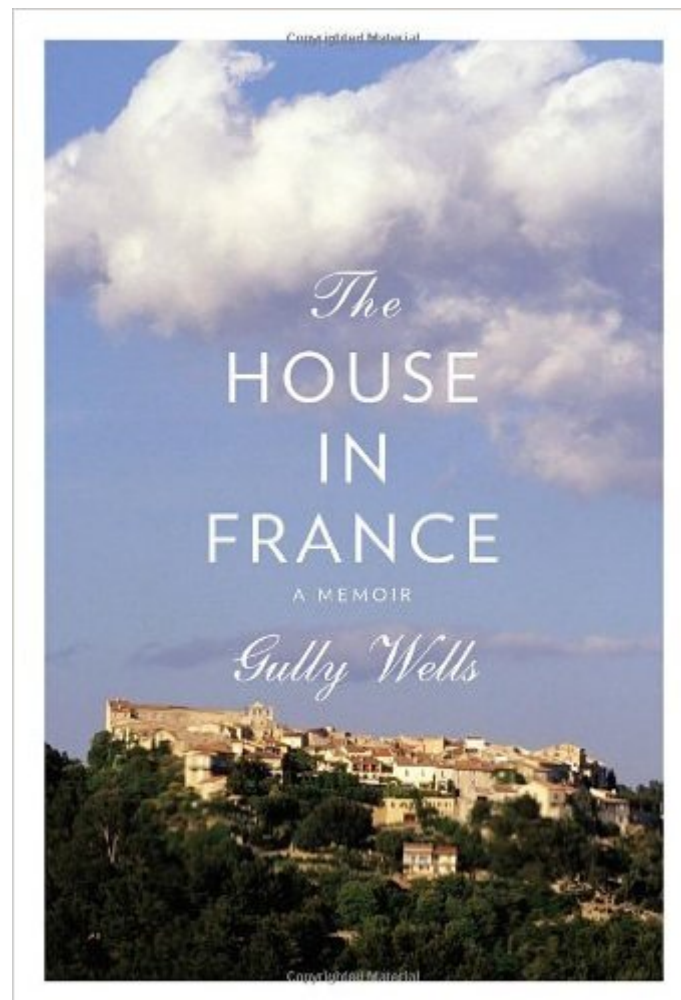


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# The House In France: A Memoir



## Synopsis

Set in Provence, London, and New York, this is a daughter's brilliant and witty memoir of her mother and stepfather—Dee Wells, the glamorous and rebellious American journalist, and A. J. Ayer, the celebrated and worldly Oxford philosopher—and the life they lived at the center of absolutely everything. Gully Wells takes us into the heart of London's lively, liberated intellectual inner circle of the 1960s. Here are Alan Bennett, Isaiah Berlin, Iris Murdoch, Bertrand Russell, Jonathan Miller, Martin Amis, Christopher Hitchens, Robert Kennedy, and Claus von Bülow, and later in New York a completely different mix: Mayor John Lindsay, Mike Tyson, and lingerie king Fernando Sánchez. We meet Wells's adventurous mother, a television commentator earning a reputation for her outspoken style and progressive views, and her stepfather, an icon in the world of twentieth-century philosophy, proving himself as prodigious a womanizer as he is a thinker. Woven throughout is La Migoua, the old farmhouse in France, where evenings were spent cooking bouillabaisse with fish bought that morning in the market in Bandol, and afternoons included visits to M. F. K. Fisher's favorite café on the Cours Mirabeau in Aix, with a late-night stop at the bullfighters' bar in Arles. The house perched on a hill between Toulon and Marseille was where her parents and their friends came together every year, and where Gully herself learned some of the enduring lessons of a life well lived. *The House in France* is a spellbinding story with a luminous sense of place and a dazzling portrait of a woman who caught the spirit of the sixties—and one of the most important intellectual figures of the twentieth century, drawn from the vivid memory of the child who adored them both.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

With exquisitely beautiful and frank detail, author Gully Wells shares in her memoir *The House of France* the memories she has of her mother Dee Wells and her step-father Sir Alfred Jules "Freddie" Ayer as she grew up in London, Paris and in their summer home situated between Toulon and Marseille all amongst the royal, social and political elite. Wells consistently paints images of a young girl coming to understand her mother through her writing, the eccentricities she observed and why it was her mother became the fierce independent woman who spoke her mind with such resolute conviction being the glamorous and often rebellious American journalist who wrote for *The Guardian*, *The New York Times* as well as authored a successful book titled *Jane* released in 1973. Explaining how her mother's wisdom clearly molded her into the woman she became, Wells giftedly tells a seemingly objective description that isn't always flattering, but always intriguing; however, throughout the entire piece there is an undercurrent of utter love and adoration that can't be contained in the last few pages as she writes about her return to her mother's house in France and how after six years following her mother's death she is finally able to return as she has never been without her mother present until at that very moment. Beginning in Paris where her mother and father met and married, readers will be delighted, shocked, impressed and charmed by this wonderfully scripted memoir that is a traveler's dream and a daughter's reality. Excerpt from the book: "'Take a chance' - this was the precept she had always lived by, the impulse that had propelled her forward, the belief she clung to as fervently as any of the pilgrims who worshipped at the shrine of Notre-Dame du Beausset-Vieux, in that tiny chapel on top of the hill, behind our house."

In the current flood of memoirs hitting the market, *The House in France* stands alone as a witty, wry portrait of an unusually clever and entertaining family. The book spans the life of Gully Wells from her childhood in the fifties through her coming of age in the sixties and her adulthood in contemporary New York City. She takes us on a breathless tour of literary London populated with many familiar names, not the least of whom, was her brilliant stepfather A.J. Ayer. Her mother, Dee Wells, was a journalist and television personality known for her "take no prisoners" conversational style. The house of the title is an ancient, beloved farmhouse at the unfashionable end of the Cote d'Azur. It is here that the family shares their most delightful, outrageous and hilarious adventures with a cast of characters that would be impossible to invent. It is the single place they will all be

forever drawn back to. I can't recommend this book enough. It is not only highly entertaining, but laugh-out-loud funny, a perfect summer read.

I enjoy this kind of memoir and was looking forward to reading *The House in France*. What a disappointment! It was a struggle plodding on to the end, and the only reason I did was that based on the other, glowing, reviews, I thought at some point the book might get better. Nope, never did. Why it is of interest to anyone to read about these shallow, dysfunctional, artificial, and annoying people, is beyond me. The entire point of the book seems to be name-dropping. The author is repetitive, nay perseverative, in her zeal to tell us she knows anyone who is anyone. The author's mother comes across as an adulterous wife, negligent mother, and a vain, superficial person. The only thing this book proves is that people get to where they are in life based on their connections, certainly not on talent. As if we didn't know that already! My advice? Life is too short to waste on this book. Read Julia Child's *"My Life in France"* instead, much more enjoyable and written by someone who's actually contributed something.

I first became aware of this book through an excerpt in *Vogue* magazine. Judging by the letters to the editor, the readers did not find the story of Gully losing her virginity to a much older, very oily, and very married Frenchman as amusing as the writer did. But no matter; the article was well written so I was curious about the rest of the story. Well....between all the infidelities, copious bottles of wine, great food and parties featuring intellectual and witty guests, everyone seems to be having the greatest time. But are they really? Gully is at pains to say how great her unconventional mother and step-father were but every now and then, the mask drops and you see two enormously selfish people. At one point her mother moves to US with her lover and leaves her 16 year old son on his own in England with no arrangements for his care (he ends up staying with various friends). Later on Gully marries a terrific guy from the BBC and gets an offer to be an editor at *Conde Nast Traveler*, despite apparently never having worked as a journalist (yeah, I'm jealous). I found this book slightly irritating because everyone was so cool and bohemian and the only sin seemed to be being a bore; yet you get the sense there were some problems and hurt feelings and anger beneath the surface but these are quickly shoved under the rug with an off-the-cuff remark and we're on to another party. I give her props for not writing a *"Mommie Dearest"* kind of book but more perception would have been great. On the plus side, this is an engaging well-written book that will hold your interest. You'll either wish you could've been at one of these parties or be glad you only have to read about them.

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