

**“The Sound of Music”: Fact or Fiction**  
**Real Story of the von Trapp Family**  
**“Sound of Music” life still rings for Trapps**

STOWE, Vt. (UPI) — “How do you solve a problem like Maria?” sang the perplexed nuns in “The Sound of Music,” and the answer has yet to be found.

At 72, Maria remains an unsolved problem. She rips around Vermont’s Green Mountains in her tiny aquamarine car, hikes, swims, rides horses and still has the strong-willed spark that made her life story in the musical one of the most beloved in stage and screen history.

“I was a wild creature,” Maria recalled while sitting in her study, her newly broken arm in a sling. “Julie Andrews and Mary Martin were too gentle — like girls out of Bryn Mawr.”

The tourists who flock to the Trapp Family Lodge, a ski resort, like religious pilgrims do not want the answer to the problem.

Maria said she was “quite fed up” with the publicity the family drew until an incident a few years ago.

“A father of a young family said to me, ‘This is the highlight of our vacation. We saved for a whole year; now you have made the whole trip.’ In a time like ours, so lacking in joy, if I can bring real joy just by stopping and smiling, it is a privilege.”

The story of the musical family is a modern day fairy tale. It began in Salzburg, Austria, in the 1920s and 1930s when the young Maria was sent to take care of widower Baron Georg von Trapp’s seven children. The convent girl and the navy captain fell in love, married and had three more children.

The family first sang together for fun, but after winning a music festival, began to tour European stages.

Von Trapp, who did not sing professionally with the family, had lost his money when his bank failed. At times, the family literally sang for their supper.

When Hitler rose to power, von Trapp, who had been awarded the Austrian equivalent of the Congressional Medal of Honor in World War I, refused a position in the German navy.

Rather than face an uncertain future, he took his family to America, where they were scheduled for a concert tour.

Unlike the film version, which shows the family leaving the country in a dramatic dash over the mountains, they went to Italy by train and later took a ship from Norway to America.

If a film sequel were made, the camera would pan the lush Green Mountains surrounding Stowe and focus on the brown-gabled Trapp Family Lodge sitting atop 1,500 acres of cross-country ski trails.

Maria, almost always in traditional Austrian costume, is a familiar figure in Stowe. She wore a red skirt and sweater, which she called “civilian clothes,” for her interview, brushing off the importance of the fractured arm.

“It was incredibly stupid,” she said. “I was walking toward the house with a young girl I had invited for lunch. A car drove by and a person asked for my picture. I turned around and said, ‘But let me get in the sun.’ I then fell into nothing — a ditch! I leaned against the car and said, ‘Please take the picture now.’”

Maria is a constant subject for magazine articles and gets many requests for speaking engagements. The message of her story is how one family, faced with a crisis, followed the will of God, she said.

“I always told my children, ‘Find the will of God and do it,’ even in the little things,” she said. “Our life consists of living minute by minute. Someday a big minute will come and you must be prepared.”

Baron von Trapp died in 1947 before seeing any of his children marry. As in the film, the “captain,” as he was called, used a bosun’s whistle to call his children from various parts of their Salzburg estate.

But unlike the film portrayal, “He was kindness personified,” said daughter Eleonore. “He was not a marionette, he was a very loving person.”

According to Eleonore, or “Lorli,” as she is known, the captain was reluctant to see his family perform, but accepted it as God’s will that they sing for others.

“It almost hurt him to have his family on stage, not from a snobbish view but more from a protective one,” she said.

The children, from oldest to youngest, are Rupert, Agathe, Maria, Werner, Hedwig (deceased), Johanna, Martina (deceased), Rosemarie, Eleonore and Johannes.

Rupert is a doctor in Hadley, Mass. Agathe runs a kindergarten in Glyndon, Md. Maria is a missionary in New Guinea. Werner owns a dairy farm in Waitsfield, Vt. Johanna lives in Austria.

Rosemarie works in an international house in Townsend, Md. Eleonore, a housewife, lives near Werner. And Johannes is general manager of the lodge. There are 27 grandchildren and four great-grandchildren.

Although the family is often pictured en masse, Johannes says, “We are all individuals. We resent being stereotyped.”

A forester by profession, Johannes, 38, created the successful cross-country ski program at the lodge.

The youngest of the flock, Johannes said he found singing great fun. “By the time I was 12, I had traveled around the world.

“We were a fine ensemble, highly disciplined,” he said.

He said the family does not sing together any more, and hopes the second generation of Trapps will “do their own thing.”

Although singing was fun for Johannes, Rupert, 66, remembers it as hard work.

“It wasn’t easy . . . we practiced four or five hours a day,” he said in his Massachusetts home. But when listening to a record of the family singing 16th and 17th century madrigals, Rupert became misty-eyed.

The von Trapps officially disbanded as a singing group in 1956, years after Rupert struck out on his own.

He earned a medical degree at the University of Innsbruck in 1938, and later was drafted into the army to work as a medic.

According to Rupert, “The Sound of Music” was “all wet.” It portrayed him as a girl.

“Edelweiss? Oh, That’s terrible! That’s so soupy! We never sang anything like that!” he said, when asked about one of the most popular songs from the film.