



Jane Murray Heimlich's new memoir recalls life with famous father and husband

By Lauren Bishop • lbishop@enquirer.com • April 26, 2010

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In the late 1970s, shortly after her husband developed the Heimlich Maneuver, Jane Murray Heimlich arrived late to a party in Tennessee thrown in Henry Heimlich's honor. The hostess took her by the hand and excitedly proclaimed to the other partygoers, "And here is Mrs. Maneuver!"

So begins a new memoir by Jane Murray Heimlich, "Out of Step" (Orange Frazer Press, \$24.95), summing up the story of a life lived just outside the spotlight. The wife of the famous surgeon is also the daughter of Arthur Murray, the founder of the dancing schools that bear his name and the star of the 1950s TV variety show "The Arthur Murray Party," along with his wife, Kathryn.

The stories of the lives of Arthur and Kathryn Murray and Henry Heimlich, at least the public ones, are well-known. Now, at 83, Jane Murray Heimlich has decided it's time to tell her own.

It's the story of an introverted girl who tried to be an outgoing performer to appease her father, who was thrilled to start a new life out of her parents' shadow with her then-unknown surgeon husband in Cincinnati, and who discovered the pitfalls of fame all over again when he, too, became a household name.

The former writer for the Cincinnati Post and The

Enquirer, who co-wrote two books on alternative medicine but never kept a journal or a diary, says she could no longer ignore the voice telling her it was time to write about her own family and her own life.

"When you do memoirs," she says slowly, in a voice so deep that her husband says it gets lost in the carpet, "it takes the sting out of some of the painful things."

From the outside, life in the Murray family must have appeared to be anything but painful. Thanks to the phenomenal success of Arthur Murray's mail-order dance steps and dance studio franchise, the family lived comfortably in New York before moving to Beverly Hills, Calif., for a year, where their friends included Groucho Marx, who had a daughter about Jane's age.

But Arthur ruled the family like a godfather, Heimlich says. Stories of the shy young girl or the stiff-legged older man who blossomed through dance dominated dinner-table conversation, when Jane and her twin sister, Phyllis, just wanted to talk about schoolwork.

"I called him the dancing missionary," Heimlich says. "He believed so fervently in the transformative effects of dance."

But she never quite transformed enough to meet his standards. He demanded perfection, and

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Heimlich often watched her mother wither under his criticism. She watches old episodes of "The Arthur Murray Party" now with a tearful pang.

"He'd be waltzing with Mother at the end of the show," she says. "She'd smile at the camera and say, 'To put a little fun in your life, try dancing!' Arthur would come out, swoop her in his arms and off they'd go into a lovely waltz. Most of the time he would be whispering in her ear, 'Why did you do that?'"

Although animated on television, Kathryn Murray also suffered from bouts of depression. She twice tried to commit suicide, first by throwing herself out of a third-story window of their apartment when Jane was just 4, and later by taking an overdose of sleeping pills 30 years later.

The family never publicly discussed the attempts. That was not their way. Their way was to keep dancing, with Kathryn, always the life of the party, sometimes literally swinging from the chandeliers.

The Heimlichs' son, Phil - the former assistant Hamilton County prosecutor, Cincinnati city councilman and Hamilton County commissioner who now provides political commentary for WXIX-TV (Channel 19) - says his grandfather was exactly the way his mother paints him.

"On the one hand, he was cold and unkind in many ways," says Phil Heimlich, 57, who lives in Loveland. "But he recognized that dance was a way of building self-esteem and turning a person's life around, and he did that for thousands of people."

Until he started reading the book, Heimlich didn't know some things about his family, notably his grandmother's suicide attempts. But he says he's glad that part of his family's story is now out the open.

"It's such an honest portrayal of her parents that we can all identify with," he says.

In her memoir, Jane Heimlich tries to understand what made her parents the way they were. From conversations with her father's brother, Ira, now 104, she learned that the boys' mother had been a powerful force.

Sara Teichman was a smart, tough businesswoman who held high expectations for her five children, whom she and her husband were raising in the slums of New York's Lower East Side after emigrating from Eastern Europe in the late 19th century with 2 million other Jews.

She was incensed when Arthur - born Moise Teichman - became what she called a "dance bum," taking lessons at first just to become popular with girls. But she changed her tune when he became an instructor at a resort hotel in Asheville, N.C., at 19, and began sending much of the money he earned home to family.

Arthur, Jane Heimlich says, didn't like to talk about his difficult childhood, but he never forgot it. She is still moved by his last words, which she heard him utter in his elegant retirement apartment in Honolulu: "We were so poor, we had to use newspaper for toilet paper."

But Kathryn Murray remained, for the most part, an enigma. Even though she wrote her own memoir, "My Husband, Arthur Murray," she glossed over much of the pain Arthur caused her.

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Henry Heimlich and his parents, both social workers, couldn't have been more different from the Murrays. Jane Murray was immediately taken by the young surgeon, and thrilled at the prospect of a life with someone whose name, she figured, would appear in medical journals, not newspapers.

They were living comfortably in Clifton, where they moved from New York in 1970, when Henry Heimlich got a job as chief of surgery at the Jewish Hospital. Then everything changed in 1974 after he had devised the method to save people from choking, the method that came to be known as the Heimlich Maneuver.

"It is genuinely kind of funny that he would invent something that would capture the world," she says, sitting in their Hyde Park living room. "I remember when the phone started ringing and it was Barbara Walters. And I thought, 'It's starting all over again.' "

Life, Heimlich writes, became increasingly unreal. Arts patron Irma Lazarus, wife of Fred Lazarus, a son of the founder of Cincinnati-based Federated Department Stores, invited them into her inner circle. They toured the Greek Islands on a 46-foot chartered sloop and hobnobbed with musical greats who were performing at Music Hall, including Leonard Bernstein and Carol Channing. There were endless parties with lots of beautiful people. The Heimlichs' marriage buckled under the strain of their new place in Cincinnati's high society.

Jane Heimlich dealt with the problem indirectly by finding her own passion: alternative medicine. While she was working as the decorating editor for the Cincinnati Post in the early 1970s, she learned about an alternative medical facility called the Psi Center in Greenhills. In 1980, she published her first book, "Homeopathic Medicine at Home," which has been translated into half a dozen languages.

"I had never written about things that I had really cared about," she says. "I felt like a detective, a sleuth or maybe Joan of Arc, bringing the information that suffering people needed."

Her husband was skeptical at first, but he became supportive. Unlike her own father might have been, she says, he's been nothing but encouraging.

"It's really very moving to me. I couldn't put it down," says Henry Heimlich, 90 and coming out with an autobiography of his own, "Heimlich's Maneuvers," later this year.

He says he hopes his wife's memoir encourages people to explore their parents' backgrounds, just as she did.

"I think that if children do look into their parents," he says, "it will give them a better understanding of what their relationship is and what it should be."

It's a telling statement, given that the Heimlichs are estranged from their son, Peter, who has spent the past several years trying to discredit his father's sometimes controversial work. (They also have twin daughters, Elisabeth and Janet.) Jane doesn't discuss the rift in her book and won't discuss it.

"Maybe I was reverting to the old family pattern of sweeping it under the rug," she says. "I'm sorry I didn't try to explain, even though I don't understand what is happening. Even saying that would be more clarification than ignoring it."

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Still, she hopes people will relate to what she did decide to include in her memoir. She wrote it primarily for other women, many of whom have told her that their fathers were much like hers.

"Just because someone is famous doesn't mean they're any different," she says. "I think we have to be reminded that we're not alone, that what troubles us is just part of the human condition."

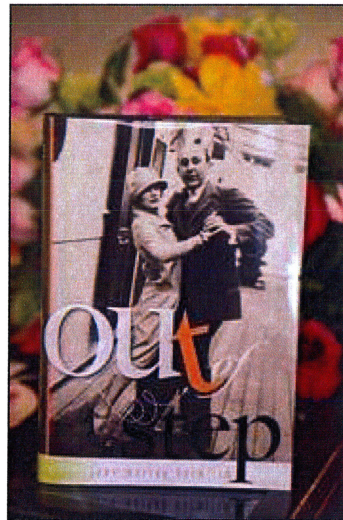
Jane Heimlich will sign "Out of Step" 7 p.m. Wednesday at Joseph-Beth Booksellers, Rookwood Pavilion, Norwood; and 2 p.m. May 2 at the Main Library, Downtown.



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Jane Murray Heimlich has written a new memoir about her life.



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If you go

What: Book signings with Jane Murray Heimlich, author of "Out of Step" (Orange Frazer Press, \$24.95).

When and where: 7 p.m. Wednesday at Joseph-Beth Booksellers, 2692 Madison Road, Norwood; and 2 p.m. May 2 at the Main Library branch of the Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County, 800 Vine St., Downtown.

Cost: Free.

Information: Joseph-Beth: 513-396-8960, www.josephbeth.com. Library: 513-369-6945, www.cincinnati.org. Orange Frazer Press: 937-382-3196, www.orangefrazer.com.

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