

Anything Goes Study Guide

Anything Goes by John Barrowman

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Plot Summary

Anything Goes is the 2008 autobiography of actor, singer, and television personality John Barrowman. At the publication of the book, Barrowman was perhaps best known to fans for his starring role of Captain Jack on the BBC television series Torchwood. Barrowman originated the role of Captain Jack on the iconic, long-running science fiction series Doctor Who.

John Barrowman was born in 1967 in Scotland. He was brash and a risk-taker as a "wee lad" and would often get himself into mischief. He had two older siblings: Andrew and Carole (the latter of whom co-wrote this autobiography). John Barrowman first discovered his love of an audience by performing songs and skits in front of family at numerous parties and engagements.

When Barrowman was nine, his father was transferred to Illinois in the United States. Children made fun of Barrowman's Scottish accent, so he learned how to move effortlessly between an American and a Scottish accent. In high school, Barrowman played the flute but was discovered to have a good voice when he was singing a part he was trying to learn for the flute. He joined the choir, the Forensic Competition for spoken word art, and was soon participating in school plays and musicals.

After a false start at the University of Iowa, where Barrowman rejected teachers' attempts to turn him into an opera singer, Barrowman attended the University of San Diego. He was soon earning the male romantic lead in the drama department's various musical productions. His good looks and strong singing voice made him a natural for such parts, and he continued to improve his dancing, which he considered his weakest feature. Around this time, Barrowman also fully discovered his homosexuality.

On a vacation back to Scotland to see relatives, Barrowman heard of a casting call for the West End production of Cole Porter's Anything Goes. Barrowman attended and impressed the producers, who cast him after a follow-up. This professional debut occurred in 1989 when Barrowman was 22.

During the 1990s, Barrowman participated in many professional stage productions on London's famed West End, becoming a quintessential leading man. He also became a television presenter on BBC kids shows. He starred in two canceled American TV pilots, and he was the star of an infamous cult horror film called Shark Attack 3: Megalodon. Attributing constant risk-taking to his success, Barrowman played parts in Shakespeare plays as well as in musicals by Stephen Sondheim and Andrew Lloyd Webber. Well-known musical producer Cameron Mackintosh had a profound impact on his career.

In the 2000s, Barrowman continued to act in stage plays. He started an annual cabaret with his high school drama teacher. And he landed the role of Captain Jack in the science fiction series Doctor Who. He later got his own series in Torchwood.



Author's Acknowledgements and Chapter 1

Author's Acknowledgements and Chapter 1 Summary and Analysis

Author's Acknowledgements: John Barrowman is the author, a well-known stage and television performer and actor. He encourages the reader to have fun with the book, and he hopes reading the book has the same effect as lounging in one's pajamas and having a laugh with Barrowman himself. Barrowman has organized the book according to chapters with song titles in them because of the important impact musical theater has had on his life and career.

Barrowman co-wrote the book with his sister Carole, who provided structure to Barrowman's many stories and recollections. The rest of the acknowledgements list people the Barrowmans would like to thank for their contributions and/or support, ending with "mum and dad."

Chapter 1: Barrowman starts with a snapshot of himself with his niece Clare, Carole's daughter, on a summer afternoon in the boisterous environment of London's west end. Barrowman was between performances of Anything Goes at the Theatre Royal Drury Lane.

While shopping, Barrowman's phone rang. It was Gavin Barker, his manager. Barrowman had been offered the role of Captain Jack in the popular British science fiction television series, Doctor Who. Even though he was at that time a veteran of acting and performing, Barrowman was stunned. Barrowman celebrated raucously with his niece at the great news. In his happiness, he nearly knocked over an old woman.

Barrowman goes back to the time he first heard of the Captain Jack role. He was in the Drury Lane dressing room for Anything Goes watching a DVD. By that time, Barrowman had been a television presenter numerous times, such as for the show Live and Kicking, but he was better known for musical theater, including roles in Stephen Sondheim's Company and Andrew Lloyd-Webber's Sunset Boulevard. He was considered West End's quintessential leading man.

Barrowman got a call from his manager Gavin about an audition for Captain Jack in Doctor Who. Barrowman had grown up watching Doctor Who and loved the show, and so he agreed to the audition immediately.

In the audition, Barrowman went through the audition scene three different times with three different accents. He won over the producers, including showrunner Russell T. Davies. Captain Jack was a pioneering character in the show, in that he was bisexual

and displayed affection for both men and women. Barrowman was very excited for the journey Davies had planned for Captain Jack.

In an early day on set, Barrowman was challenged by a green screen shoot, in which he had nothing to act with or against, just a green screen stage that would be later filled in with computer graphics. The scene called for a waltz between Barrowman and co-star Billie Piper. Rather than call in a choreographer to extend the already long shoot day, Barrowman performed the waltz without one, dancing to his own tune.



Chapter 2 and Chapter 3

Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 2: Barrowman describes himself as a baby to a baby depicted in a hellish underworld in one of Hieronymus Bosch's paintings called *The Garden of Earthly Delights*. Barrowman was the baby from hell. He was born on March 11th, 1967 in Scotland. He cried constantly and nothing could tame him. The family even tried to give him whiskey to calm him, but it didn't work. Another reason Barrowman calls himself the baby from hell is that the inside of his mouth and tongue were bright blue for a time because of an ointment used to kill an infection.

Barrowman had a brother named Andrew, older by five years, and the eldest sibling Carole, older by eight years. Barrowman cried so often and fiercely that his older siblings hated him and wanted him gone. Barrowman's father, who had a long history as a practical joker, joined Barrowman's mother in tricking Andrew and Carole into believing the parents were throwing Barrowman into the trash because he cried too much. The father wrapped baby Barrowman in a brown bag. Tricked, Carole and Andrew pleaded with their parents not to toss baby Barrowman and they promised to love the baby.

Barrowman's childhood was full of parties. Barrowman's father built an extension on the home to host guests, which they called simply *The Extension*, and it was the most popular destination in town. Barrowman's nickname was "Wee John," and he would perform songs for the partygoers. The biggest party of the year was for Hogmanay, the Scottish version of New Year's. Barrowman grew up in a family of singers, and he fondly recalls visiting his grandmother and enjoying her famous sweet treats. Grandma Murn was quite the woman. After Barrowman relayed an incident in which his teacher hit him on the back of the head for acting out, Grandma Murn marched into the classroom and hit the teacher on the back of the head, tit for tat.

Chapter 3: Barrowman lived in the Mount Vernon community in Scotland until he was nine, when his family moved to Illinois in the United States. One day in Scotland, Barrowman decided to visit his Grandma Murn and instead became hopelessly lost in another town. A stranger found him and brought him back to Mount Vernon. The stranger then gave Barrowman's parents a dressing-down for not paying closer attention to their child. Barrowman states that this episode was an early manifestation of his ability to take risks, an ability which would influence his professional career. This risk-taking trait was present in his father, who was a "wee rascal" in his time.

Barrowman goes on to explain several times in his career when he took risks. One of those risks was the musical *Matador*, which ran for only three months in 1991. Barrowman was about to pout and get upset at the producers for the early close of the show, but his co-star Stefanie Powers took him aside and took him to accept the closure like a professional. In another example, Barrowman took heat for appearing as a



contestant on the TV program *Dancing on Ice*. Many felt that to appear on a reality TV show was reserved only for has-beens and D-List celebrities. But Barrowman enjoyed it and took the risk by appearing.

In a final example about Barrowman's risk-taking, he agreed to take part in the sixtieth anniversary of the Royal Air Force (RAF) and the U.S. Air Force working and fighting together. Barrowman had always been queasy about flying, and the appearance involved being a co-pilot in a Hawk fighter jet. Barrowman nearly backed out because he was terrified of going up in the air, but he stuck with it and had an exhilarating dream come true.



Chapter 4 and Chapter 5

Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 4: In 1976, Barrowman's father accepted a position in the United States with the Caterpillar company, when Barrowman was nine. So the family left Scotland and flew across the Atlantic Ocean to become Americans. It was a momentous time for Barrowman. He held the "American Dream" in high regard and wanted to fit in. Barrowman also describes his love of Star Wars, which came out when he was 10. He had all the action figures and his room was covered with Star Wars memorabilia.

1976 was not the first time the Barrowmans had visited America, however. In 1970-71, Mr. Barrowman accepted a year-long stint at the Caterpillar company, and the family had what Barrowman calls the "Barrowmans' Excellent Adventure," multiple excursions around the midwest to see the sights. In one episode, the family was trekking across country in an RV. There was a strange odor none of them could identify. They pulled over and discovered that the vehicle had ran over tar that had stuck to the wheel, and that was the source of the strong smell. Later that day, Mr. Barrowman hooked the RV's electrical system up to a power box at a campground. There was a spark, and the family barely got out of the RV in time before the electrical surge hit the RV from the power box. They later learned that the smell of tar had covered up the smell of the electrical system shorting out. They were nearly killed or at least seriously harmed, but they escaped.

In the early 1970s, Barrowman got his first taste of fame by winning a UK talent contest. His father dressed him up in a bikini. Barrowman cheekily "blames" his subsequent homosexuality on his father dressing him up like a girl.

Grandma Murn came along with the family to live in the States, which she did until her death in 1984, which was devastating for the family as Murn was very close. Murn had suffered a stroke and had speech difficulties, but she never lost essential parts of her endearing personality.

Barrowman's thick Scottish accent made him the target of taunts at school in the States, so he became what he calls bidialectical - within the family, he spoke with a Scottish accent, and with everyone else he spoke with an American accent.

Barrowman endured his share of bullying as a kid, first from a bully he nicknames "Spotty Dick" who would sit on him and flick at his face with his fingers on the bus ride, then later by the "Brass Boys," boys who played brass instruments in the school band where Barrowman elected to play the more elegant flute. These hardships helped Barrowman become the man he turned out to be.

Chapter 5: Barrowman had his share of antics and escapades as a young, wild boy growing up in the late 1970s. He would ice skate and try dangerous stunts in the winter,



and he would swim in the creek during the late spring. He was a "hellion" in his own words, and he often sneaked out to hang out with friends.

Barrowman's brother Andrew loved to tease his younger brother, particularly about an incident in which 7-year-old Barrowman yelled at an adult with the F-word. From that point on, Barrowman was terrified that his parents would find out what he had done, and Andrew blackmailed him by threatening to tell. Barrowman finally got his revenge one day when a drunk Andrew threw the family dog, named Pagan, into the water to swim. The dog seemingly disappeared, and Andrew thought the dog had drowned and that he had essentially killed the dog. But the dog merely swam to shore and was met by Barrowman, who kept the dog's existence a secret for a time to torture his brother.

Barrowman next describes his sexuality. He had a sense that he was gay at the age of nine, when he looked at a porn magazine and was more attracted to the males than the females. But it crystallized for him at around thirteen or fourteen. Barrowman told his parents in 1992 when he was playing in *The Phantom of the Opera*. He was sick and exhausted, and he feared the worst: HIV/AIDS. He informed his parents that he was gay and that he had to get an HIV test done. He half-expected them to want nothing to do with him, but they accepted him immediately, as did his siblings and close friends. Indeed, they expected it all along. So Barrowman's "bombshell" news was met with very little drama, which is unsurprising in retrospect for Barrowman because his parents always encouraged the children to be themselves.



Chapter 6 and Chapter 7

Chapter 6 and Chapter 7 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 6: In the last couple of years of high school, Barrowman discovered he had a singer's voice and that theater was a passion for him. He credits drama teacher Beverly Holt for being an important early influence. She encouraged him to try out for a local Joliet community theater production of Cole Porter's *Anything Goes* for the role of Billy Crocker, which would later become a signature role for Barrowman.

The first man who discovered Barrowman's singing talent was his choir director David Dankwart, who heard Barrowman singing a tune for a flute part he was practicing. His first real part in a school play, at the age of fourteen, was as Barnaby in *Hello, Dolly!* Barrowman was taunted by other choir boys who were jealous Barrowman was getting choice parts so young. Barrowman sang at organizations and churches around Joliet, increasing his experience. Barrowman also participated in Forensic Competition, which included a variety of vocal competitions like public speaking, acting, and storytelling. One of the other competitors was Andy Dick, the well-known comedian. In his first Forensic Competition, Barrowman took home first prize in Dramatic Duet for a scene from *The Lion in Winter*.

Due to the positive experience Barrowman had, Barrowman later created an organization with his old drama teacher Bev Holt called *Dreamers Workshop*, a series of camps and events for young people in the performing arts. Barrowman felt the performing arts do not get nearly as much recognition as they should, especially in comparison to sports.

In the spirit of giving back to the community and helping younger performers out, Barrowman also appeared as a judge on the UK television programs *Any Dream Will Do* and *How Do You Solve a Problem Like Maria?*

Chapter 7: After graduating from Joliet West High School, Barrowman attended the University of Iowa at Des Moines to study drama and music. However, he quit after only one term, because the instructors wanted to mold him into an opera performer and he had no interest. Barrowman also suffered from what he calls the "Dues and Don't Syndrome," as in, until you've paid your dues, you don't get any significant parts. Because he was a freshman, he was relegated to very minor roles.

Though the University of Iowa didn't work out, Barrowman did join a group there called the *Old Gold Singers*. He wowed them with an acrobatic audition, and he was invited to *Opryland* in Nashville for a couple summers to perform in productions. In *Opryland*, Barrowman was a member of a vibrant gay community and for the first time felt at home, though he had never quite felt "closeted" in his life either. Through the *Old Gold Singers*, Barrowman also met a close friend, Marilyn Rising. During the wild parties

thrown during these formative years, Barrowman also had his first gay kiss with a man named Michael Clowers.

Barrowman finishes the chapter by describing a few of his antics as a well-known prankster around the set and stage, including his propensity to moon people to liven up the atmosphere and increase morale.



Chapter 8 and Chapter 9

Chapter 8 and Chapter 9 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 8: After spending some time in Chicago taking acting classes, Barrowman transferred from the University of Iowa and headed west to the University of San Diego, where he was much happier because he was able to study true theater instead of opera. He paid his dues and worked his way up the ladder in the drama department. Whatever he lacked in knowledge, he made up for in confidence. His presence earned him the petty professional jealousy of another leading-man type, whom Barrowman identifies with the colorful Peter Prick.

Marilyn Rising, Barrowman's best friend from Opryland, followed Barrowman to San Diego. They were often cast as the male and female romantic leads in shows. They became boyfriend and girlfriend briefly, but the relationship only confirmed for Barrowman that he was only gay and not bisexual.

Barrowman next relates his big break into professional theater. Barrowman was visiting Scotland to see his relatives. He heard from an uncle about an open casting call for a production in London's famed West End for the show *Anything Goes*. The casting call was taking place in Glasgow. Barrowman wowed them at the audition and showed how he could use two accents. *Anything Goes* called for a strong singer and dancer, and Barrowman proved he was both. In a callback audition in London, Barrowman met and impressed the famous leading lady Elaine Page, and his professional career was born. Page and another performer in *Anything Goes*, Bernard Cribbins, became Barrowman's two mentors.

Following advice given him by Page and Cribbins, Barrowman cut ties to the negative influences in his life, which included Peter Prick. Many years later, in 2004, Barrowman got his revenge on Peter Prick when he appeared as the leading Nazi in the "Springtime for Hitler" number in Mel Brooks' *The Producers*. Peter Prick was playing a bit part in the show, and Barrowman reveled in revealing that he was the lead in the number.

Chapter 9: This chapter is devoted to a high school friend named Midge who died under tragic circumstances at 29. Barrowman knew Midge from high school. Midge's parents and Barrowman's parents were neighbors, and they became friends. Midge went to a university in Florida but dropped out and came west, and the parents, in order to save money, purchased a condo in California which Barrowman and Midge shared as roommates.

Midge's mental state quickly deteriorated. She was obsessed about her weight and looks. She would take in filthy stray cats and leave the condo in a state of filth. Her behavior was increasingly erratic, and she was a loner. Midge's parents saw the warning signs but they refused to do anything, perhaps out of pride or fear that their



parenting was to blame. Barrowman moved out after a couple of years, and Midge became a wreck. She was diagnosed with bipolar disorder and schizophrenia.

At age 29, Midge died from leukemia, but Barrowman is convinced she committed suicide. Barrowman partially blames the parents for not tending to their child and recognizing the reality of the situation.



Chapter 10 and Chapter 11

Chapter 10 and Chapter 11 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 10: Barrowman's first serious gay relationship was with a Spanish flamenco dancer named Paco Perez-Arevalo, who was a dancer on the set of *Matador*, a play in which Barrowman played the lead, Manuel Benitez. *Matador* lasted only three months, which Barrowman attributes to a drop in tourism from the Gulf War of 1991.

Barrowman's relationship with Paco was an "open secret" considering he was still technically a boyfriend to Marilyn.

One day, while with Paco, Barrowman got a surprise visit from Marilyn. He panicked about his "affair." But Marilyn had in fact come to confront Barrowman about his homosexuality. Marilyn accepted Barrowman unconditionally and they remained good friends.

Near the conclusion of *Matador*, Barrowman got a phone call from the assistant of famous clothing designer Valentino. He eventually got a personal interview with Valentino in his lavish home. Valentino invited Barrowman to model a line of his new clothes. Barrowman readily accepted. The gig involved two weeks aboard Valentino's luxury yacht called the *TM Blue* with "young male companions" and supermodel Claudia Schiffer.

However, no photography took place during the entirety of the trip. Valentino gave Barrowman gifts of jewelry, clothes, and fine watches. Barrowman feels Valentino simply wanted to surround himself with beautiful men. Barrowman probably could have become servile to Valentino and enjoyed "high living," but he wanted to earn such things on his own, which he eventually did.

Chapter 11: Barrowman describes a road trip with Scott Gill, an architect and the love of his life whom he would eventually marry. They took an extended vacation in the central part of the United States, touring among other things the Donner Party trail. On the way to Yosemite National Park, the two ran low on gas, but they figured they were bound to see a gas station sooner or later. They got to a gas station but it was closed for the winter. Just when they thought they'd be stranded in the wilderness, they came across a tow truck which had a gas container. The tow truck driver chewed them out for their irresponsibility.

Barrowman first met Scott in 1993 at the famed Chichester Festival Theatre, where Barrowman was playing in a production called *Rope*. Scott met him backstage, and it was lust at first sight. Only years later, when they were stranded in the wilderness, did Barrowman realize he loved Scott. On December 27th, 2006, Scott and Barrowman became civil partners in a ceremony. It was a beautiful ceremony and Barrowman wore a traditional Scottish kilt. The civil partnership was a bold move at the time, and

Barrowman was amazed at the outpouring of support he received from fans in emails. Barrowman feels that formalizing their relationship made it stronger.

At the end of the chapter, Barrowman relays a tragic episode involving Scott's sister Sandie dying from glioblastoma. Scott exhibited a great strength of character by taking care of his sister until the very end of her life. Barrowman promised Sandie he would take care of her brother right before she died.



Chapter 12 and Chapter 13

Chapter 12 and Chapter 13 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 12: Barrowman describes some of his numerous phobias and superstitions regarding the theater. For example, it is bad luck to say "good luck" to an actor. Much better is "break a leg," which goes back to Shakespeare's time when actors took numerous bows to acknowledge the audience. If the performance was great, there would be more bows, and thus more of a chance to hurt your legs. Other superstitions involve: making sure to say a theater is "dark" instead of "closed"; not mentioning the play Macbeth; giving red roses to a performer after the show; and the fact that a poor dress rehearsal is in fact a good omen.

Also essential in the theater is giving everyone a charge of energy, because while it may be a company's 300th show, it is the audience's first show, and it is essential to keep the energy level high. Barrowman explains that theater actors often pull pranks on each other. In one musical in particular, *Sunset Boulevard*, the cast and crew were extremely prankish. Barrowman's co-star, Anita Louise Combe, literally squatted down on a set toilet as if peeing during one of Barrowman's numbers, and Barrowman had to hold in laughter. Other pranks involved passing dirty jokes around on notes and bringing an understudy onto stage that wasn't called for in the script. Barrowman, who definitely has a raunchy side, played a piano with his penis for a few shows of *Sunset Boulevard* before he got a note from Andrew Lloyd Webber, the writer of the music, telling him to stop.

1989's *Anything Goes* introduced Barrowman to all the pranks and silliness involved with professional acting. Co-star Bernard Cribbins had a life-like phallus sculpted and would present it to a "Dick of the Week." And Barrowman had to hold in many bouts of laughter after Elaine Page would give him certain looks. Another co-star, Martin Marquez, would have farting contests with Barrowman in the middle of musical numbers.

Chapter 13: Barrowman describes how he loves his nieces and nephews dearly. He had a special relationship with his nephew Turner. They had a history of Barrowman daring Turner to do ridiculous things for money, like eating dog food or breakdancing in the middle of a crowded cafe. Turner would always be game, though he negotiated Barrowman into giving more money than he initially offered.

Barrowman also had a special relationship with his niece Clare. Clare was born as a twin, but her twin sister was stillborn. Doctors performed a twin-to-twin transfusion to save Clare, who was born prematurely. The family didn't know whether Clare would live or die for days. From that moment (Barrowman was twenty when Clare was born), Barrowman has had a special bond with her.



Otherwise, Barrowman was a "fun uncle" to the children - teaching them swear words, teaching them how to properly prank family members, and teaching them how to put on a show, which was a tradition at Barrowman family gatherings.

The family gatherings were raucous affairs full of games like charades and Scrabble, along with the aforementioned musical numbers and performances. The main attraction involved Barrowman, Clare and Turner dressing in drag and giving a show. Barrowman had a long history of performing in drag, whether with family or in professional productions.

Chapter 14 and Chapter 15

Chapter 14 and Chapter 15 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 14: Barrowman transitions to his television career. His first television gig was as a presenter on the BBC variety show for children called Live and Kicking. His introduction was somewhat of a disaster - he hopped on the back of a golf cart, but missed the landing and instead tumbled off. Barrowman felt restricted on the set of Live and Kicking, because there was little encouragement in the way of improvisation and going off script. Nevertheless, he got television experience and a chance to interview celebrities.

Barrowman went from Live and Kicking to another kids' show, The Movie Game, a game show. During this time, Barrowman was incredibly busy - some days, he would do a taping of Live and Kicking, perform two theater shows of Miss Saigon, and then tape two shows of The Movie Game. Barrowman enjoyed working a full schedule and states that he is a nightmare to deal with if he is not busy.

Barrowman's load lightened when he realized he was getting smaller and smaller segments on Live and Kicking. After one production meeting, he declared that he had had it with being marginalized, and it was his last season on the show.

After The Movie Game, Barrowman appeared in two US TV shows, Central Park West and Titans, the latter of which was created by legendary TV producer Aaron Spelling. The production was marred by co-star Yasmine Bleeth's well-publicized drug addiction. Both Central Park West and Titans were canceled after brief runs, leaving Barrowman to feel down and somewhat unemployed as of 2001. To fill in the time, he developed a cabaret show with his old drama teacher Bev Holt.

Chapter 15: Barrowman remarks that London is his "moveable feast" and that, wherever he goes, he takes the lessons and experiences he had there with him. Barrowman feels stage director Trevor Nunn is one of the best in the world because he pays close attention to character relationships and nuances. Trevor had a superstitious habit of wearing the same jeans and shirt in the weeks before a production premiered.

Barrowman laments the fact that many people still feel it's perfectly acceptable to videotape or take photographs of a stage production going on. He considers it piracy and stealing. Plus, a flash in the crowd can throw off a performer. At one performance Barrowman was in, the crew was appalled when they saw a large videocamera in the center of the audience taping them. It had a spotlight that blinded the actors. At the end of a dance number, Barrowman hopped off stage and told the woman to shut off the camera in no uncertain terms. The audience was delighted, thinking it was a staged bit. The crew later thanked Barrowman for his boldness.

Another profound influence on Barrowman was musical producer Cameron Mackintosh, who cast him in *Miss Saigon* and *The Fix* among other things. Barrowman and Scott, his partner, had a splendid weekend getaway at Cameron's medieval summer home. Another important friend he met on stage was actress Suranne Jones, who volunteered to be the surrogate for his children. Other luminaries of stage mentioned are David Caddick, a musical director, and Andrew Lloyd Webber. While Barrowman did not know Webber as well as some other theater celebrities, Barrowman praised him for his grace and hospitality.



Chapter 16 and Chapter 17

Chapter 16 and Chapter 17 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 16: Barrowman and his partner Scott Gill travel extensively whenever their schedules allow. Scott is a big fan of touring historical ruins and museums, and Barrowman is more a fan of shopping and relaxing, so their trips are a continual process of compromises. One of Barrowman's favorite places is a 3,500-year-old Bronze Age ruin which is well-preserved because of a volcanic eruption.

Another personal favorite of Barrowman's is Rome. There is tremendous shopping to be had there, and Scott and Barrowman have toured the Trevi Fountain among other attractions.

Scott and Barrowman were both certified scuba divers, so they often planned trips around scuba diving, including a memorable trip to the Yucatan Peninsula. On another trip, they toured the Mediterranean and saw the Dome on the Rock, the Wailing Wall, a resort near the Dead Sea, and King Herod's palace.

Scuba diving was part of the reason (along with money, since he had just been canceled from a television series) that Barrowman agreed to play the lead in the infamous cult horror film, *Shark Attack 3: Megalodon*, in 2001. He took a harrowing plane trip from the US to Varna, Bulgaria. This was just after the terrorist attacks of September 11th, so Barrowman was very much on edge about flying. He even collapsed in an asthma attack after suffering through a cabin full of people smoking cigarettes.

Barrowman's female lead in the *Shark Attack* movie was lifeless, so the director often encouraged Barrowman to improvise lines to try to get emotion from her. This strategy was responsible for the most infamous line in the movie in which Barrowman encourages his female love interest to do something sexually explicit. Barrowman said the line just to get her to laugh, but they ended up keeping the line in the final cut of the movie.

Chapter 17: Barrowman thinks back to 1989 and his professional debut in *Anything Goes*. Barrowman's theory is that he had been trained by producer Cameron Mackintosh to be a leading man, and that that training had built toward the ultimate challenge for a theater actor: to be in a Stephen Sondheim musical and to work with Sondheim himself. Barrowman was in two Sondheim musicals: *Putting It Together* (first in Los Angeles in 1998, then on Broadway in 2000) and *Company* in 2002.

For *Putting It Together*, which was a revue of several of Sondheim's previous musicals, Barrowman got to act with comedienne Carol Burnett, whom he loved growing up. Barrowman considered *The Carol Burnett Show* to be sketch comedy at its best. For

Company, Barrowman got the thrill of his career when he was told by Stephen Sondheim that Barrowman's portrayal of the character Bobby brought tears to his eyes.

Other stage productions in which Barrowman was involved are De-Lovely with Ashley Judd and Kevin Kline, and Disney's Beauty and the Beast.

After the Sondheim musicals, Barrowman made a conscious effort to be more of an activist as far as gay rights and encouraging closeted gay performers to be who they really are. He had done a lot of work for a gay rights group called Stonewall, and he counted actor Ian MacKellen (an "out" gay actor) as his friend and mentor in this respect.



Chapter 18 and Chapter 19

Chapter 18 and Chapter 19 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 18: By the time of the publication of the book, Barrowman's most recent and most well-known role was that of Captain Jack on Torchwood. Barrowman first appeared as Captain Jack on an episode of Doctor Who. The actor who played Doctor Who quit, and Captain Jack did not return to the revamped new series. Barrowman was disappointed, but a new television series was proposed, a spinoff from Doctor Who starring Captain Jack. This was Torchwood.

Barrowman describes some of the trials and tribulations of filming a television show. He had to lie face down in gravel for nearly an hour for one scene. In another scene he had to keep eating a doughnut take after take until he became absolutely sick of the doughnut. On another shooting day, he had to keep pace with a stuntman on a motorcycle until he was exhausted.

The cast and crew on Torchwood had become like family after a couple of seasons. Crews spend a lot of time with each other as they wait for shots to get set up, so there is plenty of time for bonding. Barrowman liked to break out Nerf guns and other toys to keep crew members occupied. In Barrowman's words, the cast and crew on Torchwood worked hard and played hard.

Chapter 19: In this brief final chapter, Barrowman reflects on his fame and his profession. In 1985, Barrowman remembered being in the guidance counselor's office and insisting that he didn't need a "Plan B," and that he would succeed or fail as an actor and only an actor. And he had never needed a Plan B. Barrowman felt blessed for all the attention he had received, and he felt like just a regular guy despite his fame and success. He had incredible opportunities to meet stage and screen legends like Jack Lemmon and Kevin Spacey. In the end, Barrowman compares his own autobiography to Charles Dickens' last and unfinished novel, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*. Like the book, Barrowman's ending has yet to be written, and he is only at the "intermission" of his life.



Characters

John Barrowman

Barrowman is the subject of the biography. He was a multidimensional singer, actor, dancer, and television personality. He was born in 1967 in Scotland to a large family, and he caught the acting bug early on by acting and singing before his family at parties. At the age of nine, Barrowman's family moved to Illinois in the United States. Subjected to bullying by children for his accent, Barrowman learned to speak with both American and Scottish accents, an asset for his later performing career.

After being discovered by a choir director for his voice, Barrowman joined the choir and later took part in numerous plays at his high school. He pursued drama in college, and on a vacation to Scotland, he attended a casting call for the lead in Cole Porter's *Anything Goes*, which was being revived on London's West End. Barrowman got the part and his professional career began in earnest.

Barrowman was a brash, outspoken man who delighted in pulling pranks and performing other outrageous stunts with theater companies. Barrowman believed such pranks and jokes kept the energy in a company up and helped keep performances fresh. Later in his life, he used his outspoken personality to become a gay rights activist for several organizations. Barrowman attributed his success to his ability to take risks and to be confident in who he was, particularly confident in his homosexuality.

Cameron Mackintosh

Cameron Mackintosh was a well-known and well-regarded producer of musicals in both the United Kingdom and the United States (most particularly on Broadway). He produced Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Phantom of the Opera*, which began in 1986 and which was still running in New York and London more than 25 years later. He also produced the enormously popular *Les Miserables* and many other musical productions.

Mackintosh is cited by Barrowman as a profound influence on his life and his career. Mackintosh early on encouraged Barrowman to embrace the role of leading man, and Mackintosh groomed Barrowman to develop qualities and abilities important for the headlining position within a stage production.

Mackintosh was also openly gay. Men like Mackintosh became examples for Barrowman, who developed the strength and courage to become openly gay as well. Barrowman took it a step further by aggressively advocating for organizations and causes which sought to further gay rights and gay awareness.

Cameron Mackintosh cast Barrowman in *Miss Saigon* and *The Fix*, among several other productions. Barrowman relayed particular fondness for a getaway vacation he and his partner Scott Gill had with Mackintosh and his partner in a summer home Mackintosh



owned that dated from the Middle Ages. Barrowman and Gill, drunk and amorous, had sex in a tree believing that no one could see them. But Mackintosh saw them through a window and could only beam when he was reunited with the young lovers.

Russell T. Davies

Davies was the longtime showrunner of the popular British science fiction television series, Doctor Who. Davies believed in Barrowman enough to cast him as Captain Jack in the series. Barrowman cites Davies as an influence, a mentor, and a friend.

Stephen Sondheim

Sondheim was an extremely well-regarded songwriter and lyricist of stage musicals. Barrowman considered him to be "the master of the house" with all stage actors aspiring to one day be in a Sondheim musical. Barrowman got that chance by starring in two Sondheim productions in the late 1990s.

Beverly Holt

Bev Holt was Barrowman's high school drama teacher, and his most important early influence. Holt taught Barrowman to ignore naysayers and to be confident in who he was as a performer. Holt and Barrowman continued to work together for many years, particularly in an annual cabaret show.

Murn

Murn was the affectionate family nickname for Barrowman's grandmother. She was a feisty woman and was always ready to dispense some Scottish homespun wisdom. She accompanied the family when they moved to the United States and had difficulty adjusting to a new country so late in life. She died in the mid 1980s after suffering a stroke.

Peter Prick

Peter Prick is Barrowman's colorful derogatory nickname for a fellow leading man at the University of San Diego who competed against Barrowman due to professional jealousy. Barrowman got the "last laugh" on this actor by becoming much more successful than him.



Marilyn Rising

Marilyn Rising was a stage actor Barrowman befriended while in college. They dated for a time, but Barrowman could eventually not deny his homosexuality and he had an affair with a gay man while still a boyfriend to Rising. Instead of being outraged, Rising accepted Barrowman for who he was, and the two remained close friends.

Scott Gill

Barrowman first met Scott in 1993 at the famed Chichester Festival Theatre, where Barrowman was playing in a production called Rope. Lust turned to love, and Barrowman and Gill officially recognized their relationship with a civil partnership. Gill was "the love of my life" according to Barrowman.

Clare

Barrowman was very close with his niece, Clare. Clare almost did not live as a premature newborn who had to be separated from a stillborn twin. Barrowman greatly enjoyed going shopping and going on vacations with Clare and other family members.



Objects/Places

Anything Goes

Cole Porter's musical *Anything Goes* was revived on London's West End in 1989. Barrowman won an open casting call to play the lead part of Billy Crocker, and thus his professional career was started.

Joliet West High School

Joliet West High School was the high school Barrowman attended. He participated in the school band playing the flute, but his career aspirations really took off when a choir director discovered his strong voice. Thereafter, Barrowman participated not only in choir but in many stage plays and musicals.

Torchwood

Torchwood was the BBC television show Barrowman starred in as Captain Jack. *Torchwood* was a spinoff from the long-running science fiction series *Doctor Who*. At the time of the book's publication, *Torchwood* was still in production.

Dues and Don't Syndrome

Barrowman describes an unwritten rule among theater actors he calls the Dues and Don't Syndrome. Essentially, until a theater actor has paid his dues (that is, played bit parts and slowly worked his way up the ladder), then he doesn't get the best, choice roles. Barrowman thought this rule was foolish and he leapfrogged other actors into snagging lead roles very early in his career.

Dreamers Workshop

In a bid to give back to the community, Barrowman established the Dreamers Workshop with his old drama teacher Bev Holt. It was a series of summer camps and activities meant to encourage children to pursue careers in the performing arts.

Pranks

Barrowman was a notorious prankster on the stage and behind the scenes during his numerous stage productions. Barrowman felt pulling pranks kept the company fresh and the energy level high.



Opryland

Barrowman was a member of the Old Gold Singers for a couple of summer seasons during college, which was a mainstay in Opryland in Tennessee. Barrowman not only honed his craft, but he fully discovered his homosexuality amidst Opryland's vibrant gay community.

Theater Superstitions

Barrowman describes numerous theater superstitions believed in by actors, directors, producers, and other crew members in the theater community. For one example, one should always tell a theater actor "break a leg" instead of "good luck" before a performance. Barrowman fully believed in such superstitions.

West End

The West End in London is the equivalent of Broadway in New York, a premier destination for theater-goers. Barrowman described himself as West End's quintessential leading man, and indeed his career is most closely aligned with West End productions.

Putting It Together

Putting It Together was a revue of the music of Stephen Sondheim based around a loose plot. It premiered in Los Angeles in 1998, and Barrowman had a lead role in it. Barrowman considered a Sondheim musical to be the apex of theater art, and so he was greatly pleased to land the role.



Themes

Anything Goes

The title of the book, *Anything Goes*, is appropriate in several ways. *Anything Goes* is the name of the musical which started John Barrowman's professional career in 1989. But more broadly, it could refer to a "no holds barred" risk-taking attitude, an attitude which Barrowman explicitly acknowledges as essential to his success as a performer.

Early on, in high school, Barrowman's guidance counselor told him that his pursuit of the dramatic arts had to be supplemented with a "Plan B," a more reasonable course of study that could lead to employment and a livelihood should drama fail. But Barrowman, even at that age, never had any use for a Plan B. He had a "fame or bust" perspective, and he similarly encourages the reader to go for their dreams and never settle for second best.

Barrowman attributes his risk-taking to genetics. His father and his brothers were known as "wee rascals" who would terrorize the local neighborhood with mischief. In his own childhood, Barrowman would perform dangerous stunts on dares.

Barrowman also relates risk-taking to what he calls the Dues and Don't Syndrome. According to standard theater rules, a theater actor must pay his dues, acting in bit parts, before climbing the ladder and eventually rising up to lead roles. Barrowman had no patience for waiting in line. He boldly went after leading man roles immediately. And while this incurred the professional jealousy of several people around him, Barrowman succeeded in his goals and became a quintessential leading man.

A Quirky Personality

Barrowman's self-deprecating autobiography reveals that he had several significant phobias, superstitions, and quirks of personality that helped to define his persona both on stage and behind the scenes. Barrowman quickly adhered to many traditional theater superstitions, such as making sure to say "break a leg" instead of "good luck" to a performer about to go on stage, calling a theater "dark" when not in use instead of "closed," and delivering red roses to a performer after a performance rather than any other color of rose. In times these superstitions were broken, Barrowman became nervous and insufferable.

Another of Barrowman's personality quirks is that he detested having his face or neck touched. Barrowman traces this to a bully he nicknamed "Spotty Dick" who would hold him down and flick his dirty fingernails on his face. In a few humorous episodes, Barrowman relates having to "hold his breath" and resist the urge to violently act out when people have touched his face and neck. Barrowman's makeup and wardrobe people had to develop little gimmicks and distractions so they could touch these areas for their jobs.



Barrowman's reputation had also been defined by his penchant for pranks against fellow actors as well as crew members. He had a habit of flashing his butt ("mooning"), even in the middle of performances, to try to get a rise out of others. He engaged in farting contests with a fellow actor, much to the chagrin of everyone else. And Barrowman would otherwise try to throw actors off and make them laugh. Barrowman claimed that these stunts help to keep the energy level high after dozens of performances.

All of these frank descriptions of Barrowman's wilder side help to humanize the actor.

I Am What I Am

Barrowman's sexual orientation formed an important part of who he was. He grew up in a time when homosexuality was discouraged or outright discriminated against. But from an early age, Barrowman had a suspicion that he was gay. This was confirmed when he had his first gay romantic and sexual experiences as a member of the Old Gold Singers in Opryland, Tennessee in his late teens and early twenties.

As he came of age and became a professional, Barrowman's homosexuality became an "open secret" within the small theater community. He had an affair with a gay man while he was ostensibly the boyfriend to Marilyn Rising, and he dreaded being confronted with it. But Rising accepted Barrowman unconditionally and they became good friends. In another episode, Barrowman also dreaded telling his parents that he was gay. But like Rising, Barrowman's parents accepted him and were indifferent to his sexual orientation.

Men like musical producer Cameron Mackintosh helped to encourage Barrowman to be open and frank about his sexual orientation. In fact, the entire theater community, which is stereotyped as having a significant percentage of gay members, was supportive of Barrowman. Barrowman used this positive energy to become a spokesman for gay rights activism later in life, something he felt very passionately about.

Barrowman relates his homosexuality more generally to having confidence in being who he was, and never pretending he was anyone else. Barrowman equates happiness with being confident and assured in who one is.

Style

Perspective

As a self-proclaimed autobiography despite the fact that it was written by two people, *Anything Goes* is written as a first-person narrative of actor John Barrowman's humble beginnings and rise to fame. Barrowman portrays himself as a "regular guy" who through perseverance, naturally-gifted abilities, and confidence, was able to reach the pinnacles of theater art as a leading man in major West End productions.

While his career was larger than life, Barrowman takes pains to describe some "normal" activities - like camping, shopping, and getting into mischief as a young boy - alongside theater stories of rubbing elbows with people like Jack Lemmon, Andrew Lloyd Webber, and Carol Burnett. Barrowman stated that he had to resist the trappings of fame in order to retain an essential and unfiltered part of his personality, the part which has endeared him to audiences.

One essential part of his personality was his homosexuality, and Barrowman is particularly frank and open about this aspect. He rose in theater at a time when HIV and AIDS were terrorizing the gay community. This was also a time when many celebrities were fearful of coming out of the closet because they thought it would ruin their careers. Barrowman took a strong and bold stance on "outing" himself, and subsequently he participated in many gay rights activities.

As a reader, it is interesting to "read between the lines" a bit and interpret the events in Barrowman's life without Barrowman's own filter. While Barrowman treats his prima donna behavior, such as yelling at crew members, with self-deprecation and humor, the reader can imagine he was a nightmare to deal with behind the scenes.

Tone

Barrowman adopts a conversational, humorous, gossipy tone. As Barrowman explains in the Author's Acknowledgments, he hopes the reader will treat the book like an old friend sharing stories and laughing around a cozy fireplace.

The language used is decidedly informal. Barrowman often uses the f-word expletive and other expletives to make episodes even more outrageous. And the subject matter, along with Barrowman's outrageous delivery, is often earthy and even raunchy, such as the stage production in which Barrowman played the piano with his penis or the time he was caught having sex with his boyfriend in a tree by legendary musical producer Cameron Mackintosh. Barrowman never ceases to defuse such an episode with a sly, self-deprecating wink and a punchline. For example, with the episode of being caught having sex in the tree, Barrowman remarked that at least Mackintosh knew how flexible he was for possible future productions calling for a limber dancer.



While *Anything Goes* can and does get serious in a number of places, such as the death of Barrowman's roommate Midge and the death of the sister of Barrowman's partner Scott Gill, mostly the book is light-hearted and frothy. It could be said that Barrowman often inhabits the stereotype of the feminine, "fabulous" gay man in his book with such lines as "never separate a gay man from his accessories." Overall, the tone helps Barrowman establish *Anything Goes* as a fun, light romp through the highlights and lowlights of a theater performer's life.

Structure

Anything Goes is organized into nineteen chapters, which are themselves loosely confined to periods in Barrowman's life, major events, or themes. These chapters are only loosely confined because Barrowman often hops from subject to subject in a semi stream-of-consciousness fashion. This helps aid the author's stated purpose of making the reader feel they are conversing with an old friend around a fireplace, sharing stories. The structure works with the tone to create a friendly, conversational atmosphere. This type of structure also works to Barrowman's benefit by allowing him to briefly touch upon encounters with celebrities or other small events in his life that would not otherwise warrant an entire chapter. By giving himself the freedom to hop around, Barrowman is able to fit in the celebrity stories and gossip that are an important element of the readers' expectations for the book.

Highlighting the importance of theater to his life, Barrowman has named each chapter of the book for a song in a musical in which he has performed. These song titles provide a hint as to the content of the chapter. The final chapter, "Live, Laugh, Love," is an adequate summation of the author's perspective on life and how to live it. And Chapter 9, "No One is Alone," is a poignant comment on the life and death of Barrowman's roommate, Midge, who died after a bout of depression and mental disease.



Quotes

"What I remember is 'blah, blah, blah, blah, blah' because my brain stopped working at Gavin's first line: 'John, they want you to be Captain Jack!' Camera cuts quickly to our leading man jumping off the ground, punching the air with his fists and letting out a rebel yell."

Chapter 1, page 13

"From the moment I was born on 11 March 1967, I cried constantly, screaming in a pitch my family claims has permanently damaged their ability to hear certain sounds. On the plus side, my parents never hear their doorbell when a salesman rings, and now, frankly, they miss most of what they say to each other."

Chapter 2, page 21

"The episode [getting lost and being found] has remained one of my most vivid early childhood memories not because of its possible figurative connotations, but because it was my first manifestation of the Barrowman risk-taking gene. Over the years, that gene has shaped many of my personal and professional choices."

Chapter 3, page 38

"It was the summer before we moved to Joliet when I realized for sure I was gay - although I'd really known I was in my gut, or thereabouts, since the age of nine, when I'd seen my first girly magazine and been more interested in the male bits than the female bobs."

Chapter 5, page 75

"To this day, whether it's in front of a live television audience or at a Royal Variety Performance, the key is to not let my nerves take over, but instead to channel that adrenalin into my performance."

Chapter 6, page 84

"Many people believe that as individuals we're the product of some preconceived plan, some grand design that God, whatever you may call Him or Her, has predetermined for us, but I've always believed that was rubbish. I am who I am firstly because of genetics, and, running a close second, because of choices."

Chapter 7, page 93

"In all the stories I can tell you about my life and my career, the one about how my big break in theatre came about is still one of the coolest, because it has so many of the characteristics of a musical."

Chapter 8, page 110

"Most gay couples I know have lots in common with their non-gay counterparts. They are devoted to each other, concerned for their families and their futures, and are active contributing members to their neighborhoods and communities."

Chapter 11, page 147



"I have a few teensy weensy phobias and superstitions. On a scale of one to five - one being slightly superstitious to five being obsessive-compulsive about superstitions - theatre people in general are a six. I'm about an eight and a half." Chapter 12, page 149

"Don't take this litany of commitments as a complaint, however. I've always been busy and I always want to be busy. I like to keep my schedule packed because, honestly, I'm a nightmare to be around when I'm doing nothing or when I don't get to do all the things I want to."

Chapter 14, page 184

"I'm a nervous flyer at the best of times. The flight was taking off during one of the worst of times. I had everything that could be tightly clenched, clenched. I was having my own wee panic attack. As the plane began barreling down the runway, the woman sitting in front of me turned and asked, 'Have you found Jesus?'"

Chapter 16, page 211

"Charles Dickens' *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* has no conclusion and neither does this autobiography. My ending isn't written yet, my show's not over. Stay in your seats. This is only the intermission."

Chapter 19, page 245



Topics for Discussion

How does Barrowman relate risk-taking to his success as a performer?

What activities did Barrowman involve himself in to further gay rights and gay awareness?

How did Barrowman land his first professional debut in Cole Porter's *Anything Goes*?

What impact did producer Cameron Mackintosh have on Barrowman's career?

What does Barrowman feel is the importance of pranks and cutting-up among the crew of a stage production?

Describe some of the common theatre superstitions Barrowman believed in.

What accounts for Barrowman being, in his own word, "bidialectical"?