

“The Sound of Music”: Fact or Fiction
Real Story of the von Trapp Family
Von Trapps Reunited, Without the Singing

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STOWE, Vt. — When Sam von Trapp, the grandson of Maria, the singing governess made famous by “The Sound of Music,” graduated from college, his father offered him a deal: Sam could do whatever he wanted for 10 years before he had to return home here to run the family’s ski lodge.

His father started calling him to come home after six years.

When Mr. von Trapp finally returned to take over from his father, Johannes, he had had quite a decade: teaching skiing in Aspen, modeling for Ralph Lauren, surfing in Chile and even making People magazine’s America’s Top 50 Bachelors list in 2001. Recently, he sat in a dark office at the Trapp Family Lodge, the inn his grandmother started, trying to decide what to do with some old curtains.

It is hard for anyone to untangle family history and allegiances during the holidays. When your last name is von Trapp, and Americans claim you as part of their own legacy, that task is just that much harder.

That legacy weighs on Mr. von Trapp even as he considers something as mundane as curtains.

In “The Sound of Music,” the beloved 1965 movie, Maria, the governess played by Julie Andrews, turned old curtains into play clothes for the seven von Trapp children, just as the real Maria had done. Mr. von Trapp figured that if he sold von Trapp draperies on eBay, he might turn a nice little profit.

“Nobody has the level of commitment I do,” said Mr. von Trapp, now 36, but with the energy and earnestness of a teenager. “Nobody has as much to gain.”

Despite the nostalgic mist around “The Sound of Music,” Mr. von Trapp is taking over a business for a family that has had its share of ups and downs and disagreements.

When the von Trapps arrived in the United States in 1938, they settled in Pennsylvania and made money by singing baroque and folk music. By 1942, the family had bought a farm in Stowe. Maria rented out rooms in the house when the von Trapps were on tour singing.