

## **“The Sound of Music”: Fact or Fiction**

### **Real Story of the von Trapp Family**

#### **Von Trapps Reunited, Without the Singing**

Still, Johannes von Trapp, the 10th and youngest child, remembers growing up relatively anonymously in a quiet, strict home. That began to shift after the 1959 Broadway production of Rodgers and Hammerstein’s “The Sound of Music,” and when the movie opened, everything changed.

“You could no longer give your name anywhere without people saying ‘Oh, are you ... ?’ ” said the elder Mr. von Trapp, now 69. “The film, for better or for worse, made us a mass market commodity.”

The von Trapps have never directly profited from the film or Broadway musical: Maria, whose husband died in 1947, sold the rights to the family story to a German film company in the mid-1950s for just \$9,000. Johannes and now his son run the cross-country skiing lodge that trades on the family’s fame with Austrian food, waitresses wearing dirndls and pictures of the family, but not a single poster from the movie.

“ ‘The Sound of Music’ was great, but it was an American version of my family’s life,” said Johannes, who no longer sings, although he still has a pleasant, reedy bass voice. “It wasn’t what we were. I just got tired of being cast as a ‘Sound of Music’ person.”

The family legacy has been particularly onerous for him.

People would ask about Liesl, and he would have to point out that his eldest sibling was not 16 going on 17, but 54 in 1965 — and male. They would ask whether he was Kurt or Friedrich, and he would have to explain that his father and mother had three children together that were not portrayed in the movie, and he was the youngest. His mother was presented as a near-saint in the movie; in real life, she was difficult and domineering, people who knew her said.

By 1969, he had graduated from Dartmouth, completed a master’s degree from the Yale school of forestry and was planning on an academic career in natural resources. He returned to Stowe to put the inn’s finances in order, and ended up running the place. He tried to leave, moving to a ranch in British Columbia in 1977 and staying a few years, then moving to a ranch in Montana. But the professional management in Stowe kept quitting. “Now I’m stuck here,” he said.

As long as Maria was alive, the von Trapp siblings grudgingly got along.