

ONE

If truth be told, Tom Cruise Mapother IV has always been something of a ladies' man. Sweethearts, girlfriends, lovers, and wives; it has been a rare day in his life when he has not been wooing, wowing, or wedded to a young woman. In fact, he first walked down the aisle when he was just eleven in an impromptu ceremony under the spreading oak tree in his school playground. There is no record of who officiated or whether there were bridesmaids or even a best man, but the bride, a pretty, open-faced girl with a halo of blond ringlets, felt sufficiently confident of their plighted troth to sign herself Rowan Mapother Hopkins when she autographed her school friends' year-books.

Maybe it was a dash of Irish blarney in his soul, as much as his winning smile, that made him so popular with the ladies. There is Celtic ancestry—albeit of confused genealogy and origin—on both sides of his family. Some historians assert that the first member of the Mapother clan to set foot in the New World was an Irish engineer named Dillon Henry Mapother. He was the younger of two sons, age just eighteen, who left his home in southeast Ireland in 1849 to escape famine and poverty. This is endorsed by the passenger list on the ship *Wisconsin*, which docked in New York on June 2, 1849. A certain Dillon

Mapother, who listed his occupation as engineer, was one of the many seeking a new life in the New World. Other genealogists, notably used by the TV show *Inside the Actors Studio*, tell a different story. They claim that the same Dillon Henry Mapother was a Welshman, from Flint in north Wales, who had arrived in America several decades earlier, in 1816. All are agreed that he settled in Louisville, Kentucky, and married a woman named Mary Cruise, who bore him six children. Tragically, Dillon Mapother, by now a surveyor, died of a severe case of food poisoning in 1874, leaving Mary, then only thirty-one, to bring up her large brood alone.

She was not on her own for long, meeting Thomas O'Mara, who made a decent living in the town as a wholesaler of chemist supplies. While he was born around 1835 in Kentucky, as his name suggested, the O'Mara family hailed from Ireland. The couple married in February 1876 and promptly started a family. Their first son, Thomas O'Mara, was born just over nine months later, on December 29. In the 1880 census, the toddler was still called Thomas O'Mara and was listed as living with his parents and two half brothers, Wible and deHenry, who were both still at school, and a half sister, Dellia, then eighteen, who worked as a store clerk. Mysteriously, at some point during his childhood, Thomas O'Mara's name was changed to Thomas Cruise Mapother. Perhaps it was to give him the same surname as his half brothers and sisters, or his parents later divorced and his mother altered Thomas's name, but as genealogist William Addams Reitwiesner noted, "The reasons for him changing his name are not entirely clear." Indeed, this confusing family tree could serve as a metaphor for the actor's own contradictory and elusive history.

So while the family name of Mapother seems to be Irish rather than Welsh in origin, the actor's paternal bloodline can be traced back to the O'Mara clan from Ireland. Yet Mapother the surname stayed, and for the next four generations the actor's father, grandfather, and great-grandfather were all named Thomas Cruise Mapother.

Not only did they keep the same name, they lived in the same place, putting down deep roots in the rich Kentucky soil. Over the

years the Mapothers, from both the O'Mara and Mapother bloodlines, produced an array of well-to-do professional men: mainly lawyers, but also engineers, scientists—and even a railway president.

The first Thomas Cruise Mapother (born Thomas O'Mara) went on to become one of the youngest attorneys in Louisville. He married Anna Stewart Bateman, who bore him two sons, Paul and Thomas Cruise Mapother II. "They were a good, solid family, pillars of Louisville society and very loyal and dependable," recalled Caroline Mapother, a family cousin.

His younger son, Thomas Cruise Mapother II, born in 1908, followed in his father's footsteps, becoming a lawyer and later a circuit court judge and a well-known Republican Party activist. After his marriage to Catherine Reibert, the couple went on to have two boys. His younger son, William—father of the actor William Mapother—became an attorney, bankruptcy consultant, and judge like his father, while his elder son, Thomas, born in 1934, inherited the family's inquisitive scientific bent. His cousin Dillon Mapother, formerly associate vice chancellor for research at the University of Illinois, is probably the best-known scientist in the family, his work on superconductivity and solid-state physics earning him a considerable reputation. The professor's academic papers alone take up 8.3 cubic feet in the college library.

As a teenager, Thomas Mapother III continued that tradition. After graduating in the early 1950s from St. Xavier's, a private Catholic school in Louisville that has been the alma mater to generations of Mapother boys, he went on to study electrical engineering at the University of Kentucky. At the time it was viewed as one of the better colleges in the country, but was mainly for white kids—the university was not desegregated until 1954. After graduating in the mid-1950s, he started seriously courting an attractive brunette, Mary Lee Pfeiffer, who was two years younger and had a family history equally established in Jefferson County, Kentucky. Like her future husband, she could trace her lineage back to Ireland and her roots in Louisville to the early nineteenth century. Her father, Charles, had died in March

1953, so only her mother, Comala, who lived to the ripe old age of ninety-two, and her brother Jack were present to watch the twenty-one-year-old walk down the aisle at a Catholic church in Jefferson County just a few days after Christmas Day, on December 28, 1957.

For a young electrical engineer like Thomas Mapother, it was an exciting time. Recruited by the giant General Electric Corporation, he apparently took a keen interest in the development of laser technology, which had just been introduced in a paper by scientists Charles Townes and Arthur Schawlow in 1958, their pioneering work ultimately revolutionizing the world of medicine and communications. “Thomas was fascinated by technological developments of the day,” Professor Dillon Mapother later observed. “He spent every waking moment on new projects.” While he was establishing himself in his new corporation, it was not long before the newlyweds began a family: four children born in just four years. Their first child, Lee Anne, was born in 1959 in Louisville, their second, Marian, two years later, after the family had moved to Syracuse, New York. Thomas Cruise Mapother IV was born on July 3, 1962—the day before Independence Day. His younger sister, Catherine—known as Cass—who was named after her paternal grandmother, arrived a year later.

It did not escape notice that with his dark hair, strong jaw, straight nose, blue eyes, pouchy dimpled cheeks, and slim, well-proportioned features, together with a winning smile, little Tom was very much his mother’s son. The two developed an intensely close bond of mutual love and admiration, an adoration he has never been shy of expressing. “My mother is a very warm, charismatic woman, very kind, very generous,” he later told TV interviewer James Lipton. As the only boy in the family, he found himself doted on by his sisters as well as his mother.

A young child with a vivid imagination—often caught daydreaming instead of helping his mom—he was constantly creating his own real-life adventures, eagerly exploring the domain beyond his backyard on his tricycle. At times his daring spirit caused a degree of consternation in the Mapother household, the youngster regularly having to be

gently coaxed down by his mother from the trees he had climbed. It did not help his mother's equanimity that he dreamed of emulating his hero, G.I. Joe, a plastic action man who came complete with a parachute. Then only three or four years old, he achieved his ambition with potentially tragic results. He remembers pulling the sheets from his bed, using monkey bars to climb onto the garage roof, and then jumping off. "I knocked myself out. I was laying there looking at stars," he later recalled.

Even as early as the tender age of four, he daydreamed of becoming an actor. "It just evolved," he once recalled, and it was no surprise that from a young age he was fascinated by the drama, action, and adventure of the movies. A family treat was to go to a drive-in, buy popcorn, and let young Tom lie on top of the station wagon to watch the film. He was mesmerized by the wartime yarn *Lawrence of Arabia*, even though nothing in his young life enabled him to grasp the notion of an endless rolling desert. Around the dinner table he enjoyed performing, making his family laugh with impersonations of cartoon characters like Woody Woodpecker and Donald Duck. Later he graduated to the voices of Elvis Presley, Humphrey Bogart, and James Cagney. His mother, who had a love of theater, encouraged Tom and his sisters to perform skits she had written.

In some ways his early experience of school was a more painful adventure than jumping off the roof. When he was still a toddler, the family moved frequently, living for a time in New Jersey, then moving to St. Louis, Missouri, and returning to New Jersey when he was six. In 1969 he was at the Packanack Elementary School in Wayne Township. It soon became apparent to his teachers that young Tom was struggling to learn the rudiments of reading. He felt humiliated and frustrated, embarrassed every time he was called upon to read aloud in class. It was not long before he was diagnosed as suffering from dyslexia, a learning disability that apparently affected his mother and, to a greater or lesser degree, his three sisters. Dyslexics find it difficult to distinguish letters, form words, spell, or read with any degree of comprehension. Even though sufferers are of average or above-average intelligence,

this invisible handicap, if unrecognized, can produce deep psychological trauma, notably a sense of isolation, inadequacy, and low self-esteem.

Tom has since spoken of the shame he felt as he grappled with the disorder: “I would go blank, feel anxious, nervous, bored, frustrated, dumb. I would get angry. My legs would actually hurt when I was studying. My head ached. All through school and well into my career I felt like I had a secret.” Like other sufferers, he developed coping strategies, rarely volunteering to answer teachers’ questions, or behaving like the class clown to deflect attention from his academic failings. His Woody Woodpecker impersonations now amused his classmates as well as his family.

Tom’s own frustrations were seemingly mirrored by his teachers’ impatience with him. He would later claim that when he was seven—the time he attended Packanack Elementary School—one teacher hurled him over a chair in class, the implication being that the teacher was angered by his inability to grasp the subject. Other teachers, he later recalled, were similarly irritated. The current principal of the five-hundred-pupil school, Dr. Kevin McGrath, who has been teaching for more than thirty years, finds the actor’s claims difficult to accept. “That kind of behavior by a teacher toward a pupil would not have been tolerated then or now,” he says. “It is tantamount to locking a child in a closet or taking a switch to them.”

In the winter of 1971, when he was halfway through third grade, his family packed up yet again and headed north for Ottawa, the Canadian capital, where his father had apparently gotten a job working for the Canadian military. They moved into a tidy clapboard house at 2116 Monson Crescent in Beacon Hill North, a leafy middle-class suburb that attracts government workers, diplomats, and other itinerant professionals. “Hello, my name is Thomas Mapother the Second,” announced Tom proudly if incorrectly when he knocked on the door of his new neighbors, the Lawrie family, and introduced himself. “I liked him,” recalls Irene Lawrie, whose sons Alan and Scott became regular playmates. “He was always very active, always on the go but a bit of a loner.”

Beneath the surface bravado there was, as he admitted later, an American youngster understandably worrying about whether he would fit in at a new school with new friends in a foreign country. “You know, I didn’t have the right shoes; I didn’t have the right clothes; I even had the wrong accent,” he recalled. Small for his age, “Little Tommy Mapother,” as he was known by teachers and pupils alike, soon found himself picked on by playground bullies. He had to learn to stand tall. “So many times the big bully comes up, pushes me, and your heart is pounding, you sweat, and you feel you are going to vomit,” he said later. “I’m not the biggest guy in the world, I never liked hitting someone, but I know if I don’t hit that guy, he’s going to pick on me all year.”

Tough lessons from his father, which he painfully learned at home, as well as his own obdurate nature gave him the inner resilience to face down those who opposed him. When his own father was at school, he, too, had been bullied, an experience that emotionally scarred him for life. Determined that young Tom not go through the same trauma, he always pushed him to stand up for himself. If Tom was in a fight and lost, his father insisted that the youngster go out and take on his opponent again. Physically, Tom Senior was “very, very tough” toward his only son, seemingly crossing the boundary between stern parenting and abuse. “As a kid I had a lot of hidden anger about that. I’d get hit and I didn’t understand it,” the actor later told celebrity writer Kevin Sessums.

Young Tom’s bloody-minded obstinacy and refusal to back down soon earned him respect among local youngsters. “Tom was the school tough guy,” recalls Scott Lawrie, now a police officer. “He wasn’t a pushover and could handle himself.” As his brother Alan observes, “If there was trouble with the local kids, he would be the first to say, ‘Let’s get involved.’” In the cruel world of playground politics, Tom needed a thick skin. He stood out not only because he was American but also because of his learning difficulties. “I remember some kids making mockery of him because he couldn’t read,” recalls Alan Lawrie.

Ironically, in spite of the inevitable taunts from thoughtless classmates, Tom was enrolled in the perfect elementary school for a child with his learning needs. So new that pupils had to take their shoes off before walking on the purple carpet, Robert Hopkins Public School was years ahead of its time: progressive, enlightened, and nurturing, with ample funding. When Tom and his sisters were enrolled, his parents alerted the school principal, Jim Brown, to their children's various learning difficulties. The principal explained that before the Mapother children could be placed into special-needs classes, they had to be given a routine assessment by an educational psychologist.

When he was at the school, which was open plan, Tom and other youngsters with similar problems—normally there would be eight or so in a class—would go into a smaller room away from the hubbub for more intensive tuition in reading, writing, spelling, and math under the watchful eye of the school's special-needs teacher, Asta Arnot. Even by today's standards, this was high-quality care. His mother supplemented the work of the school at home: Tom would dictate the answers to his assignments to her, then she would hand the work back to him so he could painstakingly copy it out.

While there is no recognized cure for dyslexia, teaching programs help sufferers to make sense of everyday life—from distinguishing the numbers on currency to reading a menu. The fact that he was diagnosed early worked heavily in his favor. At that age—he was at Robert Hopkins between eight and eleven—the brain is at its most adaptable, able to interpret and consolidate the basic building blocks of reading, writing, and arithmetic even in the face of a condition like dyslexia.

While the school was professionally equipped to help children with learning difficulties, the actor later complained about his treatment in the educational system: "I had always felt I had barriers to overcome. . . . I was forced to write with my right hand when I wanted to use my left. I began to reverse letters and reading became difficult," he said later. Unsurprisingly, his former teachers meet the actor's grievances with disbelief. Both Pennyann Styles, who taught him at Robert Hopkins, and special-needs teacher Asta Arnot emphatically reject

these claims. Styles, who is left-handed herself, was a self-confessed “zealot” about helping lefties to write as they wished—even bringing left-handed scissors to school.

In spite of his learning difficulties, the teaching staff at Robert Hopkins remembered Tom as a creative pupil who simply needed more time and attention. Another former teacher, Shirley Gaudreau, observes: “He was a right-brain kid—very creative but not in academics. It takes a lot more work with them.” Like other pupils with similar problems, he was encouraged to excel at a nonacademic subject like sports, drama, or art in order to bolster his confidence. He joined the school’s drama club and soon became a regular fixture in plays and other theatrical events. This was not entirely surprising, as there was acting blood on both sides of his family. Among the Mapother clan, his cousins William, Katherine, and Amy were enthusiastic childhood performers, William and Amy later becoming professional actors, while Katherine now works with the Blue Apple Players in Louisville. During their time in Ottawa, Tom’s mother and father were so keen on drama that the American newcomers helped found the Gloucester Players amateur theater group, appearing together in the group’s first-ever performance.

A fellow founder was school drama teacher George Steinburg, who, together with Tom’s mother, was instrumental in kindling the boy’s enjoyment of theater. “He had good raw energy that had to be channeled,” Steinburg recalled. “You could tell there was some talent.” In June 1972, at the end of his first school year in Ottawa, Tom and six other boys represented Robert Hopkins in the Carlton Elementary School drama festival. The group, dressed in tunics and tights, performed an improvised play to dance and music called *IT*. Their aim was to interpret the full title of the piece, which was “Man seeks out and discovers some unknown power or thing. He is affected by it.”

In the audience was drama organizer Val Wright. Even though she has since watched and judged hundreds of youngsters, she has never forgotten that “superb” production. “The movement and improvisation were excellent. It was a classic ensemble piece.”

Other performances were equally memorable. In her mind's eye, teacher Wendy Santo can still remember the youngster in a fifth-grade performance where he played the sun, frozen in a sideways pose. "Even thirty years later it still gives me goose bumps. He was just another kid, but you would have been impressed," she says.

When he took on roles that demanded reading and learning lines, teachers were on hand to help him out. Teacher Marilyn Richardson remembers how she was asked to read his lines out loud to help him memorize them. "He could read, but it took him a long time," she recalls. "He had a very good memory and it didn't take him long to learn his lines." Certainly his performances always left an impression—although sometimes for the wrong reasons. Fellow pupil Louise Giannoccaro (née Funke) recalls the day when the "really cool" Tom Mapother appeared in a school play about Indians and cheekily played to the gallery to get a laugh. "He was supposed to pick an apple and say, 'An apple, what's an apple?' but he was eating the apple and couldn't say the line." As his teacher Marilyn Richardson recalls, "He was a joker who liked to kid around. Everything was a bit of a laugh."

While his acting garnered attention, his sporting prowess was more notable for tough, unbridled aggression than for any natural ability. He scraped into the school's second team for hockey and earned a reputation for spunk and determination, flinging himself into "impossible situations" where the sticks were flying. "He was rough in floor hockey," recalled his school friend Glen Gobel. "He was hardheaded but not talented." For his pains, he ended up chipping a front tooth in one game. His belligerent streak got him into more trouble during a robust game of British Bulldogs—a rough version of "Piggy in the Middle"—in the school playground that left him writhing on the floor in agony. He was taken to the hospital in an ambulance with a busted knee, prompting headmaster Jim Brown to ban the game.

Doubtless it was an incident that made his father proud. Tom Senior's robust approach to teaching his son sports emphasized taking the knocks without complaint. When they played catch with a baseball glove in their backyard, Tom's father would throw the hardball violently

and fast at the head and body of his nine-year-old son. "Sometimes if it hit my head, my nose would bleed and some tears would come up," he later recalled. "He wasn't very comforting." Noticeably, it was Tom's mother rather than his father who took him to his first ball game. This tough training did help Tom win a place on the North Gloucester baseball team, and as he adapted to local sports, he became much more proficient. When neighbor Scott Lawrie played against him in an ice hockey match, he couldn't believe how good he was. "I just couldn't get the puck by him," he recalls. "He became a good hockey player, always ready to try new things."

It should not have come as too much of a surprise. Tom and his gang, which included Scott and Alan Lawrie, Lionel Aucoin, Scott Miller, Glen Gobel, and Tom Gray, spent endless hours playing street hockey or baseball in the summer and ice hockey in the winter. For a change they played pool on a miniature table given to Tom by his sister Lee Anne's boyfriend, rode their bikes to nearby Ottawa River, or went fishing in Green's Creek.

The same reckless daring he showed on the sports field was evident when his gang was out having fun. Tom was the acknowledged tough guy, a thrill seeker who pushed the edge of the envelope when his friends cried chicken. "He was cocky, confident, and cool," recalls Alan Lawrie. "When the kids got together, he set the agenda." At Tom's prompting, the boys became blood brothers, pricking their fingers with a pin and then mixing their blood together. When they went bike riding, he was the one who constructed rickety ramps to perform Evel Knievel-style stunts, the one who used a hockey net hung on a frame or a tree to perform Tarzan tricks, and the one who performed a daring back flip from the roof of his house but missed the soft landing of a snowbank and broke his foot when he landed on the sidewalk. This experience failed to curb his daredevil antics. At a nearby building site, he climbed on the roof or started the builder's tractor while the rest of his friends ran off. "He was pushing limits all the time," recalls Alan Lawrie. "I never thought of him ever becoming an actor. He was more of an Al Capone character, a maverick, the kind of kid who wouldn't back down."

Tom had a belligerent side, a cussed indomitability that seemed to stop him from knowing when to retreat and move on. One episode demonstrates the stubborn streak of the alpha male in Tom Mapother. He and his friend Glen Gobel were walking home when two older and bigger boys made disparaging remarks about Tom's new haircut. He fiercely denied having his hair cut, and it was only the intervention of his school friend that stopped a fight—and Tom taking a beating. Afterward, when Glen asked why he had been so insistent, Tom replied, "It's not a haircut, it's a hairstyle." As Glen recalls, "Even though he was a pretty popular kid, this 'my way or the highway' attitude did lose him friends."

Of course, there was another reason Tom was so concerned about his hairstyle and why he took the trouble to go home at lunch every day to change—girls. "Little Tommy Mapother" punched way above his weight in the romantic arena. His teacher Pennyann Styles remembers him well. "He had charisma. He was a standout because he was so good-looking. Even then he had that smile that he has today. Little Tom was attractive, outgoing, and slightly mischievous but not bad. The kind of kid you recognize and remember." He had long eyelashes that the girls adored and, for some inexplicable reason, they swooned over the fact that he had a sty under one eye. "The way his hair fell was so dreamy," recalls Carol Trumpler, a fellow pupil at Robert Hopkins. "He had a cute way about him, certainly the gift of gab." More than that, he had a swagger, a confidence that made him seem to stand much taller than he was. "We all had a crush on him; even then he was very cute," recalls former pupil Nancy Maxwell.

He was the precocious kid, the one who organized parties for girls and boys at his house just as the sexes were becoming interested in each other. "He was sort of a bad boy, on the outside of the rules," recalls Heather McKenzie, who enjoyed her first smooch with the future star. Even the boys in his gang now have to admit he had something that they lacked. "All the girls liked him and he thought he was pretty hot, too," recalls his friend Lionel Aucoin pointedly. Tom had a distinct advantage over his friends, as living with three sisters had given him an

insight into the fairer sex. “Women to me are not a mystery. I get along easily with them,” he observed later. That his sister Lee Anne, nearly three years his elder, would let her friends use him for kissing practice gave him a practical edge in the endless battle of the sexes. “It was great; there were no complaints,” he recalls.

One of his first girlfriends was fellow pupil Carol Trumpler. He was her first sweetheart, and even now, two marriages and four children later, she comes across all misty-eyed when talking about her first-ever kiss. “When you talk about first loves, I will always remember mine . . . Tom Cruise,” she says. “He was a very good kisser, very much at ease with it all. But what do you know at eleven?”

Carol got in trouble when she and Tom were caught smooching behind the picket fence by the playground perimeter. The young lovebirds were hauled up before school principal Jim Brown. As a result Carol was grounded by her parents and ordered to stay in her room. Undeterred, young Tom knocked on her door a few days later, a gray pup tent slung over his shoulder, to ask if she wanted to go camping in the woods. “It was probably so he could spend the day kissing me,” she recalls. “He was quite precocious and promiscuous, as far as you are at that age. He was trying to kiss me all the time.” Even though her father, Rene, sent Tom packing, the youngster was reluctant to take no for an answer, prepared to stand his ground before the older man.

After Carol—“I was trying to be a good girl, and when I didn’t give in to his ways he moved on”—there was Heather, Louise, Linda, Sheila, and, of course, his “bride,” Rowan Hopkins. Athletic, adventurous—she loved camping and hiking—and with a lively imagination, Rowan was one of the darlings of her year. As Lionel Aucoin recalls, “When you look back, it was just one of those funny things, Tom Cruise marrying his sweetheart in the school playground.”

In his official class photograph, taken in 1974 when he and his classmates had moved from Robert Hopkins to Henry Munro Middle School, it is easy to imagine why the eleven-year-old American was known as the coolest kid in school. With his head half cocked at the camera with a look of inquisitive insolence, his long hair in a fashionable,

almost pageboy cut, and his checked shirt daringly unbuttoned, as was the style in the early 1970s, he looks more confident and at ease than other youngsters standing beside him. “As a kid he was famous even before he became properly famous, if that makes sense,” recalls Scott Lawrie. “He was one of those kids that you wanted to be around. I thought it was cool that Tom Mapother lived next door to me.” (Tom did, however, have competition to be king of the heap. On the next street lived Bruce Adams, now better known as rock star Bryan Adams, who also attended Henry Munro Middle School at the time.)

Cool, confident, charismatic, energetic; an occasionally cussed but popular boy: This is the presenting portrait of Tom Cruise Mapother IV as he approached his teenage years.

While academically he was seen as a middle-of-the-road student, it seems that he was coping well enough with his dyslexia not to need any extra help or coaching at Henry Munro. His homeroom teacher, Byron Boucher, who later specialized in special-needs children, taught him in a variety of subjects, including English and math, and as far as he is concerned, twelve-year-old Tom Mapother had no unusual learning difficulties. If he had struggled with reading and writing, the school principal would have been automatically informed and necessary remedial action taken.

At his new school he continued to excel at acting, taking part in Friday-afternoon drama sessions where, if they had worked hard, pupils were allowed to perform in front of the class. “He liked that very much and was very convincing,” recalls Boucher.

Less convincing was his behavior. During the transition from Robert Hopkins to Henry Munro, Tom’s image as a boy who got up to mischief but not into trouble began to change—for the worse. It wasn’t just the parents of his sweetheart Carol Trumpler who now viewed him with suspicion. He gained a reputation as a bit of a troublemaker, a youngster whose friendship should not be encouraged. “Parents would say, ‘Watch that kid,’” Alan Lawrie recalls.

He had started to get into more serious scrapes toward the end of his time in elementary school. His teacher Sharon Waters was hauled up by the school principal and threatened with dismissal when Tom and another student played hooky from Robert Hopkins. The local police escorted the pair, then eleven, back to class, and Sharon was severely reprimanded for failing to take attendance. On another occasion, Tom and Lionel Aucoin found a cache of firecrackers, which they threw into backyards in the neighborhood before running off. One irate householder gave chase, caught them, and threatened to turn them over to the police. Another time, Alan Lawrie's father, Murray, cuffed him around the ear when he spotted him using three pine trees he had just planted in his garden for high-jump practice. (Tom didn't do permanent damage to the trees, which are now over thirty feet tall.) As Tom later admitted, "I was a wild kid. I'd cut school. Everything had to do with my wanting always to push the envelope to see: Where do I stand with myself? How far can I go?"

In truth, his truculent behavior coincided with the collapse of his parents' marriage, his wilder excesses a manifestation of his confusion and unhappiness. In an attempt to sort out his personal problems, his father sought professional counseling. "After the breakdown you could see big changes," recalls George Steinburg. "Tommy was a problem. His dad was coming home from therapy and teaching him about opening up. Tommy really got into it and got into some trouble at school. You know, cussing and swearing."

During the three years they lived in Ottawa, stresses and strains were developing that neighbors and friends could only imagine. It had all started so well. When they first arrived in Ottawa, the family made an effort to fit into their new community.

Tom's mother earned the nickname "Merry Mary Lee" for her sunny personality. For a time she worked at the local hospital and helped out at the children's school, taking part in school trips and other activities. "The first year and a half they lived here I think was a

very happy time for the whole family,” recalled George Steinburg. “They were all popular.” The children pitched in, too, Tom remembering how he and one of his sisters took part in a forty-mile walk (the distance has probably been exaggerated) to raise money for local charities. Tom remembers that grueling walk mostly for the fact that a woman gave him a quarter for a soda to quench his thirst just as he was silently praying for a cool drink.

Around the neighborhood, he and his gang were seen as helpful kids who made two dollars a job for mowing lawns. Tom himself earned a little extra by cleaning out people’s yards. But after the first flush of neighborliness, the general judgment on the block was that Tom’s father was distant and uncommunicative—a shadowy, elusive figure. “He was not sociable at all,” recalls his neighbor Irene Lawrie. “He could barely bring himself to give you the time of day.” There was talk that he had quit his job to write a book—certainly the family never had any money—rumor that he was a heavy drinker, gossip, too, that social services had been called in to help the family.

After the early efforts to socialize during their first years in Canada, it became clear to friends, teachers, and neighbors that the Mapother marriage was unraveling. “It was not a happy time for the family,” recalls Tom’s former teacher Shirley Gaudreau. The polarized local opinion about the Mapothers matched the schisms inside the family. While Tom has never uttered a critical word about his “beautiful, caring, loving” mother, who doted on her only son, he has rarely had a kind comment about his father. The relationship seemed one of mutual, confusing antagonism, his father singling his son out for his own interpretation of tough, almost brutal, love. While Tom and his sisters could not do enough for their strong, jovial mother, they tiptoed warily around their unpredictable father.

On one occasion the Mapother children asked Irene Lawrie for help in secretly baking a cake as a surprise for their mother’s birthday. Their oven wasn’t working and they didn’t have any baking equipment, so they threw themselves on her mercy. Irene ended up baking the cake,

but the affection the Mapother children felt for their mother was clear from their excitement. By contrast, when Tom's father took him for a two-hour drive to go skiing in the hills outside Ottawa, he refused to stop to let his hungry son buy a snack. Perversely, he told Tom to eat imaginary food, the duo spending a long time making and then eating a make-believe sandwich, complete with soda and chips. "And we had nothing," Tom later recalled of his father's bizarre behavior.

He would eventually describe his father as a "merchant of chaos" and life as "a roller-coaster ride" where he could never trust or feel safe with his father. For a boy who once said that all he really wanted was "to be accepted" and be given "love and attention," life with a father who was a "bully and a coward" was almost unbearable. One of his more poignant memories concerns seeing the movie *The Sting*, starring Robert Redford and Paul Newman, which spoke to him not only because of the catchy theme song and audacious story line about con men, but because it was one of the few pleasurable experiences he remembered sharing with his father. His verdict on his father is damning: "He was the kind of person where, if something goes wrong, they kick you. He was an antisocial personality, inconsistent, unpredictable."

The fear Tom felt in his father's presence may help explain his natural affinity for acting, as the great skill of a child in an abusive, difficult home is the ability to split off, to hide in the imagination, to simply no longer be present when things get bad. In short, to fake it. This ability gets in the way later in life, when victims cannot connect to really important emotions like love and happiness because they are inextricably linked to fear. As adults, they are able to express emotion but not feel it.

At the same time, perhaps the indulgence of his mother, her obvious devotion to her son, generated a primal jealousy and resentment in his father, a rage that only served to diminish his authority and cement the bonds among mother, son, and daughters. Every inexplicable outburst, every ugly tirade against his son, merely served to create protective

sympathy for Tom, while edging his father further to the margins of family life.

As he became more of an outsider within the family, Tom Senior seemed to be increasingly at odds with society at large. He slowly transformed into an angry young man, a renegade who had little time for the system. Brought up a Catholic, he denounced organized religion and expressed contempt for doctors and conventional medicine. A restless, seemingly unfulfilled soul, he quit jobs while nursing dreams of making a fortune with various inventions. Doubtless his secret drinking fueled his tirades, the lurching unpredictable moods of brutality and remorse. "He was a very complex individual and created a lot of chaos for the family," Tom later remarked. Finally, it all got too much for Mary Lee. It is a vivid testament to how difficult life with Thomas Mapother III had become that it was Mary Lee, a stalwart, strong-minded, churchgoing Catholic, who made the decision to leave her husband. "It was a time of growing, a time of conflict" is her only comment on this distressing event.

For a woman with a sense of the theatrical, the family departure was indeed dramatic. Mary Lee painstakingly planned the great escape with the precision of a military operation. She told Tom and her daughters to pack their suitcases and keep them by their beds in readiness for flight. At four-thirty one spring morning in 1974, when for some reason her husband was out of the house, Mary Lee roused her children, packed them into their station wagon, and headed for the border. "We felt like fugitives," recalls Tom, the secrecy surrounding their flight predicated on the false assumption that, under Canadian law, Mary Lee's husband could prevent them from leaving the country.

They drove the eight hundred miles from Ottawa to Louisville, where Mary Lee knew that her mother, Comala, and brother, Jack, were waiting for her. The route was not unfamiliar to the Mapother children, the family often driving to Kentucky during the summer break to spend time with relations from both sides of the family. As they sang along to the radio to keep their spirits up, it is doubtful that any of the children realized that they would only see their father three more

times. They hadn't said any sort of good-bye to him, nor had they a chance to say their farewells to their school friends. Later, Tom's younger sister, Cass, did take the trouble to send her teacher a "sweet" note thanking her for all her help.

After the initial excitement and sense of adventure wore off, the enormity of what they had done began to sink in. They had left a safe, well-to-do neighborhood, excellent schools, and a familiar circle of friends for an uncertain future. In addition, the full extent of their financial calamity became clear once they realized that Tom's father was either unable or unwilling to pay child support. At first Mary Lee's mother, brother, and other family members rallied round to help, paying for a rented house on Taylorsville Road in the eastern suburbs. It also seems that they and the Mapother family helped pay the fees to send Tom to the local Catholic school, St. Raphael, which takes children up to eighth grade.

The move south had at least one advantage for Tom: When he joined the school hockey team, he was a star player thanks to his Canadian experience. During one match in Indiana, the opposing player was so frustrated by Tom's quicksilver ability that he unceremoniously grabbed him by the collar and threw him off the ice.

There was, however, no disguising the difficulties the family now faced. They could not rely on the kindness of relatives forever. Everyone had to chip in. The two eldest girls, Lee Anne and Marian, got part-time jobs as waitresses, and Tom got back into the old routine—taking on a paper route, mowing lawns, and cleaning neighbors' yards. This time the money he earned was not to spend on movies or indulging his sweet tooth, but in putting food on the table. "No job was too dirty or difficult for Tommy, as long as it paid money to help his mom out," recalled neighbor Bill Lewis, a former Marine who befriended the youngster. Not that Tom was as saintly as he is portrayed. He later boasted that he saw *Star Wars* some fourteen times, paid for from his part-time jobs, while he once skimped on tidying a neighbor's yard so that he could catch an early showing of his favorite war movie, *Midway*, a dramatized account of the World War II sea and aerial battle in the Pacific Ocean.

His mother was the main breadwinner, taking on three part-time sales jobs to pay the bills. "My mom could have sat there every morning and cried and cried," Tom later recalled. "She didn't. My mom was very proud. She had dignity. She's going to work hard." Even though the family received federal food stamps, they were ineligible for full welfare benefits because she had too many jobs. Juggling those three jobs took its toll. Mary Lee slipped a disk in her back when her boss in the electrical store where she worked part-time ordered her to move a washing machine on her own. She was in traction for eight months, so incapacitated that a family friend had to move in to help out. The store never apologized or offered compensation.

The new young man about the house was incensed, consumed with an impotent fury at his mother's treatment. Even today the incident rouses him to rage. "He [the store manager] didn't give a shit about his employee. My mother's not a bitter person, but I remember just being very, very angry about that." Solicitous of his mother, protective of his sisters, Tom took his new role very seriously. At an age when most teenage boys have little time or patience for their mother, Tom became even closer to her. He admired Mary Lee for her unconditional love, steadfastness, and optimism. She was the kind of person who always sees a glass as half full, sings in the morning, and offers hospitality to strangers. When Mary Lee eventually returned to work, she enjoyed a treat from Tom, at least during Lent. Every day for six weeks, he washed and massaged her feet for thirty minutes when she came home.

Tom was sternly possessive toward his older sisters, giving their boyfriends his stamp of approval and on several occasions threatening them if they crossed the line of propriety. Once he threatened "to kill" his sister Marian's boyfriend if he touched her because he knew that the boy was dating another girl. Another time, a fellow pupil at St. Raphael who criticized one of his sisters found himself doing battle in the school bathrooms with an outraged Thomas Mapother. "I didn't care, I'm fiercely loyal," he says. His eldest sister, Lee Anne, observes that he has always acted more like a big brother than a little brother.

“He was very caring and protective of us,” she recalls. “Whenever any of us girls started dating anybody we were serious about, having them meet Tom was a big deal. His opinion has always weighed very heavily with all of us.”

While he always felt comfortable surrounded by women, once observing that he trusted women more than men, they did get to be too much at times—so he called on his cousin William Mapother for company. “He only has sisters and I only have sisters, so we turned to each other for protection,” recalls William. “We have a lot of strong verbal women in both our lives.”

A hero to his uncritical mother, adored by his sisters, and with a father now held in contempt, it all rather went to his head. “It gave him a real sense of entitlement,” recalls a family friend, speaking on the condition of anonymity. “He was the king of all he surveyed.” Tom’s authority quickly extended beyond his immediate family, the youngster displaying the daredevil leadership that had made him so popular among his Ottawa friends. His tall tales of his life outside the provincial confines of Kentucky, combined with his edge of dangerous audacity, gave him a patina of glamour and excitement. “To the neighborhood kids he became leader of the pack,” recalled his onetime pal Tommy Puckett. “He would reward our loyalty by either buying or stealing cigarettes from the corner store for all of us to smoke.” The youngsters would go off into fields with Puckett’s BB gun and take potshots at the local wildlife. Tom was apparently a good shot.

Still, he wasn’t quite the master of all he surveyed. On one occasion he came close to severely injuring himself when he rode a motorbike into the side of a house. He had boasted to older teenage friends that he was experienced with motorbikes, when in fact he had never ridden one. Mistaking the accelerator for the brake, he roared through a clump of bushes and into a brick wall. “I nearly killed myself trying to be one of the guys,” he later admitted.

Closer to home, the new monarch had an unexpected and uneasy encounter with the deposed king, his father, on the streets of Louisville. Tom’s father had eventually followed his family back to

Kentucky, where he reportedly tried unsuccessfully to reconcile with his estranged wife. Tom Senior had abandoned all pretense of a professional life, living hand-to-mouth and taking on casual, unskilled work. At one point it was said that he was working on the crew of a highway construction gang. During his awkward encounter with them after months of separation, Tom Senior asked Tom and his sister if they wanted to go to a drive-in movie with him—a once-happy family event. While Tom has never spoken of this confrontation, his father later said to a local reporter that his son had told him to “stay the hell out of everything.”

In fact, he came back into his son’s life in a way that many in Louisville found incomprehensible. On August 1, 1975, just three weeks after Tom’s thirteenth birthday, Mary Lee and Thomas Mapother were officially divorced and Mary Lee reverted to her maiden name of Pfeiffer. Just six weeks later, after a whirlwind courtship lasting all of two weeks, Tom’s father remarried. In August 1975, the month he officially divorced, he met Joan Lebendiger, the widow of a well-respected local doctor who had died the previous November at the age of just forty-six. The attraction was instant and mutual, and within a matter of days they decided to wed.

Certainly Joan Lebendiger was measuring up to the translation of her German surname: “full of life.” If the Mapother clan was surprised, the four Lebendiger children were utterly stunned. “My mother told us on a Tuesday over dinner that she was getting married and they married on the Saturday,” recalls Jonathan Lebendiger, who at thirteen was the same age as his future stepbrother. Tom and his sisters attended the civil ceremony, which took place in their home at 2811 Newburg Road, a leafy suburb of Louisville. Apart from making desultory conversation with the four Lebendiger children at the wedding, Tom has never contacted his “second family” again.

If the wedding was rushed, no sooner had Jonathan Lebendiger, his brother, Gary, and his sisters, Jamie and Leslie, absorbed the news that their mother was marrying for the second time than they literally found themselves abandoned, their mother and her new husband

setting off for a new life in Florida. In this family crisis the Lebendiger children were taken in by relatives or family friends, with only the money left by their dead father to support them. Neither their mother nor her new husband contributed in any way to clothe, feed, and educate the children, just as Tom Mapother Senior did nothing to help his blood family.

Understandably, this incident has left the Lebendiger children with a legacy of anger and bitterness toward the man who turned their lives upside down. “He was the black sheep of the Mapother family,” says Jonathan Lebendiger, now a real-estate agent in Philadelphia. “I don’t know what his relationship was like with his son, but I know that he was a bad apple. His family were all lawyers and he opposed everything they stood for. I was angry about it at the time but I am not anymore.” This union—a grand passion or passing desperation—lasted for just a year before Jonathan’s mother and Tom’s father went their separate ways. Joan Lebendiger, a bridge fanatic, eventually retired to Los Angeles. She and her children were reconciled before she died in 2005. “She said that she did the best she could but admitted that she didn’t have the normal parenting skills like other people,” recalls Jonathan. “Let’s leave it at that.”

If the Lebendiger circle was aggrieved, the Mapother clan was “appalled” by Tom Senior’s behavior. “I don’t think anyone normal would go off and abandon a wife and four children like he did,” Caroline Mapother told writer Wesley Clarkson. The family did not hear from Thomas Mapother III for years—not a note or a letter or even a Christmas card. Tellingly, Tom recalls the first Christmas after the 1975 divorce as the best ever. As they only had enough money to put food on the table, his mother suggested that they each pick a name out of a hat in advance, then perform secret acts of kindness for the recipient and reveal their identity on Christmas Day. On that day they all read poems and put on skits for one another. “We didn’t have any money and it was actually great,” he has since said of this life of hand-me-downs, early-morning paper rounds, and making do.

Curiously, at that time, they lived in a handsome four-bedroom

house on Cardwell Way, a neighborhood where backyard swimming pools are not uncommon. For their part, the greater Mapother family bristles at suggestions that they abandoned Mary Lee and her children to a life of struggle and poverty. As Caroline Mapother observed, “These claims make me angry because his grandmother did everything in the world to try and help support those children, especially after Tom III went off.”

Tom became particularly close to his grandfather Tom Mapother II, a retired lawyer with a wealth of tales about the colorful characters he’d encountered in his practice, as well as stories about Tom’s now-absent father when he was young. One summer he took Tom and his cousin William on a visit to Washington to see the sights; and after Tom left St. Raphael in 1976, he offered to pay the fees at St. Xavier’s, a prestigious all-boys Catholic high school that William was destined to attend.

Tom spurned his grandfather’s generous offer, arguing that unless he could pay for his sisters to attend private schools, too, he was reluctant to be singled out simply because he was a boy. This seems an odd argument, given the fact that St. Xavier’s was all boys and his older sisters, Lee Anne and Marian, were already settled in their high schools and only a couple of years from graduating. Tom later told TV interviewer James Lipton that this was the compelling reason he traveled one hundred miles north to enroll in a Catholic seminary in Cincinnati. His yearlong sojourn at the St. Francis boarding school run by Franciscan priests has been widely interpreted as indicating his desire to train for life as a priest. As he later explained, the reason was much less romantic: “We didn’t have the money back then, and I went for the education for a year, and it was free.” Still, he insists that he did indeed toy with the idea of joining the brotherhood. “I looked at the priesthood and said, ‘Listen, this is what I’m going to do,’” he told Dotson Rader.

Perhaps his family felt that this truculent teenager, who was forever getting into scrapes and fights, might benefit from a stiffer regime than the “monstrous regiment of women” who enveloped him. This was now the fifth school he had attended since he was seven—not the

fifteen institutions he claimed to attend before he was fourteen years old to emphasize his rootless childhood. He spent a school year at the remote seminary, from September 1976 to the following summer, and he described this period with one hundred other pupils, many the children of divorced parents, as the best year of his academic career.

Tom may have appreciated the discipline and regimentation of a religious boarding school—Mass was said every day—as well as the jostling, boisterous camaraderie of twenty boys sharing a dormitory. A sense of belonging, a need to be part of an identifiable group, is a recurrent theme in Tom’s emotional lexicon. While his family fulfilled that need, the cloistered world at St. Francis seemed to become his emotional home away from home. “He always had a smile,” recalled Father John Boehman, rector and guardian of the now closed seminary. “But he stood out because he was the smallest in his class and he couldn’t get away with anything.”

He joined the glee club, played basketball—even though he was the shortest player in his freshman year—and played on the Saints soccer team. There were hobby shops and remote-control boats and planes available, which, for a boy who had a passion for flight, was thrilling. Even more thrilling, for the first time in his academic career he made the honor roll.

Given his fond memories, it is surprising that he stayed at the seminary only until the summer of 1977, deciding to return to Louisville to continue his education—especially since he had to go and live with his aunt and uncle, the Barratts, because Mary Lee and his sisters could no longer afford the rent on their house and had squeezed in with her mother. He enrolled at St. Xavier’s Catholic school and says that he paid the tuition by taking on a paper route and, for a time, working in an ice cream parlor in downtown Louisville. It seems a perplexing choice. He knew that his grandfather had previously offered to pay his fees, and now that Lee Anne had graduated and his other sisters were established in their own schools, there was no obstacle to accepting his generosity.

Teenage pride and a realization that model planes were no substitute for hanging out with the fair sex probably helped explain his return

to Louisville. When he was at the seminary, he and other boys had visited the homes of local girls, to chat and play spin the bottle. "I started to realize that I love women too much to give all that up," he later recalled. He and his friends cruised the streets of Louisville looking for action or hung around in the local mall playing pinball. His easy way with women, evident from his numerous conquests in Ottawa, was equally apparent in his new hometown. For years Laurie Hobbs, who met Tom when she was a student at the Sacred Heart School in Louisville, boasted that she was the first to teach one of the world's sexiest men how to kiss. He was probably too much of a gentleman to discuss his numerous previous experiences, although she should have realized as much from her own comments. "I remember thinking how surprised I was that he could kiss like that. We just floated along clinging to each other. I even had to tell him to keep his hands to himself."

The frenetic fumbblings and mumblings were part of a typical teenage rite of passage. When he and his friends were not looking for girls, they were just barely keeping themselves out of trouble. Even though, at fifteen, he was too young to have a driver's license, he cruised around town in borrowed cars. On one occasion he was stopped by police when he tried to drive the wrong way down a one-way street. The police officers watched him impassively as he struggled to turn the car around.

Never one to refuse a dare, he once stripped naked and streaked down the street as his friends watched. He literally ran into trouble when a passing police patrol car caught him in its headlights. According to a former school friend, he had the wit to tell the skeptical officers that he had locked himself out of his home after taking a bath. For his pains he was given a ride home wrapped in the officer's coat. Tommy Puckett recalls one Halloween when Tom and others dressed as flapper girls for a laugh.

Tom was not smiling, however, when he discovered that his mother was dating plastics salesman Jack South, whom she had met at an electronics convention. For a young man used to being the head of the household, cosseting his mother and vetting his sisters' boyfriends,

the interloper was an affront to his authority. Gruff, tough, and straight-talking, Jack South was more than a match for the young whippersnapper. There was an inevitable clashing of heads, and for a long time their relationship was uneasy. Their common interest in sports, movies, and “guy stuff,” notably gambling, eventually helped bring about a thaw. The fact that Tom made the right choices during their betting duels seemed to forge a degree of friendship between them. After all, Jack South was now permanently in his life. He and Mary Lee were married in 1978, and shortly afterward he took a job in New Jersey. As a result the family was on the move again. But this time all the family traveled together.