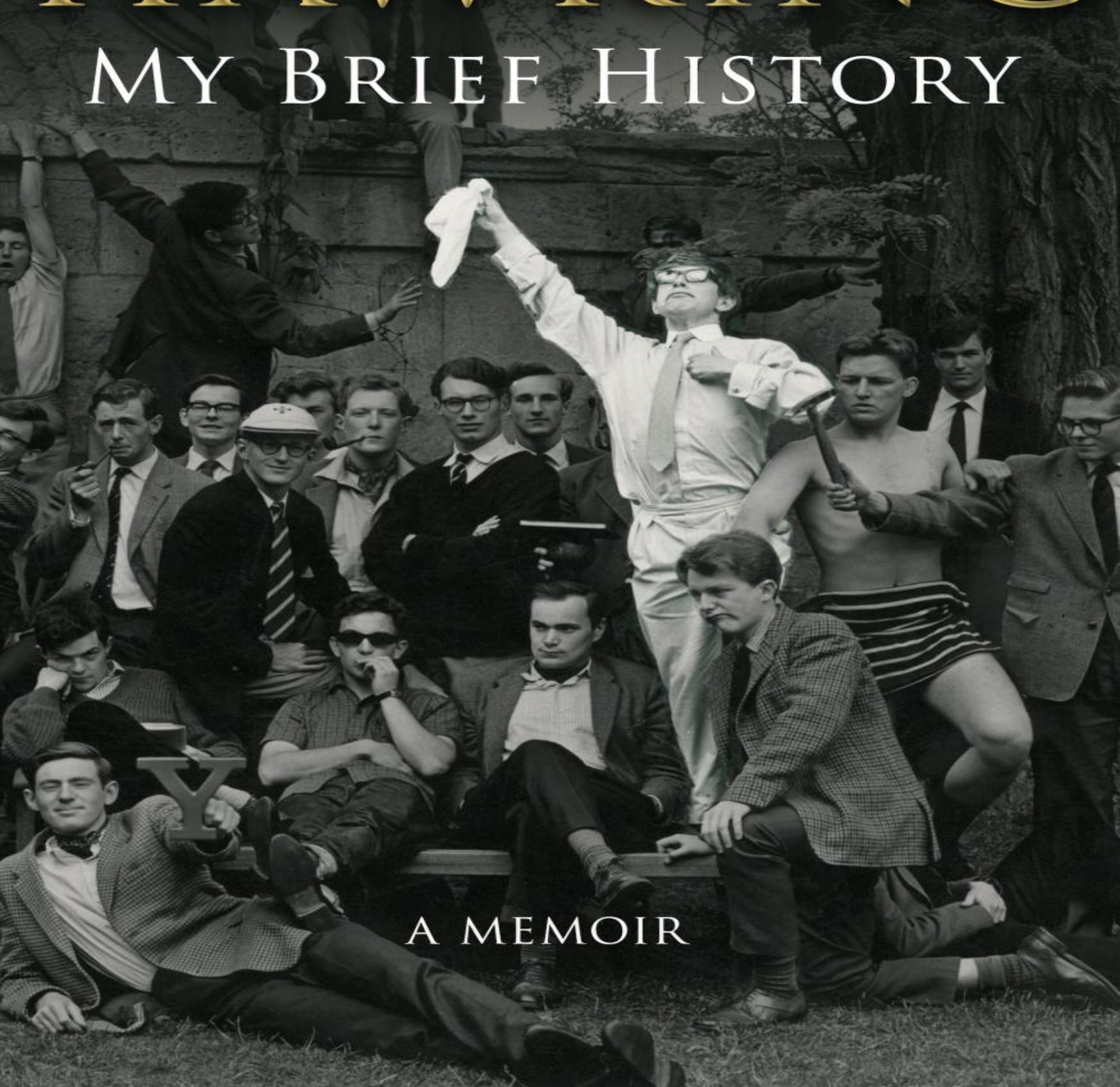


STEPHEN HAWKING

MY BRIEF HISTORY



A MEMOIR

ABOUT THE BOOK

Stephen Hawking has dazzled readers worldwide with a string of bestsellers exploring the mysteries of the universe. Now, for the first time, the most brilliant cosmologist of our age turns his gaze inwards for a revealing look at his own life and intellectual evolution.

My Brief History recounts Stephen Hawking's improbable journey, from his post-war London boyhood to his years of international acclaim and celebrity. Lavishly illustrated with rarely seen photographs, this concise, witty and candid account introduces readers to a Hawking barely glimpsed in previous books: the inquisitive schoolboy whose classmates nicknamed him 'Einstein'; the jokester who once placed a bet with a colleague over the existence of a black hole; and the young husband and father struggling to gain a foothold in the world of academia.

Writing with characteristic humility and humour, Hawking opens up about the challenges that confronted him following his diagnosis of motor neurone disease aged twenty-one. Tracing his development as a thinker, he explains how the prospect of an early death urged him onwards through numerous intellectual breakthroughs, and talks about the genesis of his masterpiece *A Brief History of Time* – one of the iconic books of the twentieth century.

Clear-eyed, intimate and wise, *My Brief History* opens a window for the rest of us into Hawking's personal cosmos.

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MY BRIEF
HISTORY

STEPHEN
HAWKING

For William, George, and Rose



1

CHILDHOOD

MY FATHER, FRANK, came from a line of tenant farmers in Yorkshire, England. His grandfather—my great-grandfather John Hawking—had been a wealthy farmer, but he had bought too many farms and had gone bankrupt in the agricultural depression at the beginning of the twentieth century. His son Robert—my grandfather—tried to help his father but went bankrupt himself. Fortunately, Robert's wife owned a house in Boroughbridge in which she ran a school, and this brought in a small amount of income. They thus managed to send their son to Oxford, where he studied medicine.

My father won a series of scholarships and prizes, which enabled him to send money back to his parents. He then went into research in tropical medicine, and in 1937 he travelled to East Africa as part of that research. When the war began, he made an overland journey across Africa and down the Congo River to get a ship back to England, where he volunteered for military service. He was told, however, that he was more valuable in medical research.



My father and me



With my mother

My mother was born in Dunfermline, Scotland, the third of eight children of a family doctor. The eldest was a girl with Down syndrome, who lived separately with a caregiver until she died at the age of thirteen. The family moved south to Devon when my mother was twelve. Like my father's family, hers was not well off. Nevertheless, they too managed to send my mother to Oxford. After Oxford, she had various jobs, including that of inspector of taxes, which she did not like. She gave that up to become a secretary, which was how she met my father in the early years of the war.

I WAS born on January 8, 1942, exactly three hundred years after the death of Galileo. I estimate, however, that about two hundred thousand other babies were also born that day. I don't know whether any of them was later interested in astronomy.