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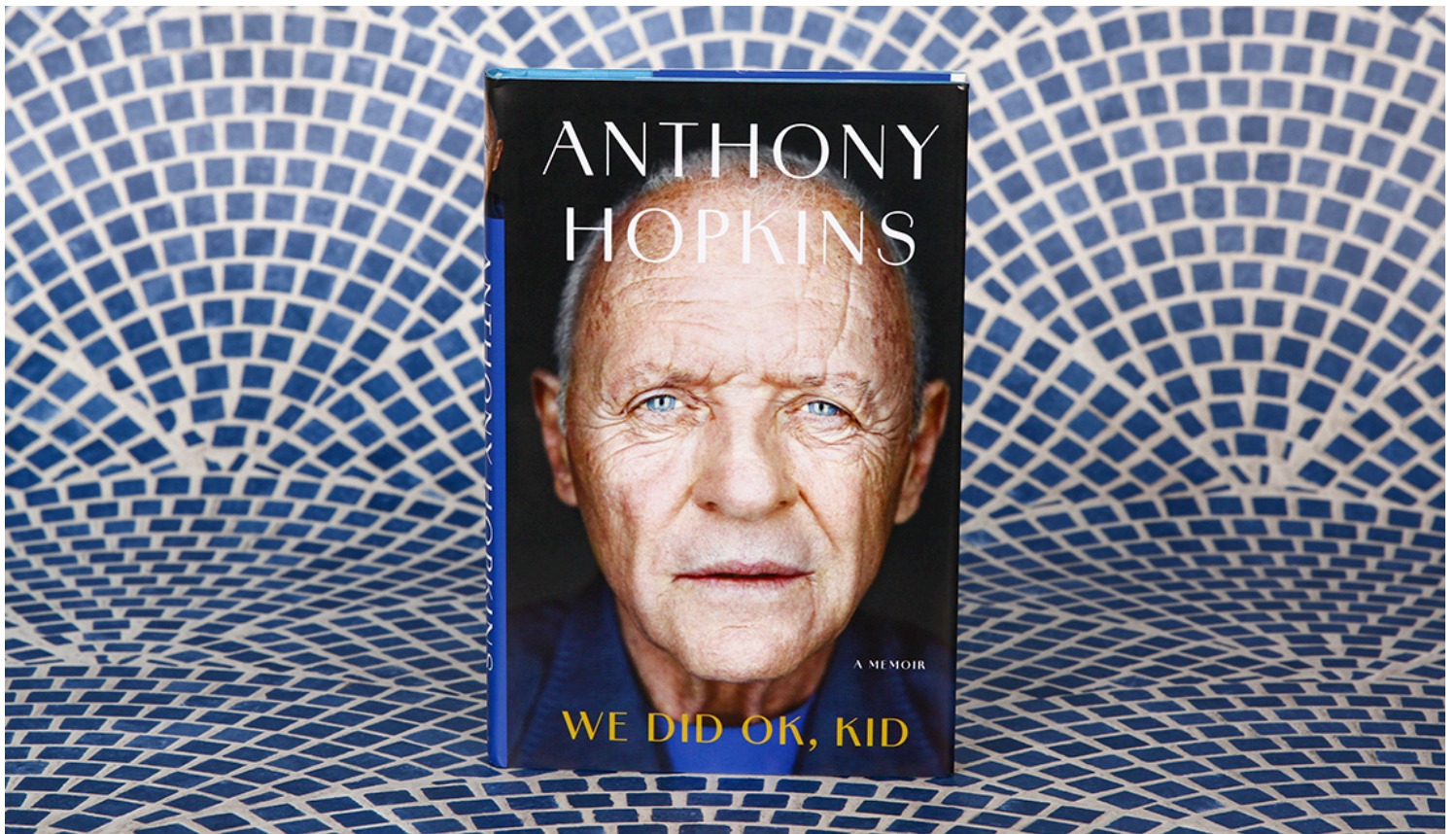
BOOKS

9 Fascinating Facts About Anthony Hopkins, 87, From His New Memoir

The esteemed actor describes his isolated childhood, alcohol addiction, finding love in his 60s and more in 'We Did Okay, Kid'

By Maria Speidel, [AARP](#) 2

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Hopkins doesn't shy away from unflattering facts in his new memoir, a frank recollection of high and low points in his life.

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[Anthony Hopkins](#), 87, will forever be associated with his most famous character, the cannibal Hannibal Lecter from 1991's *The Silence of the Lambs*, for which he won his first Oscar. (The uber-villain says of one victim, "I ate his liver with some fava beans and a nice Chianti." *Slurp, slurp, slurp.*)

He once [told AARP](#), "I'll never escape from that guy... [The role] changed everything for me." Of course, the Welsh actor has also masterfully embodied the erudite butler of *The Remains of the Day* (1993), President Richard Nixon in Oliver Stone's 1995 biopic *Nixon*, King Lear (in 2018) and many other memorable characters — including in *The Elephant Man* (1980) and *The Father* (2020), for which he won his second Oscar.

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But who is "the real" Sir Anthony Hopkins, off-screen? He tries to answer that question in his new, painfully honest and often sad memoir, *We Did Okay, Kid*, which includes recollections of his socially isolated childhood in Wales, life-changing discovery of Shakespeare and acting, alcohol abuse and sobriety, and rise to fame and knighthood (Queen Elizabeth II knighted him in 1993 for his contributions to drama).

Here are nine takeaways from his memoir.



Hopkins won his second Oscar for his role in 2020's 'The Father.'

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1. Hopkins is likely on the autism spectrum.

Near the end of his book, he mentions that he is probably on the [autism spectrum](#) — a fact that might help explain his social avoidance (he even hid from other children during his own birthday party) and other issues throughout his life. “[My wife’s] belief that I probably have Asperger’s is likely right, given my proclivity for memorization and repetition,” he writes of this late-in-life realization, “But, like any stoic man from the British Isles, I’m allergic to therapeutic jargon. Even if the world might prefer I accept the Asperger’s label, I’ve chosen to stick with what I see as a more meaningful designation: cold fish.” (Note: Asperger’s is no longer an official clinical term for autism spectrum disorder, but some still favor it.)

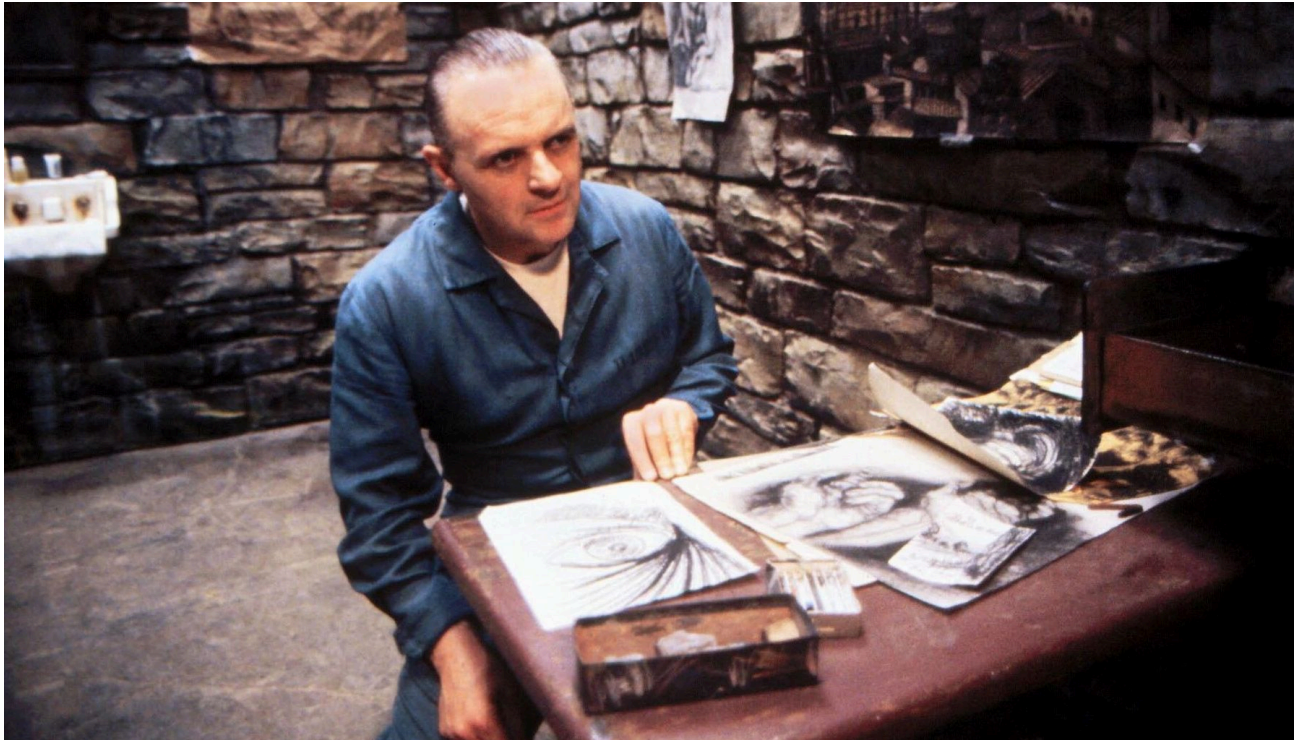
2. He struggled as a kid.

Hopkins grew up in Wales, the only son of a baker, Richard, and his wife, Muriel. His working-class parents sacrificed to send him to private schools. Although he memorized facts from a 10-volume children’s encyclopedia and read Charles Dickens at a young age, he failed in the classroom. It wasn’t easy to be a child with differences in his time and place. One headmaster excoriated him in front of his classmates. “You’re totally inept. Does anything go on in that thick skull of yours?” and then slapped him. Hopkins — nicknamed “elephant head” by other kids for his large head — withdrew, refusing to socialize or participate in sports. When he was 17, a particularly bad school report came home, and his father lost it: “What the hell is wrong with you.... You’re bloody useless.”

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3. His coping mechanism was a thing he called “dumb insolence.”

“The more slaps I got [at school], the more I leaned into my survival trick, I gave a look of pure dumb insolence,” Hopkins says of one incident. “Show no reaction. Stare them down. Pretend they don’t exist.... It drove adults crazy.” He deployed this tactic well into adulthood.



Hopkins as Hannibal Lecter in 1991's 'The Silence of the Lambs'

ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

4. He used his dumb insolence act to play Hannibal Lecter.

Some 40 years later, Hopkins pulled out the old trick to play Hannibal Lecter. “Does that make me a psychopath?” he asks in the book. “Probably. Aren’t we all psychopaths to some extent, and it’s just a matter of degree? My dumb-insolence game was a game of manipulation. The game of silence and stillness can make people uneasy, because in behaving that way, you are subtly amputating your humanity.” He cites other inspirations for his portrayal of Lecter, including the quiet voice of Hal from *2001: A Space Odyssey*, a former acting teacher and *Dracula*.

5. Acting saved him.

Shortly after the devastating school report noted above, young Hopkins wandered into a rehearsal of an Easter play at the local YMCA and was cast as a saint with the single line, “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.” His impressed father cried with happiness over his

son's newfound talent. After high school, Hopkins won a scholarship to the Cardiff School of the Arts and later attended London's prestigious Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts. Next came regional theater and movies, including *The Lion in Winter* (1968) with Katharine Hepburn. Megastardom arrived in his 50s with *The Silence of the Lambs*.

6. A dangerous drinking binge and blackout scared him into sobriety.

As a young actor, Hopkins often dined in pubs, first drinking beer before later graduating to whiskey, "which was becoming my favorite meal," he writes. In the military (he spent his two years of service in the army), his weekend pass was revoked for his being "a bit of a scrapper, a brawler, and a drunk." Entire nights disappeared in blackouts when he was living in New York in 1974, starring in the Broadway hit *Equus*.

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The following year, his agent informed him that he'd driven blind drunk from Arizona to Los Angeles and had been found passed out in his car. "The craving to drink left me," he writes. "That was eleven o'clock on December 29, 1975." The actor adds that he's been sober ever since.

7. He is estranged from his only child.

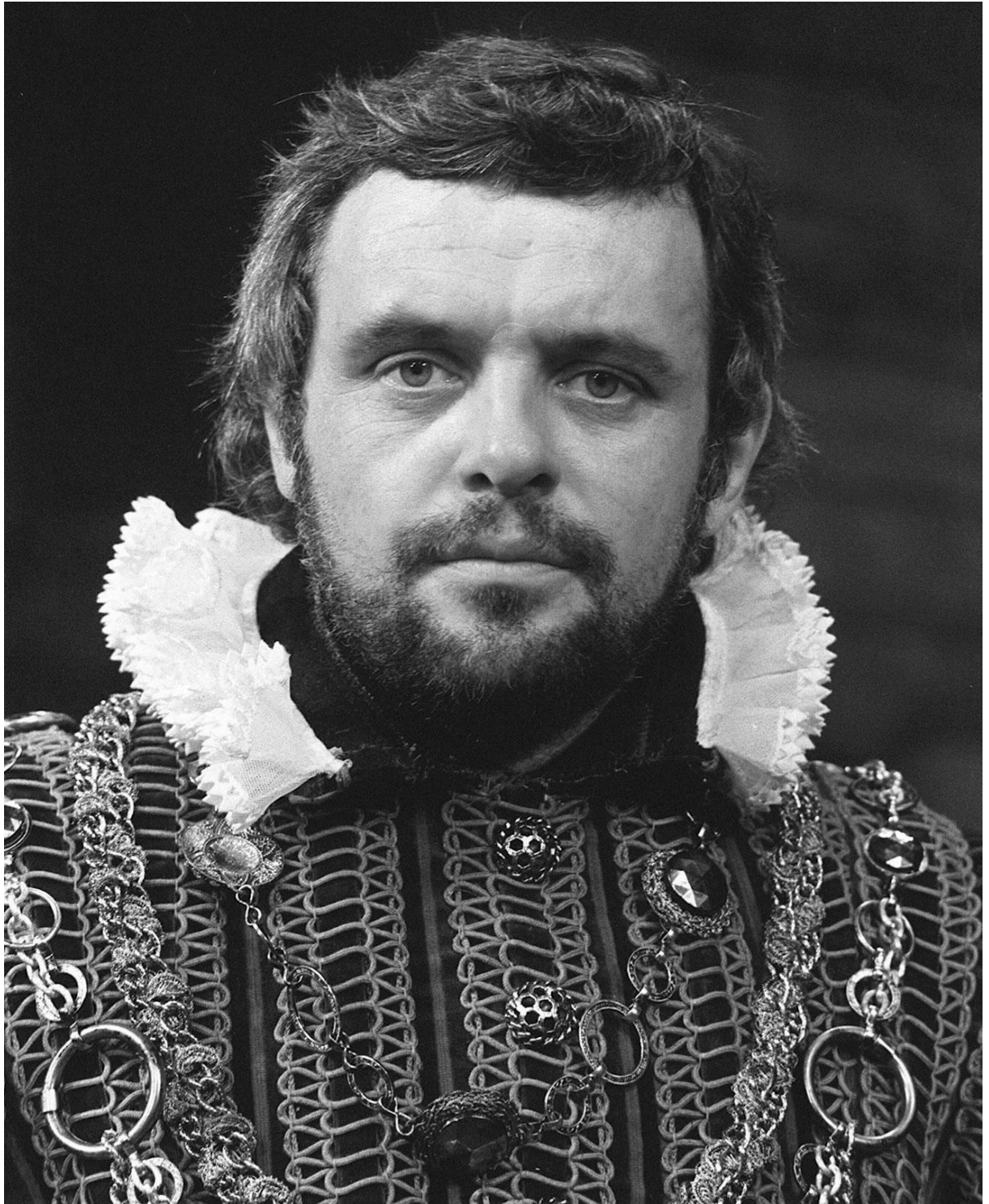
Hopkins' first marriage, in 1967, to actress Petronella Barker, constituted "the worst two years of my life." He walked out when their daughter, Abigail, was a year old, and although he sent money, he did not see Petronella or Abigail for years. Although they later met sporadically, including working together in the 1990s, Hopkins is estranged from Abigail, 57, an actress and a composer. "She had her reasons," he writes. "I can't blame her for that." He regrets speaking coldly of her in past interviews. "I hope my daughter knows that my door is always open to her," he says. "I will always be sorry for hurting her."

8. He goes way back with Shakespeare.

Hopkins loved the Bard from the moment he watched Lawrence Olivier's 1948 *Hamlet* at boarding school. "I was too young to grasp a modern sense of the words. But a force had broken into the center of whatever I was." Later, he would work under his idol, Olivier, at the National Theatre, performing Shakespeare onstage. At 78, he played his favorite Shakespeare role, King Lear, in the 2018 film, drawing on his father and his grandfather to telegraph "locked-up rage and loneliness." It is not lost on Hopkins that he and his favorite character share daughter issues. "I felt deeply, perhaps for the first time, how I had hurt my own daughter, Abigail."

9. Hopkins found love in his 60s.

The actor's 20-year second marriage, to Jenni Lynton, a film producer's assistant, fell apart after he stopped drinking. She hated his 12-step friends and wanted to stay in London, while he preferred California. He met his third wife, Stella Arroyave, 69, an antiques dealer-turned-filmmaker whom he affectionately refers to as "the Boss," when he walked into her store in



Hopkins as Macbeth in a 1972 production of Shakespeare's play in London

ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

2001. Hopkins writes, "She broke me wide open, helped me overcome the old feelings of regret and anxiety in a way that's set me free." They married in 2003 and live in California. (This year's [wildfires](#) destroyed their previous home in Pacific Palisades.)

Meanwhile, Hopkins has at least six more movies in the works, including *The King of Covent Garden*, where he plays the 18th-century British German composer George Frideric Handel. Fans

can also find him dancing, painting, playing the piano and reciting poetry [on TikTok](#), where he has 3.6 million followers (and, notably, follows no one).

Maria Speidel is a writer who lives in Los Angeles with a house full of books.

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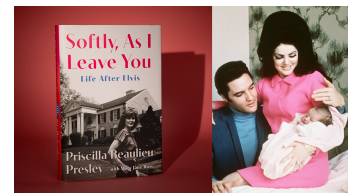
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