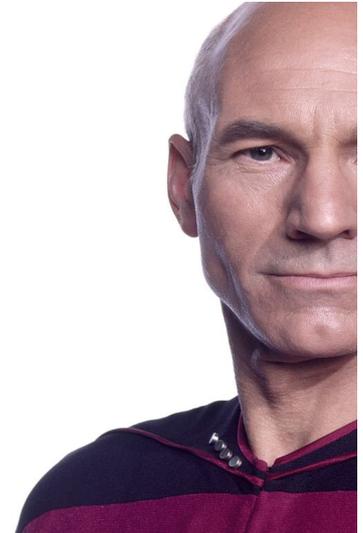


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Patrick Stewart: ‘My relationship with my children is practically non-existent. There’s not a day that goes by that I’m not pained by it’

As he releases his memoir, the Star Trek actor talks about the shadow of his abusive father, the significance of Richard Harris and his greatest regret



Patrick Stewart makes fun of his own pomposity in book. Photo: Getty

Patrick Stewart shot to stardom as Captain Picard. Photo:



Dónal Lynch

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The original title of Patrick Stewart’s memoir was to be *Are You Anybody?* It was a reference to a question asked of him as he exited a theatre many years ago and its modest inference fits with the humble and self-deprecating tone of the book. But others had already written memoirs with the same and similar titles. Among them were the Irish author Nuala O’Faolain, whose 1997 memoir *Are You Somebody?* was an international bestseller.

Just as the towering figure in O’Faolain’s book was her alcoholic and emotionally absent mother, so Stewart’s drunken and violent father runs like a seam through his own memoir, *Making It So*. As a child witness to his father Alfred’s beatings of his mother, Stewart became “determined that he would play absolutely no part in my life at all”. But the scar grows with the man, and it took him, he writes, “decades of analysis, beginning in the late 1980s, to understand and cope with the impact of the violence, fear, shame, and guilt I experienced as a child”.

When he began his career as an actor the monster would be pushed into service. When he appeared as the unpleasant Leontes in *The Winter’s Tale* in 1981, he recalls the director, Ronald Eyre, saying to him: “If you can find this man inside yourself and really let him out, I think it might work. And furthermore, if you really do that, I’ll be there all the time, and I’ll catch you when you fall.”

Later, having taken what is probably his career-defining role as Jean-Luc Picard in *Star Trek: The Next Generation* he writes that from his father he found the captain’s “stern, intimidating tendencies”.

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There is a tendency to wonder, if, in the other positive attributes of Captain Picard – his calmness, his asceticism and his humane intelligence – Stewart (83) was perhaps portraying a version of the father he wishes he'd had. The actor bows that famous bald pate and takes a long pause when I put this to him. "I think it might have been more the one I wished I was."

Was it difficult to be the kind of father he wanted to be?

"It was. Given that I'm separated from my children now, we don't have relationships, they have become very important. I never thought that this would happen, but both my children are in their 50s, they're not children anymore, they're adults. And my relationship with them is practically non-existent."

Has that created a sense of grief?

"Significant grief, yes. There's not a day that goes by that I'm not pained by the memory of my children, who they were and by a sense of responsibility that they became who they are in part because of me and my influence or lack of influence on them. I always put my acting work first, before my family."

Stewart's two children are Daniel Stewart and Sophie Alexandra Stewart and in the book he describes his relationship with them as a "work in progress". Daniel is an actor who appeared alongside his father in the 1993 TV film *Death Train* and the sitcom *Blunt Talk*. Most notably, he played Picard's son in a 1992 episode of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*.

Their mother is Sheila Falconer, who was married to Patrick from 1966 to 1990. The marriage ended when he cheated on her with a younger woman, the actress Jennifer Hetrick. It's a pattern that would repeat itself when he cheated on his next wife, Wendy Neuss, one of the producers of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, this time with another actress, a then 23-year-old Lisa Dillon.

"I had cheated on my wife with a younger woman – again – and there is no getting around that," he writes in the book, adding: "I needed to do better by the women with whom I was romantically involved. In a life chockablock with joy and success, my two failed marriages are my greatest regret."

Given this bracing honesty I feel emboldened to ask him during our interview what he thinks drove this behaviour. Another pause. "Confusion." About? "Who I was and what I was." Does he feel that he made peace with his former wives after the marriages broke up? "To an extent, yes."

Stewart met his third wife, American singer-songwriter Sunny Ozell in 2008 at the Brooklyn Academy of Music where he was performing *Macbeth*. They were married in 2013.

"She is an absolutely sensational individual. I'm in love with her, I'm impressed by her. She provides me with so much support and help, which I try to return as best that I can. But I'm so fortunate that I'm in, well, I don't mean to say at the end of my life because I hope that's not where I am and I don't want to be melodramatic, but her contribution to my life has been extraordinary."

Stewart is part of that generation of actors who are a dying breed in Britain: working-class kids made good. Surprisingly, given his plummy accent, he comes from the North of England, a West Yorkshire town called Mirfield. His father was a former army sergeant who became an "itinerant labourer", while his mother was a textile worker who delayed Stewart's birth because she didn't want to interrupt the midwife in the middle of a movie.

"My father was very important to me. Both my parents were," he says. "But they were very, very different people. My father had been a soldier for 15 years. He'd been told before he left the army that he had what was called shell shock, and then that was to be PTSD – post-traumatic stress disorder – because of things he had witnessed, things that he had been part of, the horrors of the attack on Europe in 1939 and on into 1945. I knew there was much there in my father, but the violence, when he came home from the wars and I was still a young boy, was very hard to live with."

Alfred's trauma from the war was, Stewart says, "the cause, almost certainly, of his alcoholism, of his violence towards his wife. He was never violent to his children, however, myself and my older brother. But to understand him, to get a feeling for who he was and why he was who he was became invaluable to me as an actor."

As a child Stewart says, his "outrageous dream was to be a long-distance lorry driver". But, fatefully, there were others who saw a different kind of potential in him. An English teacher, Cecil Doman, introduced him to Shakespeare and put him on the stage for the first time in school productions. Then came Ruth Wynn Owen, a sometime voice coach and a former understudy to the great Peggy

“She lived not far from me, although it took me about three hours to get to her front door because I had to use public transport. And she was the first acting coach that I ever had, and she stayed with me, as such, until I got myself a place at a drama school when I was 17.”

Stewart had felt that acting wasn't for “people like me”, but it was Doman who pointed out to him that others from working-class backgrounds, such as Albert Finney and Richard Harris were beginning to make names for themselves. And so, after a brief spell as a newspaper reporter he decided to give acting a go, and was accepted to the Bristol Old Vic theatre school.

By his mid-20s he was part of the Royal Shakespeare Company, but mainly in “small supporting roles”. His ambitions were limited in those years, he says, and there was a lack of recognition.

“After one performance I came out of the theatre and there was a group of young people and a young woman thrust an autograph book at me and said, ‘Signature’. Then she looked at me and pulled it away and she said: ‘Are you anybody?’ And I said: ‘No.’

His first film was the British thriller *Hennessy* (1975) where he had a small role alongside the film's star, Rod Steiger, who proved to be something of a mentor.

“Rod got very angry with the director about how the director was referring to me. And so when they called for a lunch break, he said to me: ‘So Patrick, what are you doing for lunch?’ And I said: ‘Oh, I don't know. I've never been on a film set before.’ And he said: ‘Oh Lord, over there, there's a wagon and you'll get food there. Bring it to my trailer. We'll have lunch together.’ Rod Steiger had invited me to his trailer for lunch! So I went and we talked and he answered lots of my questions.

“It must've been very tiresome for him, but it gave me some confidence. And he said something that always stayed with me: the camera can photograph thoughts.”

Still, by 1987, when the role of Picard was offered to him, he was still hesitant.

“Television was still alien to me. I had done television in the UK, one or two quite nice things, but nothing very important, but never anything like the series that I was being offered.”

And so he tried to take the stage with him on to *Star Trek*. “There is a formality to the way they speak and comport themselves that reminds me of numerous Shakespearean situations I'd been in onstage,” he writes in the book. “I should play Jean-Luc, I realised, as if he were a character in *Henry IV*, which is about brave men.”

Initially he couldn't stand how his castmates didn't approach the show with the same lofty aspirations. “[They] doubled over in laughter when they flubbed multiple takes and, in rehearsals, they sometimes ad-libbed things that weren't in the script to make their lines funnier,” he writes. As a result he “lectured” the cast for messing around, causing them to “erupt in hysterics at my pompous declarations”.

He stormed off to his trailer in a sulk before two of his co-stars, Jonathan Frakes (Riker) and Brent Spiner (Data), talked him around by assuring him that, even if he had misjudged the situation, everyone did respect him.

It took him “the entire first season to relax and thaw out from an uptight Englishman to a loose, amiable colleague given to quasi-American behaviour but, bit by bit, I got there”. And indeed there is a sense throughout the memoir of a man who delights in skewering his own earlier pomposity. He recalls moments which may have rankled at the time, such as the Queen not recognising him when she bestowed his knighthood on him, with gentle good humour.

The incredible run of *Star Trek: Next Generation* surprised him and its success made him reluctant to make his next big career move, into Marvel's Cinematic Universe, beginning in *X-Men* (2000). The role reunited him with Ian McKellen, who played Magneto to Stewart's Professor Xavier. Their friendship is perhaps the most enduring and uncomplicated relationship of Stewart's life.

“I had known who Ian McKellen was for decades. There's, I think, a 15-month difference in our ages. Ian is older than me, which of course makes him my leader. It was not until *X-Men* that we were cast together in the same project. And there were so many leading actors in that production that there was just a long row of luxury trailers when we were filming the first film. And it just so happened that the trailer next door to me was Ian's trailer.

“And little by little we began to chat and talk and coffee in the mornings in his trailer and tea in the afternoons in my trailer and in the evening – and we worked a lot of evenings – a glass of wine. And we came to know one another, and I think we grew very fond of each other until I was certain that I loved Ian very, very much.”

When Stewart was married in 2013 McKellen, who had gotten an online marriage licence, officiated at the ceremony. “My wife loved Ian too and it was her idea that he would marry us.”

A memoir is a biography with the last chapter missing. I wonder if he wonders about his own mortality.

“Dying does not fill me with dread,” he says. “I'm 83 now. I would like to see my 90s. My wife assures me I shall make it to 100. But I try not to think too much about that like I tried not to think about whether my book would be successful or not, I just wanted to give it a shot. And I want to go on working as much as I can.

“Stamina is important to the work that actors do, and that is a little challenging now. But other than that, I still have ideas, I have concepts, I have ambitions even at this age, and I should preserve them until they’re no longer any use to me. But I hope that moment is still a long way off.”

‘Making It So’ by Patrick Stewart is published by Simon & Schuster and out now

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