

JOHN LENNON

The Early Years

1. John Lennon as a young boy in a school uniform and cap, c. 1948.



The city of Liverpool was the principal port in the north-west of England, and one of Europe's traditional seafaring gateways to America. That meant it wasn't the safest place to be living in the early days of the Second World War. October 9, 1940 saw a particularly fierce spate of night raids, but this was the last thing on the mind of the young Julia Lennon as she lay in Liverpool's Oxford Street Maternity Home. With bombs falling around the hospital, Julia gave birth to a boy. She decided to name him John. His second name, in honour of Britain's heroic wartime leader, was Winston.

Julia was one of five daughters. Her father worked for the Glasgow and Liverpool Salvage Company – the numerous shipwrecks along the Mersey had kept him and his colleagues busy ever since the air raids had first started. Julia was the wild one of the family. Two years earlier, she'd married long-time sweetheart Alf 'Freddy' Lennon, at least partly to defy her father. It was not to be the closest of partnerships – Freddy worked on the great passenger liners that travelled between Liverpool and New York and they were apart more often than not.

Freddy was berthed in New York when war broke out. Wanting to avoid participation at all costs he jumped ship. He was eventually interned at Ellis Island, and ended up serving a sentence for desertion at a British military prison in North Africa. Julia herself would later admit that her decision to marry Freddy was one of the least serious of her life. While Freddy returned to Liverpool for a few brief visits in 1940 – long enough to "put her in the family way" as she put it – he pretty well disappeared from her life after that.

He reappeared in 1945 and tried to persuade John and Julia to move to New Zealand with him, and when Julia refused, forced John to choose between them. It would be a long time before John saw his father again.

The war brought hardship to everyone, but it was an especially difficult time for a young mother. Julia was not only unhappy but unsettled. She longed for the carefree times she had before the war, and before she became tied down with John. While Julia was not a poor mother, much of the burden of child care fell on the rest of her family. It quickly became apparent that her sister Mimi was forming an especially close relationship with John. Far from causing any jealousy, it came as a relief to Julia. As the war came to an end, life in Liverpool began to get back to normality. Julia was still young and attractive and there was soon a new man in her life. Working at a café in Penny Lane, she met 'Bobby' Dykins, and fell in love with him.

Aunt Mimi

Under pressure from her sisters, Julia agreed to let John live with them – primarily the childless Mimi and her husband George Smith – to provide a more stable environment. He went to Mendips, a semi-detached house in Menlove Avenue, Woolton, a pleasant middle-class suburb three miles outside Liverpool's city centre. George Smith was a well-respected man who owned the local farm and dairy. Julia knew that her son would be well looked after, and saw him most days.

From birth, John Lennon's artistic leanings made themselves known to the world. He was a very bright child who had easily learned to read by the age of four. Mimi sent him off to school at Dovedale Primary, near Penny Lane. One of John's earliest passions was reading. He soon developed an interest in writing and drawing his own books and comics. He also began to develop a taste for the kind of petty mischief that would get him into trouble time and time again in the future.

When he was 12, John was sent up to Quarry Bank Grammar, a school with a fine record of academic achievement. He started out as one the school's brightest hopes, but with his friend Pete Shotton always close at hand, John began a startling academic decline, becoming more and more of a troublemaker. Mimi, by now a widow, began to dread the periodic phone calls from the school secretary detailing John's latest – mostly harmless – misdemeanours. By his early teens, John Lennon had already carved out a reputation as a fledgling rebel.



2. John Lennon as a child on a school trip to the Isle of Man.

Whilst John worshipped Aunt Mimi, Julia had always remained in close contact with John. As he grew older he began to see more and more of her, often cutting out classes to do so. He thought of Julia more as an older sister than his mother. What's more, she told him the kind of things that he wanted to hear, like not to worry about homework or what they might do in the future. This was a singular contrast to Aunt Mimi, who was something of a disciplinarian.

3. John Lennon's Ivor Novello award which he won for the song She's Leaving Home with Paul McCartney.



Julia

Julia Stanley was born on March 12, 1914, the daughter of George and Annie Stanley. She was the fourth of five children, all girls, and had a reputation for being impulsive, flighty and highly humorous. She was also musically talented however, as was her mostly absent husband, Alf 'Freddy' Lennon. Their only child together, John, was her first, but she went on to have three daughters – the first of whom she put up for adoption, under pressure.

Although John spent most of his childhood living with his aunts, especially Mimi, Julia remained close to him, keeping in very regular contact. She strongly encouraged his musical and free-spirited tendencies, and bought him his first guitar despite Mimi's significant disapproval. In his teenage years, John often stayed at the house she shared with Bobby Dykins and their daughters, Julia and Jacqui.

Julia was killed on July 15, 1958 by a drunk learner-driver, an off-duty policeman named Eric Clague. Drunk driving was not illegal at the time, and Clague testified that she just walked out of the hedge-lined central reservation straight in front of him. He was acquitted of all charges.

Julia was buried in Liverpool's Allerton Cemetery.

