Philadelphia during the 1930s and early 1940s, it seems as if world events had caused a situation in which it was not opportune or advisable to be German, to speak German, or to declare oneself to be of German heritage.

In the summer of the fateful year of 1933—the year of the so-called Nazi takeover through the appointment of Adolf Hitler to the position of chancellor by President Paul von Hindenburg on January 30—the fourth and final Kelly child was born: Lizanne. And thus, Margaret Majer-Kelly’s repeated attempts to raise her children bilingually came to nothing. In these difficult times, it was better not to be heard speaking German out in society. It was as though she needed to disavow or give up her German identity, here in a place far from her distant, restless homeland. Thus, Margaret implemented a policy through which everything German was not only systematically marginalized out of the story of the Kelly family, and especially that of her prominent daughter, but it was literally cut out and completely negated.

This is ultimately how the historically inaccurate picture was established, which claimed that Grace Kelly had purely Irish roots.

This also explains why Grace Kelly filled out her application to the New York American Academy of Dramatic Arts the way that she did. In October 1947, she completed the form, noting various characteristics, such as age, height, weight and figure, and hair color, and she included under the line for “Nationality” the following information: “American of Irish heritage.”<sup>39</sup>

The Kelly clan still functions as an Irish group. Few words are ever spent on the familial culture of the mother. Considering the existing intersections that run through Monaco’s royal family, including Prince Albert’s South African wife Princess Charlène and her family roots (in 1861, her great-grandfather Gottlieb Wittstock and his entire family emigrated from Zerrenthin, in the modern state of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, to South Africa via Hamburg), this decades-long development is quite astonishing.

Years passed before Margaret and John got to know each other better. John had to do much to woo his future bride. A challenge, since Margaret Majer initially did not want to have anything to do with John Brendan Kelly. This was an unexpected experience for this self-assured charmer.

An entire decade lies between the first meeting and the marriage of these two strong-willed personalities. On January 30, 1924, Margaret and John married in their home city of Philadelphia, in St. Bridget Roman Catholic Church, located in the East Falls neighborhood on the Schuylkill River.



Margaret had to first convert to Catholicism. (Although her Hessian mother, Margaretha Berg, was Catholic, her Wuerttemberg father Carl Majer was Lutheran, and she was raised in his denomination.) The family moved to the East Falls neighborhood, to the now legendary house at 3901 Henry Avenue.

During their first nine years of marriage, the couple was blessed with four children, born at approximately two-year intervals. The oldest of the Kelly children was Peggy (all three girls were called by nicknames that end in a “-y” sound), whose full name was Margaret Katherine for her mother. She was born on June 13, 1925. The only boy, John Brendan, Jr., named after his father, was always called “Kell,” and he was born on May 24, 1927. On November 12, 1929, Grace (“Gracie”) followed him into the world. For three and a half years, she was the youngest in the family with all the benefits that typically come with this status. Finally, on June 25, 1933, the nestling, Elizabeth Anne, always called “Lizanne” or “Lizzie” within her family, arrived. With Lizanne, now the spoiled youngest child, the six-member Kelly clan was complete.

Not all the Kellys reached old age. However, excepting father Jack Kelly, all of them outlived their daughter and sister Grace. Margaret Kelly lived the longest. She survived her world famous daughter in a very tragic way.

On January 6, 1990, Margaret Majer-Kelly died at the age of ninety-one in Linwood, New Jersey, in a senior citizens’ home not far from the family’s home in Ocean City. This occurred after she had suffered a stroke and spent many years in increasing senility. At the end, she could no longer register reality, and she even forgot the early death of her daughter, Grace.

Ma Kelly, as she was called by her husband and two of her children (Peggy and Kell), was buried in the Holy Sepulchre Cemetery in Cheltenham Township, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania, located north of Philadelphia.<sup>40</sup>

John B. “Jack” Kelly died at the age of seventy of cancer on June 20, 1960, in Philadelphia. On reaching fifty-seven years of age, John B. “Kell” Kelly, Jr. died on March 2, 1985, in Philadelphia. The oldest of the Kelly children, Margaret K. “Peggy” Kelly Conlan, was sixty-five years old when she died on November 23, 1991.

Only Lizanne Kelly LeVine, the youngest of the six-member family, survived to see the beginning of the twenty-first century. Until recently, she took part in the documentaries made about the life of her famous older sister Grace. She provided information and talked about her memories during various television interviews. Even as a young child, she often accompanied her sister Grace, and in later years she kept her company on the film sets. “I can remember Lizanne Kelly quite well. She was relatively well known because she liked to accompany her sister Grace everywhere. Thus, we began to follow Lizanne around Philadelphia but only because she was the sister,” recalled Mary Louise Murray-Johnson.<sup>41</sup>

At the age of seventy-seven, Lizanne Kelly LeVine died of cancer on November 24, 2009, in Haverford, Pennsylvania. She too was buried in Holy Sepulchre Cemetery, separately in the grave of her husband, Donald Caldwell LeVine.

The only member of the family who does not rest in the hometown of Philadelphia is Grace Kelly.

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*Little Flower, you're a lucky one  
you soak in all the lovely sun  
you stand and watch it all go by  
and never once do bat an eye  
while others have to fight and strain  
against the world and its every pain of living.*

*But you must, too, have wars to fight  
the cold bleak darkness of every night  
of a bigger vine who seeks to grow  
and is able to stand the rain and snow  
and yet you never let it show  
on your pretty face.*

Poem by eleven- or twelve-year-old Grace Kelly, circa 1940.<sup>42</sup>

# —I. THE EARLY YEARS

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1929–1947

## The Years at Home: Childhood and Youth in Philadelphia

*Grace was overly sensitive, as far as her own family was concerned. It [her family] meant a great deal more to Grace, more—so it seemed to me—than Grace was important to them . . . Even if there was a strong solidarity in the Kelly family, it wasn't necessarily affectionate.*

—Prince Rainier III of Monaco<sup>43</sup>

*A German mother and an Irish father. There was the dreaminess, the poeticism, and there was also the very structured, intellectual, punctual, perfectionist German. She was the most punctual woman that I have ever known. The most dependable. When she said, "it will be this way," then that is the way it was. Nothing could prevent it. At the same time, she could stand at the window and gaze up into the clouds, or she could sit in front of the fire and stare into it for hours on end, dreamy, her head somehow in the clouds. That was the contradiction.*

—Robert Dornhelm<sup>44</sup>

November 12, 1929 fell on a Tuesday. In Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, the baby, Grace Patricia Kelly, was born in the Hahnemann Medical College Hospital. The hospital was located at the corner of Broad Street and Vine Street in the center of the city, in the City West district, not far from City Hall. At this time Hahnemann was one of the largest private clinics in America.

Two weeks later, on December 1, Margaret and John B. "Jack" Kelly had their daughter baptized in St. Bridget Roman Catholic Church in the East Falls neighborhood. The baby's namesake was one of Jack Kelly's four sisters, one who died at the age of twenty-two of a heart attack that struck while she was ice skating. Interestingly, at the time of her death, this sister Grace had stood at the beginning of a potentially promising career as an actress.

By this point, the Kellys no longer lived in their small East Falls apartment at the corner of Ridgely Avenue and Midvale Avenue, which had been their first home after their marriage. Before the birth of their son Kell, they moved in the spring of 1925 into a house that John B. Kelly built. It was a large Classical Revival, two-storied home with seventeen rooms and a slate roof. The house was constructed of red Kelly bricks, delivered by John's company, *Kelly for Brickworks*. The facade of the house at 390 Henry Avenue was ornamented with a columned porch. Located at the intersection of Henry Avenue and Coulter Street, the house sits on a northward rising hill, and behind it is a small green space. According to Robert Dornhelm, "they did not live very richly."<sup>45</sup> From their old apartment, which was situated only a stone's throw from the Schuylkill River, Midvale Avenue went uphill from the river bank past St. Bridget Catholic Church (founded in 1853), and up to Henry Avenue. Stretching several miles into the upper rises and elevations of Philadelphia's Wissahickon Valley Park, Henry Avenue seems, in character, to fit more into the East Falls neighborhood than into the more prominent neighborhood

Germantown to the northeast, to which it is often ascribed. Germantown was founded in 1683 by Francis Pastorius to accommodate newly arrived German and Dutch settlers and immigrants. It is the oldest suburb in Philadelphia, and over time, with the integration of other neighborhoods, this area became a tightly knit district. Germantown is the area in which the schools that Grace attended in the 1930s and 1940s were located.

“Philadelphia is not pretty. It is an industrial city—many medical schools, much research, much art, and much music; but the infrastructure is not good. The Kellys lived in East Falls, in a lovely mansion. It was very pretty where they lived, but it was not the Main Line, which was considered the best neighborhood and was home to the upper class.”<sup>46</sup>

Nonetheless, Philadelphia’s lengthy Henry Avenue was one of the streets along which the city’s wealthier residents built their homes. Numerous villas and mansions lined the avenue, complete with spacious front yards and driveways that led straight to the front doors. If one lived here, one was well-to-do at the very least. However, despite his greatest efforts, Jack Kelly and his family never succeeded in becoming fully accepted and integrated members of the city’s high society, a clique dominated by long-established, Anglo-Saxon Philadelphians. These were the families that lived along the Main Line. Long-established heritage and wealth were the prerequisites for the highest social status, and the Kellys could not meet the latter standard. Acceptance into this exclusive, Anglo-Saxon society was impossible to attain for the *Nouveau Riche* and the immigrants, including the Irish, the Germans, and the Jews. Members of these groups never received invitations to important city events and festivities, such as the exclusive Piccadilly Ball.

The Kellys remained outcasts, even if they did reach an elevated status because of their wealth. People did, indeed, know the Kelly name in the city, in part due to the untiring efforts by Jack to gain recognition. He sought political offices, athletic success, and financial influence. Later, the gossip centered on the continuously neglected young daughter and her ongoing, self-motivated attempts to find success as an actress. The Kellys were always the talk of the town.<sup>47</sup>

Throughout his life, John B. “Jack” Kelly impressively exemplified the American Dream, the dream of going from dishwasher to millionaire. He pursued this in Philadelphia, in the melting pot of great and varied ethnic groups that sought new beginnings in this industrial and manufacturing city. Many old factory buildings still stand today along Scott’s Lane, near the bank of the Schuylkill River. One of these buildings once housed the Dobson textile factory, where John Brendan’s father, John Henry Kelly, once worked alongside several of his six sons, including Patrick, Walter, and John, all of whom were sent to work there around the age of ten.

Outside of school hours, Jack began to work here at the age of nine, first as furniture mover, in order to earn a little pocket money, and then as an apprentice mason. Young Jack later worked in the construction business owned by his brother Patrick, who was eighteen years older than him. Patrick started the business around 1900, and it went by the name *P.H. Kelly & Co.*

During World War I, Jack Kelly was unable to fly as a pilot due to his nearsightedness, so he served as a volunteer for a medical unit in France. In 1921, he established his own company. He borrowed money from two of his older brothers, George and Walter, and personally took over the management of his new construction company, *Kelly for Brickworks*. In turn, his brother Charles left his job at Patrick’s *P.H. Kelly & Co.* and took a position with Jack’s *Kelly for Brickworks*. Charles’s decision, along with the fact that the two firms were now in competition against each other, resulted in a tense situation among the Kelly brothers. Jack Kelly’s construction company, which he later led as its president, grew over the years to become one of the largest of its kind in the United States. This obviously brought great satisfaction to the son of poor Irish immigrants. By the time he married Margaret Majer on January 20, 1924, in 5



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