

FELBERG REAL LIFE STORIES

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# *Bruce Willis*

A SHORT BIOGRAPHY

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*Bruce*  *Willis*

A short biography

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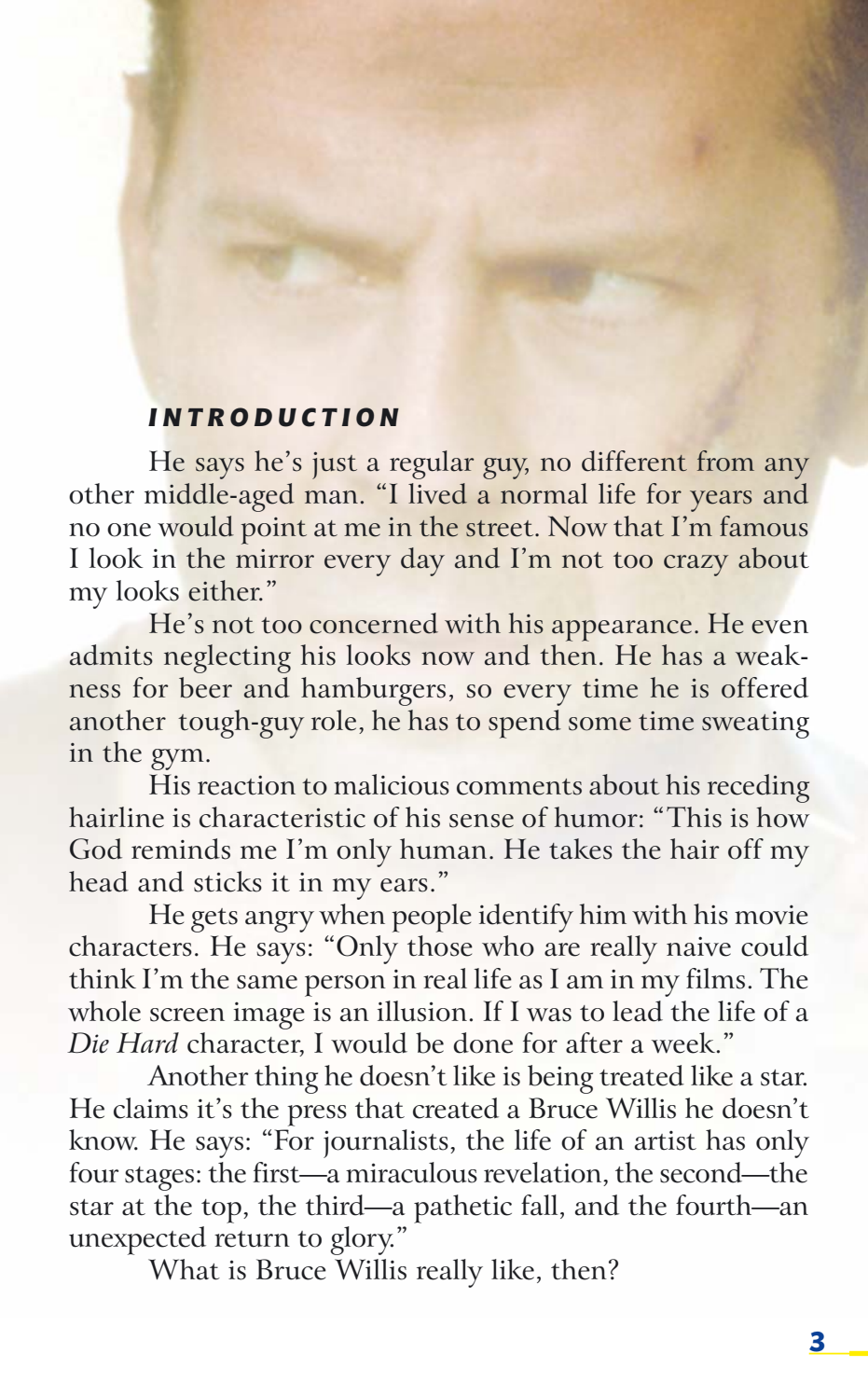
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## INTRODUCTION

He says he's just a regular guy, no different from any other middle-aged man. "I lived a normal life for years and no one would point at me in the street. Now that I'm famous I look in the mirror every day and I'm not too crazy about my looks either."

He's not too concerned with his appearance. He even admits neglecting his looks now and then. He has a weakness for beer and hamburgers, so every time he is offered another tough-guy role, he has to spend some time sweating in the gym.

His reaction to malicious comments about his receding hairline is characteristic of his sense of humor: "This is how God reminds me I'm only human. He takes the hair off my head and sticks it in my ears."

He gets angry when people identify him with his movie characters. He says: "Only those who are really naive could think I'm the same person in real life as I am in my films. The whole screen image is an illusion. If I was to lead the life of a *Die Hard* character, I would be done for after a week."

Another thing he doesn't like is being treated like a star. He claims it's the press that created a Bruce Willis he doesn't know. He says: "For journalists, the life of an artist has only four stages: the first—a miraculous revelation, the second—the star at the top, the third—a pathetic fall, and the fourth—an unexpected return to glory."

What is Bruce Willis really like, then?

## Penns Grove. The Harmonica Years

Bruce Walter Willis was born on 19 March 1955 on an American military base in Idar-Oberstein, West Germany, where his father worked as a mechanic. In 1957 David Willis' contract with the army ended and he moved back to America with his wife Marlene and two-year-old son Bruce. They settled in Penns Grove, New Jersey, where Mr. Willis started work in a shipyard.

Soon, Bruce's two brothers and a sister were born. The children were brought up in a very strict way. However, this didn't stop Bruce from having disciplinary problems at school. The teachers complained he was much more willing to play schoolboy pranks and monkey around with his pals than to sit down and learn. Once, when he was 15, he bet them one dollar that he would run naked from the school to the town hall. He won but he was brought home in a police car.

When Bruce was 16 his parents divorced, which further affected the young man's personality and behavior. He was expelled from school for taking part in student riots only three months before graduation! He started to hang around in bars, doing what he enjoyed most at that time—playing the harmonica with a local rhythm-and-blues band called Loose Goose.

Yet he somehow managed to graduate from Penns Grove High School in 1973. This is what he wrote under his photograph in the school yearbook: "I intend to be insanely happy or to become a harmonica player." In reality, he had no idea what he wanted to do in life.

First, he worked as a driver for the chemical corporation Du Pont. His job was to drive a bus with factory workers going in for their shifts. But he soon got fed up with getting up early every morning and so he quit this job after a week. Next, he became a caretaker working at a nuclear power plant construction site and earning four dollars an hour. This was far from a dream job, so he soon quit it too.

The thought of becoming an actor was slowly taking shape in Bruce's mind. He enrolled in a drama course at Montclair State College. He made his stage debut there with the part of Brick in Tennessee Williams' *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. Encouraged by his success, he started to go to all kinds of auditions in New York City. In 1976, after just two semesters, he quit Montclair College and moved to New York.

## CHAPTER TWO

### New York. Desperately Seeking Fame

In New York, Bruce lived in a rented apartment, together with Linda Fiorentino and her sister. To pay his rent, he worked as a barman in the fashionable Café Central, a bar where famous New York actors met. When he wasn't mixing cocktails, he went to auditions, both for Broadway and TV productions. Bruce Willis got his first role in an off-Broadway staging of *Heaven on Earth* in 1977. He also appeared in a TV commercial for Levi's 501 jeans. In 1979, he was cast in *Railroad Bill* and the fact that he could play the harmonica helped him get the role.

However, Bruce wanted to be in movies. His first attempts were not too successful and in practice meant little more than being a sheer extra. He got his first bit part that lasted several seconds in Brian G. Hutton's film *The First Deadly Sin* in 1980. A perceptive eye will notice him passing an actor at a restaurant door. But at least the actor Willis is passing in this scene is Frank Sinatra! His next bit part in *Prince of the City* was, regrettably, edited out. His first role

#### BIT PARTS ON TV

<i>Miami Vice</i> , episode: <i>No Exit</i>	1984	Tony Amato
<i>The Twilight Zone</i> , episode: <i>Shatterday</i>	1985	Peter Novins
<i>Mad About You</i> , episode: <i>The Birth</i>	1992	Himself
<i>Ally McBeal</i> , episode: <i>Love Unlimited</i>	1997	Dr. Nickle
<i>Friends</i> (three episodes)	2000	Paul Stevens