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# Prologue

David Bowie is a songwriter, singer, actor, performer and artist and he is active on the Internet. He is a versatile man and possibly the most influential pop musician ever.

In the seventies Bowie was the king of glitter rock, the trendsetter. He was a pioneer in using new video techniques and visual language. In the eighties he opted for the big money and became a superstar. He became a cult figure in the nineties.

Some people passionately loved Bowie while others loathed him. They called him a cheater, a liar, an ultimate superstar, a prophet and a sexual tourist. Kenny Everett once named him: "The second greatest thing next to God". Some thought of him as a hero, others as an antihero. He manipulated the press and the audience and was manipulated himself by managers and record companies.

He constantly amazes. With his immense talent he succeeds in giving every new album a different twist. In the seventies Bowie influenced almost everybody in the music business with his innovative acts. He is best known for his bizarre and decadent unisexual and bisexual behaviour.

Back in those days he had already changed his image and direction before the fans and the record companies could adapt to his former image. Oddly enough, many journalists compared him to a chameleon because of these changes. But what does a chameleon do? It takes on the colour of its surroundings, blending itself in. Bowie did exactly the opposite. He did just about everything one can imagine in order to stand out.

Bowie himself describes his music as the following: a storm that passes you by. Some run away, others let themselves drift with the elements and enjoy it. He is exceptionally intelligent and always manages to look young and healthy. Whenever he hears a smart remark, he stores it in his memory and uses it

another time. He once compared himself to a car from which he replaces the parts for increasingly better parts.

Bowie's life and career tell a story of drugs, sex, very high peaks and deep lows and the exploitation of his androgynous looks.

## David Robert Jones

David Bowie's family history is very complicated; therefore all persons irrelevant to this biography are left out. But in order to understand the kind of environment in which he grew up, a short explanation is a necessity. Do not be discouraged by this, dear reader. As the story progresses it will be easier to read and it will also become more interesting.

David's father, Haywood Jones, was born in 1912 in the city of Doncaster. He was a calm, rather sturdy, taciturn man. If you got to know him better he was very kind. On his twenty-first birthday he received the inheritance of his parents who died at a young age. In London he fell in love with nightclub singer Hilda Sullivan and went on to marry her on December 19, 1933.

Haywood invested the majority of his inheritance in a poorly attended revue and his small fortune went up in smoke. He invested his remaining £1,000 in a piano bar, the Boop-a-doop. Haywood was not a good bartender. Having drinks with the customers was no problem, talking to them was a lot harder. Within a year the bar had to close and Haywood was broke.

Dr Barnardo's organisation dedicates itself to needy children and orphans. In September 1935 Haywood got a job at the organisation. He had a great time there and worked there for the rest of his life. The relationship between Haywood and Hilda cooled down and they decided to split up.

While he was dining in the restaurant of the Ritz cinema in Tunbridge Wells, the yearning-for-love Haywood fell in love with waitress, Margaret (Peggy) Burns.

Margaret Burns, a single mother of two, was one year older than Haywood Jones. Out of a short relationship with a bartender, a son was born on November 5, 1937, named Terry.

As a single mother, Margaret had to work for a living. She did not have time to babysit a child. Her parents raised Terry.

Four years later she had an affair with a married man and on August 29, 1943 their daughter was born, named Mary Ann. Margaret's parents did not want to raise another child and therefore the girl was given up for adoption.

In 1946 Margaret had another pleasant announcement for her parents: "I am pregnant."

"Who is the father?"

"Haywood Jones, a married man."

"Oh. Is he prepared to look after the child and live together with you?"

"Yes."

Her parents sighed with relief. This time she would be able to raise her own child. The couple found a house on Stansfield Road in Brixton, a London district.

Out of this relationship a son was born on January 8, 1947 at 9 AM, David Robert Jones. It was winter and the street was snowy that Wednesday morning. To the relief of David's parents Haywood's divorce from Hilda Sullivan was finalised in August 1947. A month later he got married to Margaret.

"My son, Terry, is almost ten now. He will be living with us," Margaret decided.

Terry was the mirror image of his biological father. Because of that, Haywood was reminded daily of one of Margaret's earlier relationships. Haywood did not feel happy about the situation, but he had little choice. Terry had actually been raised too long by Margaret's parents and the newlywed couple never established a real bond with him. Haywood tolerated his stepson and that is all there was to it.

Haywood and Margaret continually rowed and let everybody in the street know what bothered them at a high volume. Sometimes Margaret was silent for a longer period before suddenly bursting out into a tirade.

For most people, the first years after the war were a difficult period. The Jones' were no exception to the rule. Books with food stamps were still in use and the ruins of bombarded buildings dominated the destructed streetscape. The country slowly recovered from the horrors of the Second World War. Candles lighted Woolworth's.

David already experimented with make-up at an early age and acted strangely in the eyes of his mother. Mother and son

would never establish a true bond. Even in David's younger years they kept their distance.

"When David was about three years old, he put on make-up for the first time. When I found him he looked like a clown. I told him that he shouldn't use make-up."

The Burns branch of the family was mentally weak. Several aunts were receiving treatment for mental issues. In 1950 aunt Una was admitted into a psychiatric clinic for schizophrenia. David's confrontation with (and fear of) schizophrenia would become a theme later on in his life and work.

For the time being there was not a lot of reason for David to be worried. He was however very nervous and shy on his first day at school. He did not dare to ask where the bathroom was. He had to go badly and he peed in his pants.

In 1954 the family moved to Bromley in the county of Kent, a somewhat boring London suburb. From his eighth year onwards, David walked every morning, for three years, to the Burnt Ash Junior School in his brown school uniform, orange-brown tie and brown pants.

David's half-brother, Terry, had a rough time. He continually had arguments with his mother and stepfather. Sometimes, you could cut the tension within the family with a knife. Terry began to develop a certain form of schizophrenia, which would become very serious at a later period. To escape the domestic tensions, Terry joined the Royal Air Force and was stationed in Germany.

David celebrated Christmas 1956 with his father at a concert featuring rock 'n' roll singer, Tommy Steele, who enjoyed his first and only number 1 hit in England: 'Singing the Blues'. To David's surprise they were allowed backstage for a meet and greet with the celebrity.

David was deeply impressed. He made a decision: "I want to be a singer."

In the course of the following year, David and his friends, Geoffrey MacCormack and George Underwood, joined St. Mary's Church's choir. The choir mistress, Mrs Baldry, was not impressed with David's vocal performances. She later remembered David as a mediocre singer.

Lonnie Donegan and his skifflemusic's popularity were at their peak in the summer of 1957, when the 18<sup>th</sup> Bromley Wolf Club Boy Scouts went on summer camp to Bognor Regis. George

Underwood absolutely loved it. Around the campfire they sang 'Gambling Man', 'Puttin' On the Style' and 'Cumberland Cap'.

A teacher at Bromley Technical High School asked David what he wanted to become. Without hesitation he answered: "The British Elvis."

Terry Burns was not given a warm welcome when he returned after his time in the Royal Air Force. He wanted to put his belongings in his old room but was shocked to see that his stepfather had cleared it out. His mother had had enough of the bickering and felt forced to make a decision. She made it clear to Terry that there was no place for him at the parental home anymore; he had to stand on his own two feet now. Terry and his stepfather rarely spoke to one another, except to bicker. After that day they never spoke to each other again.

Terry was forced to live elsewhere, but kept in touch with David. He played his jazz records for David and sometimes took him to London to listen to live music. David borrowed Terry's books and came into contact with the work of Ginsberg and Kerouac at a young age. These middleclass Caucasian American writers had joined the 'beat generation'. They rebelled against the system. Kerouac's *On the Road* especially made a huge impression on David.

At a certain point in puberty hormones begin to emerge. Girls start showing off and boys start showing macho behaviour. In February 1962 David got into an argument with his friend George Underwood about a girl. George punched him in the eye and David needed surgery. The eye was permanently damaged; the pupil no longer responded to light and dark and therefore remained permanently open. Both eyes are blue, but the enlarged pupil gives a green effect.

In the seventies David said: "When I was 14, I fell in love with a girl. I was crazy about her! Trouble was, my best mate had a bit of a soft spot for her too. I moved in before he'd even made up his mind how to approach her and the next day I was at school boasting to my mate about what a Casanova I was and he threw a punch at me. The girl almost cost me my eye. There was some thought I'd lose it."

George Underwood had a rather different recollection in March 2007. "It was coming up to my 15th birthday. We both liked the same girl, Carol Goldsmith, so I invited her to a party. David got absolutely rat-arsed, but I stayed sober and asked Carol out, and she said, 'Yes, next Wednesday at the youth club.' David was a competitive sort, and he was furious. On the day,



he phoned me and said, 'She doesn't want to go out with you; she asked me to tell you.' I thought, Oh well, but went out anyway, and another friend said, 'You're late. Carol waited and then left.' David's call was complete bollocks, and when I later heard him boasting about how he'd got off with her, I saw red. I hit him. I didn't know until a week later that he'd been rushed to hospital, so I went to see him and said, 'It's not worth it over a girl,' and we stayed friends."

David frequently listened to Terry's jazz records. He developed a preference for the saxophone and realised that there was a lot of demand for saxophone players, because almost everybody wanted to be the guitarist or the singer in a band.

"Dad, I want to buy a saxophone."

Haywood bought him a plastic alto saxophone. David was the apple of his father's eye and sometimes he gratefully used that to his advantage. Haywood did everything he could to make sure David lacked nothing. Even though they had financial troubles and he could not always accommodate David's wishes, he usually found a solution and supported him for as long as he lived. To partially reimburse his father for the saxophone David delivered meat packages for the local butcher.

For a while, he practised songs by Charlie Parker, Charlie Mingus, John Coltrane and other jazz legends on his alto saxophone. He felt he did not progress fast enough and sought professional aid to improve his technique. His father arranged eight lessons with Ronnie Ross in Orpington, a member of the Jazzmakers combo.

"I was teaching him about music in general – how scales were formed, about harmony, how to blow and breathe and a little about how to read music. I told him that playing the sax was like trying to get the sounds you hear in your head out through a horn and into a room. It wasn't just reproducing notes you saw on paper. It was creating a new language. Communicating your visions without speaking them."

David decided to set up a band with George Underwood. They found three kindred spirits and called themselves The Kon-Rads. David played saxophone and he sometimes sang a few songs. "I was never very confident of my voice. I couldn't decide whether I wanted to play jazz or rock 'n' roll. And as I wasn't very good at jazz and I could fake it pretty well on rock 'n' roll, I played rock 'n' roll." The Kon-Rads debuted with a

short instrumental set on a school band night at Bromley Technical High School.

Background singer, Stella Patton, thought that even then David already had something special.

"What made them stand out from most of the groups in the area was that they were good musicians and they weren't satisfied unless their sound was perfect. They had a very professional attitude right from the start. David was always playing to the crowd; he was a good showman and went down well. There was always a spark about David. He was a quite good looking lad."

In May, 1963 there was another school band night. This time David and George Underwood performed going by the name of George and The Dragons. They were on the same stage as The Little Ravens, with the twelve-year-old Peter Frampton on the guitar. Peter's father Owen was a teacher at the Bromley Technical High School. The majority of the teachers used a cane to discipline the students. Owen Frampton on the other hand treated his students as equals.

David loved unusual clothing. Because he had little money he had to rely on the dustbins of Carnaby Street. The greatest designers worked there and the clothing had to be perfect. If a small detail was not quite right the clothes were thrown into the dustbin, from which David dug them out at night.

A so-called package tour came to The Hammersmith Odeon. Little Richard, The Everly Brothers, Bo Diddley and The Rolling Stones stood on the same stage there. Full of admiration, David stared at the energetic performance of Little Richard (real name, Richard Penniman), a bisexual African-American who used eyeliner.

From that day on he had just one wish: to play the saxophone in Little Richard's backing band. As a first step in that direction David and George Underwood joined the R&B band, The King Bees, out of Bromley. Les Conn signed the group and became their manager. He saw something special in David.

"He had natural charisma. He was broke as any of the kids in those days but he walked around like a star. He had that star quality right from the very first minute I met him. I really believed in his talent and I knew he would make it, but I realised that I couldn't afford to bring it about, it needed money which I was running out of."