

= Mimi Smith =

Mary Elizabeth " Mimi " Smith (née Stanley ; 24 April 1906 ? 6 December 1991) was the maternal aunt and parental guardian of the English musician , John Lennon . Mimi Stanley was born in Liverpool , England ; the oldest of five daughters . She became a resident trainee nurse at the Woolton Convalescent Hospital , and later worked as a private secretary . On 15 September 1939 , she married George Smith , who ran his family 's dairy farm and a shop in Woolton , a suburb of Liverpool .

After her younger sister , Julia Lennon , separated from her husband , she and her son (Lennon) , moved in with a new partner , but Mimi contacted Liverpool 's Social Services and complained about him sleeping in the same bed as the two adults . Julia was eventually persuaded to hand the care of Lennon over to the Smiths . Lennon lived with the Smiths for most of his childhood , and remained close to his aunt , even though she was highly dismissive of his musical ambitions , his girlfriends , and wives .

She often told the teenage Lennon : " The guitar 's all right John , but you 'll never make a living out of it " . In 1965 , Lennon bought her a bungalow in Poole , Dorset , where she lived until her death in 1991 . Despite later losing touch with other family members , Lennon kept in close contact and telephoned her every week , until his death in 1980 . The Smiths ' house in Liverpool was later donated to The National Trust .

= = The Stanley family = =

According to Lennon , the Stanley family once owned the whole of Woolton village . Mimi 's father , George Stanley , was born in the Everton district of Liverpool in 1874 , and became a sailor . Her mother , Annie Jane Millward , was born in Chester around 1875 , to Welsh parents . Annie 's first two children , a boy and a girl , died shortly after birth , and she had five additional children : Mary , known as ' Mimi ' ; Elizabeth ' Mater ' (1906 to 1991) ; Anne ' Nanny ' (1911 ? 1988) ; Julia ' Judy ' (1914 ? 1958) ; and Harriet ' Harrie ' (1916 ? 1972) .

After the birth of his daughters , Stanley retired from sailing and found a job with the Liverpool and Glasgow Tug Salvage Company as an insurance investigator . He moved his family to the Liverpool suburb of Allerton , where they lived in a small terraced house at 9 Newcastle Road . According to Beatles biographer Bob Spitz , Mimi assumed a matriarchal role in the Stanley house to help her mother , and dressed " as if she was on her way to a weekly garden club meeting " . Friends of Lennon later stated that his aunt based everything on decorum , honesty , and a black @-@ and @-@ white attitude : " Either you were good enough or you were not . " Lennon 's school friend , Pete Shotton , later commented that she " had a very strong sense of what was right or wrong " . Annie Stanley died in 1945 , so Mimi accepted the responsibility of caring for her father , with help from her younger sister , Julia .

When other girls were thinking of marriage , Mimi talked of challenges and adventures that arose from her attitude of " stubborn independence " , and often said that she never wanted to get married because she hated the idea of being " tied to the kitchen sink " . She became a resident trainee nurse at the Woolton Convalescent Hospital , and later worked as a private secretary for Ernest Vickers , who was an industrial magnate with businesses in Manchester and Liverpool . She had long @-@ term plans to buy a house in a " respected suburb " of Liverpool one day so that she could entertain the " scholars and dignitaries of Liverpool society " .

= = Marriage and ' Mendips ' = =

In early 1932 she met George Smith , who lived across from the hospital where she worked , and to which he delivered milk every morning . Smith and his brother , Frank Smith , operated a dairy farm and a shop in Woolton that had been in the Smith family for four generations . Smith started courting Mimi , but was constantly thwarted by her indifference and her father 's interference . Stanley would only allow the couple to sit in the back room at Newcastle Road when he or his wife were in the front

room , and before it grew too late he would burst into the back room and loudly order Smith home . The courtship lasted almost seven years , but Smith grew tired of waiting . After delivering milk to the hospital one morning he gave her an ultimatum that she must marry him , " or nothing at all ! "

Mimi and Smith were finally married on 15 September 1939 . They bought a semi @-@ detached house called Mendips ? named after the range of hills ? at 251 Menlove Avenue , in a middle class area of Liverpool . Menlove Avenue suffered extensive damage during World War II , and she said that she often had to throw a wet blanket on incendiary bombs that fell in the garden . During the war the government took over the Smiths ' farmland for war work , and Smith was called up for service , but was discharged three years later , working in an aircraft factory in Speke until the end of the war . Smith later left the milk trade and started a small bookmaker 's business , which led Mimi to complain later that he was a compulsive gambler , and had lost most of their money .

= = Mimi and John Lennon = =

Julia Stanley married Alfred (" Alf " or " Fred ") Lennon on 3 December 1938 , and on 9 October 1940 , the couple 's first and only child was born . Mimi phoned the Oxford Street Maternity Hospital that evening and was told that Julia had given birth to a boy . According to Mimi , she went straight to the hospital during the middle of an air raid , and was forced to hide in doorways to avoid the shrapnel . She ran , as she later recalled , " as fast as my legs could carry me " . When a parachute @-@ borne landmine fell outside the hospital , she later said , " My sister [Julia] stayed in bed , and they put the baby [Lennon] under the bed . They wanted me to go into the basement , but I wouldn 't . I ran all the way back to Newcastle Road to tell father [Stanley] the news . ' Get under the shelter , ' the wardens were shouting . ' Oh , be quiet , ' I told them . " The story about the air @-@ raid has since been repudiated , as there was no attack that night . The previous raid had been on 21 ? 22 September , and the next was on 16 October , when the areas of Walton and Everton were badly hit .

After Julia separated from her husband , she and the infant Lennon moved in with her new partner , John Albert " Bobby " Dykins , but Mimi twice contacted Liverpool 's Social Services and complained about Lennon sleeping in the same bed as Julia and Dykins . Julia was eventually persuaded to hand the care of Lennon over to the Smiths , who had no children of their own . Mimi later confided to a relative that although she had never wanted children , she had " always wanted John " . In July 1946 , Alf Lennon visited the Smiths and took Lennon to Blackpool , ostensibly for a long holiday , but with the secret intention of emigrating to New Zealand with him . Julia went to Blackpool and took Lennon back to her house , but a few weeks later she handed him back over to Mimi . Lennon then lived continuously at Mendips , in the smallest bedroom above the front door . Although she was a caring guardian , she was also known for being very strict , compared to the more relaxed influence of her husband and Lennon 's mother . Family friends described Mimi as stubborn , impatient , and unforgiving , but also said that she had a strong sense of humour . On many occasions when she criticised Lennon , he would respond with a joke , and the two of them would be " rolling around , laughing together " .

Mimi bought volumes of short stories for Lennon , and her husband taught Lennon to read at the age of five by reading aloud the headlines of the Liverpool Echo . Every summer , from the age of nine until he was fifteen , she sent Lennon alone on a ten @-@ hour bus journey to visit his Aunt Mater and cousin Stanley Parkes at their home near Loch Meadie in Durness , Scotland . Mimi also took her charge to a garden party in Calderstones Park every year , where a Salvation Army band played . She remembered Lennon pulling her by the hand to get there , saying , " Hurry up Mimi ? we ? re going to be late " . Strawberry Field , in Beaconsfield Road , was the name of a Salvation Army house that Lennon would later immortalise in the Beatles ' song , " Strawberry Fields Forever " . She would later say : " John loved his uncle George [Smith] . I felt quite left out of that . They 'd go off together , just leaving me a bar of chocolate and a note saying , ' Have a happy day ' " .

Smith died of a liver haemorrhage in June 1953 , at the age of fifty , leaving £ 2000 in his will . The Smiths had rented their two first @-@ floor bedrooms to students for extra income since 1947 , while the Smiths slept in the former dining room ; on the ground floor , at the back of the house .

Some of the students who lodged there included John Cavill (from September 1949 until June 1950) . Cavill played piano , but as the house had none he bought a guitar ; admitting he knew almost nothing about chords : " My father had a violin and I had learned to play pizzicato on it , so when I got the guitar I played tunes on the strings , and John [Lennon] did the same " . Michael Fishwick also lodged there (from October 1951 until December 1958) , as did Keith Capron (September 1956 to July 1959) . Both Capron and Cavill were studying veterinary science at the University of Liverpool , with Fishwick studying biochemistry .

Five years after Smith 's death , Lennon 's mother was killed on Menlove Avenue ? shortly after a visit to Mendips ? when she was knocked down by a car driven by a drunk , off @-@ duty police officer ; PC Eric Clague . Mimi did not witness the accident , but shortly after was seen crying hysterically over Julia 's body until the ambulance arrived . Clague was acquitted of all charges , given a reprimand , and a short suspension from duty . When Mimi heard the verdict she shouted " Murderer ! " at Clague .

After Lennon became famous , she berated him for speaking in a Liverpudlian accent , but Lennon replied : " That 's showbusiness , they want me to speak more Liverpool " . Despite the talk of Lennon being working class ? as were Paul McCartney , George Harrison and Ringo Starr ? he later refuted the idea by saying , " I was a nice clean @-@ cut suburban boy , and in the class system I was about a half an inch in a higher class than Paul , George and Ringo , who lived in subsidised government houses . We owned our own house , had our own garden . They didn 't have anything like that " .

= = = Lennon and music = = =

Although Mimi later claimed that she had bought Lennon 's first guitar , it was actually his mother , after Lennon had pestered her incessantly for weeks . Julia insisted that the £ 5 instrument had to be delivered to her house and not to her sister 's . The two sisters first saw Lennon perform with the Quarrymen at the Woolton St. Peter 's Church fête on the afternoon of 6 July 1957 . Julia (who knew that her son would be performing) heard music coming from the field behind the church (now the site of the Bishop Martin School) , and pulled Mimi along with her to listen . Lennon saw his aunt coming through the crowd and comically changed the words of a song to feature her name : " Oh @-@ oh , here comes Mimi down the aisle now ... " Mimi related two versions of what she thought that day after seeing Lennon on stage : " I was horrified to behold John in front of a microphone " , and " as pleased as Punch to see him up there " .

With help from Mimi and Lennon 's headmaster , Lennon was accepted into the Liverpool College of Art because his aunt insisted that he should have some sort of academic qualifications , even though Lennon was beginning to show an interest in music . She opposed the idea of him forming a band and disapproved of McCartney because he was , " working class " , calling him " John 's little friend " . When she later met Harrison , she " hated him " because of his thick Liverpudlian accent and Teddy Boy clothes . Lennon and McCartney often met at Mendips to write songs , and rehearsed in the glass @-@ panelled porch at the front of the house , which was the only place they were allowed to play . She once asked Parkes to take her to The Cavern to see Lennon and the Beatles play , but when she descended into the damp , dark cellar ; full of screaming teenagers , she shouted to Parkes , " Get him [Lennon] out , get him out ! Tell him to come off the stage ! He can 't stay here We 'll have to stop this ! " The band 's first residency in Hamburg exasperated her because she wanted Lennon to continue his studies , but he placated her by greatly exaggerating the sum of money he would earn .

She hoped Lennon would become bored with music ; often saying , " The guitar 's all right John , but you 'll never make a living out of it " . In later years , Lennon would jokingly remind her of the comment , and later had a silver plaque made engraved with her words . When later asked about the plaque , she would say that Lennon had it made for her husband , and not her .

= = Lennon 's relationships = =

Mimi 's attitude to Lennon 's partners was often frosty , disdainful , or sarcastic . She constantly criticised Lennon about his relationships . Mimi once referred to Cynthia , Lennon 's first wife , as " a gangster 's moll " , and was particularly unpleasant or cold towards her . In the summer of 1962 , Cynthia discovered that she was pregnant with Lennon 's child , so Lennon proposed marriage . When he told his aunt , she threatened never to speak to him again to stop him from going through with it . Lennon and Cynthia were married on 23 August , at the Mount Pleasant Register office in Liverpool , although Mimi did not attend . Lennon had wanted his half @-@ sisters , cousins , and aunts to be there , but Mimi had contacted them beforehand and advised them against attending . After the Lennons had been living at Brian Epstein 's flat for a few months (and after hearing about Cynthia 's near @-@ miscarriage) , she offered to rent her downstairs back room to them .

Before Christmas in 1972 , she met the then @-@ divorced Cynthia at the funeral of Mimi 's sister , Harriet , in Liverpool . Mimi sternly criticised Cynthia for divorcing Lennon ? and letting him start a relationship with Yoko Ono ? by saying she should have stopped him from making " an idiot of himself " . Even though Mimi was described as domineering , Ono later compared herself to her when describing her own relationship with Lennon . She later admitted that Ono was a good wife and mother . After Lennon 's death , Ono and Sean Lennon visited Mimi in Liverpool , where she was staying at her sister Anne 's house because of a heart condition . She said , " Sean is like John in every way ? looks and manner ? and he has got John 's sense of humour . As long as he keeps away from music , he will be all right " .

Ono later bought ' Mendips ' and donated it to The National Trust . It was renovated to make it look as it was in the 1950s when Lennon lived there , and Ono paid a visit before it was opened to the public . Lennon 's cousin , Michael Cadwallader , had advised the National Trust on how the house looked when the Smiths lived there .

= = Later years = =

Mimi had relatives in Eketahuna , New Zealand because her maternal aunt , Harriet Millward , had married and moved there . Mimi had exchanged letters with her relatives over the years , so Lennon arranged for a tour of New Zealand in 1964 . The success of The Beatles caused problems for her and she was constantly pestered by fans at ' Mendips ' , so she sold the house for £ 6 @,@ 000 in 1965 ; Lennon bought her a £ 25 @,@ 000 bungalow by the beach called Harbour 's Edge in Sandbanks , at 126 Panorama Road , Poole , Dorset , which was her home for the rest of her life . The Lennons and their son visited her there in the summer of 1965 , which was the last time all three of them visited the house together . Lennon later gave his aunt his MBE medal , but later asked for it back so that he could return it in protest .

Lennon gave Mimi an allowance of £ 30 per week , but when she found out that his wife 's mother was being given the same amount , she phoned the Lennons ' house and said , " What has she [Cynthia 's mother] done to deserve anything ? Tell John , when you speak to him , that I am very , very annoyed " , before slamming down the phone . Lennon moved to New York in 1971 , and never returned to England again . Despite losing touch with several family members , he kept in close contact with her and telephoned her every week . On 5 December 1980 , three days before Lennon was murdered , he called her to say he was homesick and was planning a trip back to England . After Lennon 's death , Mimi was furious to find out that he had never transferred the ownership of the house over to her , which meant that Ono owned the house , and could sell it at any time .

= = Death = =

Mimi died on 6 December 1991 , at the age of 85 , while being cared for at home by Lynne Varcoe , an auxiliary nurse . During the night , other carers were present . On the day of her death , Mimi collapsed in the bathroom , so Varcoe helped her to the bed , where Mimi started Cheyne @-@ Stoking . According to Varcoe , her last words were , " Hello , John " .

Although the oldest of the Stanley girls , Mimi was the last of them to die . Cynthia , Sean and Ono attended her funeral on 12 December 1991 : McCartney , Harrison , and Starr all sent floral

arrangements . Despite the animosity between Cynthia and Mimi , Varcoe remembered Cynthia crying throughout the whole funeral , and said that Mimi had always spoken positively about her . Mimi was cremated at the Poole Crematorium and the reception was at the Harbour Heights Hotel . The whereabouts of her ashes is unknown . Ono put Mimi 's house up for sale on the same day as the cremation , but it was demolished in 1994 , so a four @-@ bedroomed house could be built on the site .

= = Portrayals on film = =

Mimi was portrayed on film in Birth of The Beatles (1979) , John and Yoko : A Love Story (1985) , In His Life : The John Lennon Story (2000) , and by actress Kristin Scott Thomas in Nowhere Boy (2010) . McCartney disagreed with the director of Nowhere Boy , Sam Taylor @-@ Wood , about the original script portrayal of Mimi , saying : " Aunt Mimi was not cruel . She was mock strict , but she was a good heart who loved John madly . " Taking McCartney 's advice , Taylor @-@ Wood agreed to change the script .