

SHRINK RAP

Inside the head of...
Elaine Paige

The 4ft 11½in singer longed to be a tennis player, but couldn't see over the net! And how *did* she end up in a boat with Dustin Hoffman on *Evita*'s first night?

What is your earliest memory?

Sitting on my mum's lap as she sang little ditties to me. I can still remember the lyrics. I have no idea where Mum got those songs – years ago I recorded myself singing them on cassettes and gave them to various godchildren when they were babies.

What sort of child were you?

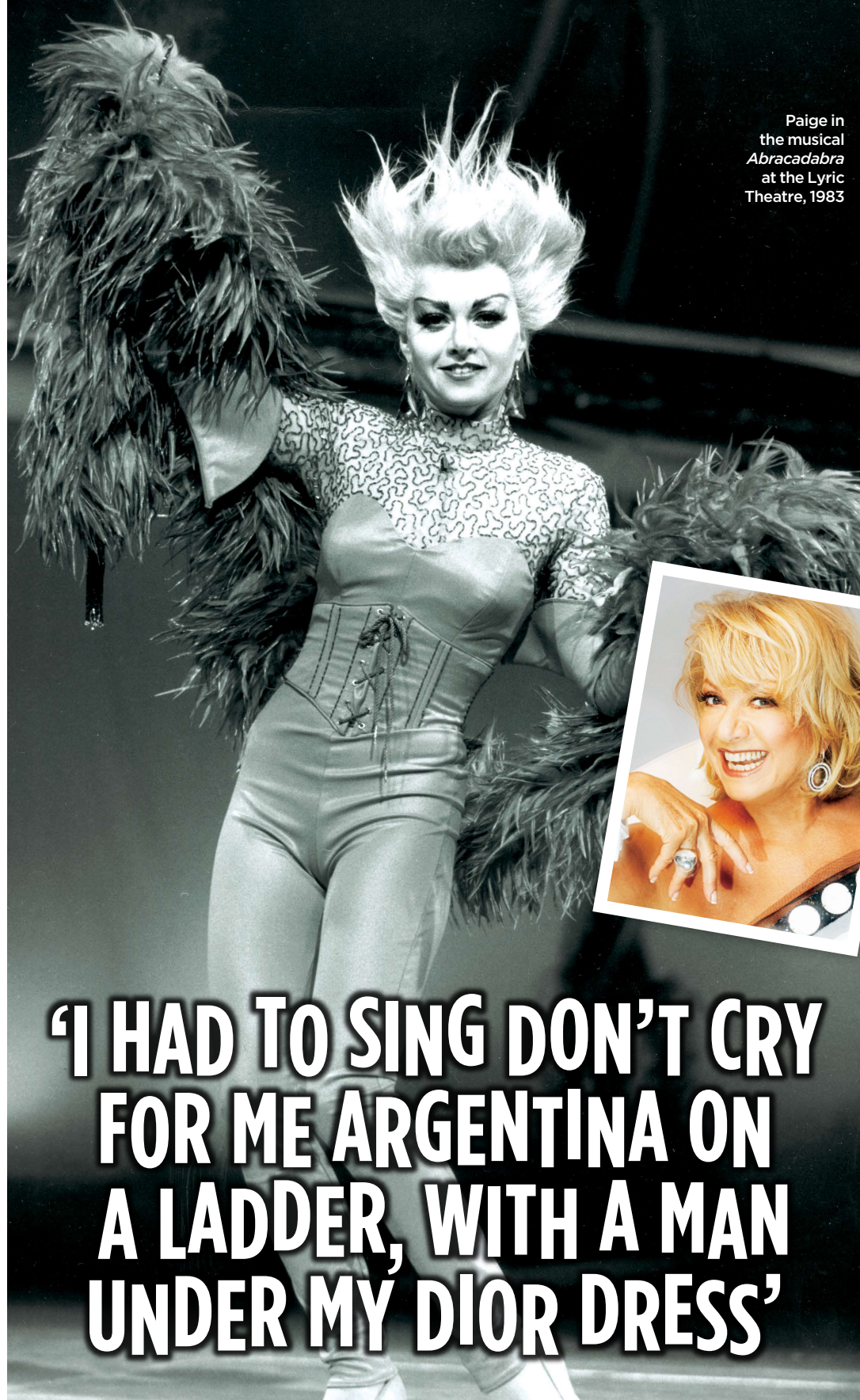
I was very shy and quite insecure, a real mummy's girl. And I was not very strong health-wise. In the winter I had to wear a liberty bodice to keep my chest warm because the slightest cough or cold went to my chest. That still happens nowadays.

What is the worst thing anyone has ever said to you?

When Miss Hamer, my school headmistress, destroyed my dreams of being a professional tennis player. I was 15. She asked if I wanted to do A levels and I said, 'No I want to be a tennis player.' There was a pause and she said: 'But, Elaine dear, you can't even see over the net.' It was the first time I had realised I was short and not like other people. But the woman did me a favour: after that I started concentrating on singing and acting.

What is your most treasured possession?

My mother was a milliner and I still have her heavy wood head block. It is very battered, with lots of pinholes. It reminds me of watching her make hats. Our bath was always filled with sparta (a tough linen) soaking in water, which she used for the base of the hats. I keep the block in my dressing room at home.



Paige in the musical *Abracadabra* at the Lyric Theatre, 1983

'I HAD TO SING DON'T CRY FOR ME ARGENTINA ON A LADDER, WITH A MAN UNDER MY DIOR DRESS'

Describe the best night of your life

The opening night of *Evita* in 1978 was extraordinary. I had won that part in the face of worldwide competition and I knew the show was going to be a hit. It was just so unusual and unique. The standing ovation went on so long that night that it was slightly embarrassing. At one stage I didn't want to go back on for another bow, but the manager literally shoved me on from the wings. My friend Dustin Hoffman escorted me to the after-show party on a boat on the Thames and we all had a fantastic night.

Who would like to say sorry to and why?

An old friend of mine called Frank Baker. He was a big

Barbra Streisand fan and I was supposed to get tickets for a concert or big film premiere she was doing in the Eighties. I was on the charity connected to the event. I can't even remember exactly what it was, but there was some mix-up and I wasn't able to get him a ticket. He was so upset that I was cut out of his life for good and I never heard from him again. It was so silly and I missed our friendship.

What has been your most embarrassing moment?

Every night during *Evita* when I had to climb a ladder to a platform to sing *Don't Cry For Me Argentina*. A

stagehand had to get under my skirt and climb the ladder with me to take the weight of the Christian Dior spangly dress. It was so hazardous that I would have fallen without help. It was often a different person each night

LAST FILM YOU SAW?

Spectre. I love Daniel Craig and it made me laugh out loud a few times.

LAST BOOK YOU READ?

Joan Rivers' autobiography, which was so honest and revealing.

LAST TV SHOW YOU LOVED?

The Affair with Dominic West and Ruth Wilson. The chemistry between them was really good.

and it was so embarrassing to have a young man somewhere so private.

Tell us a secret about yourself

I paint watercolours. I started about ten years ago and it is a real passion. I slosh the paint around and I'm not that great, but I love it. I often paint landscapes at my home in the hills of Cannes in the style of Turner and Monet. Ha, ha! Well, you've got to set your sights high.

What is the worst job you've done?

A musical called *Maybe That's Your Problem* in 1973. Unbelievably, it was about premature ejaculation and it didn't last long. In fact it was all over after 18 performances and was the quickest show I have ever done.

Who would be your dream dinner date?

Roger Federer. I play tennis whenever I can with friends at Queen's Club in London. Roger is such a wonderful player, so dinner with him would be fascinating. It certainly helps that he is very attractive.

What phobias do you have?

I hate confined spaces, especially crowded rooms. It's mainly to do with being little. I am 4ft 11½in, so I am always 'down there' when everyone else is way above. It feels horrible and I start to perspire and get breathless and I have to get out of there. I am the same in a packed lift.

What is your guiltiest pleasure?

Fortnum and Mason's Rose & Violet Creams. They are terrible for a singer because all that chocolate and cream hangs around the vocal cords, but people give them to me and I adore them.

If you could go back in time, where would you go?

I'd love to be in the court of Elizabeth I and go to the Globe Theatre to see the first night of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

Which words or phrases do you most overuse?

Darling. It's a convenient replacement for names that I will never remember.

Interview by Rob McGibbon
'Musicals: The Definitive Illustrated Story', with foreword by Elaine Paige, is published by DK, £25. The DVD *'I'm Still Here'* is out now