



**My wedding to Stephen**  
I bought my dress from DH Evans. After, we spent a few nights at The Bull in Long Melford, then left for New York, where our honeymoon was spent at a physics conference **Right** The wedding recreated in the film



# My love life... on the big screen



Jane Hawking, who was married to physicist Stephen Hawking for 26 years, talks to Victoria Young about seeing their love story live again in a feature film

**J**ane Hawking, 70, lives in Cambridge with her second husband, Jonathan Hellyer Jones. She and Stephen have two sons, Robert and Tim, and a daughter, Lucy. The film, *The Theory of Everything*, which stars Felicity Jones and Eddie Redmayne is based on her memoir, *Travelling to Infinity: My Life with Stephen*.

When Stephen and I first met at a party on News Year's Day in 1963, I was immediately very drawn to him. He was standing in a corner regaling some friends with a story of how he came to be in Cambridge, having done a first degree in Oxford. He'd messed up his Physics final so the examiners called him in to try and decide whether this rather eccentric candidate should be given a pass or a first. Stephen told them that if they gave him a first he'd go to Cambridge – but if they gave him anything else he'd stay in Oxford. So they gave him a first because they wanted to get rid of him, he said. It was just so funny – and he was so nice.

Watching some of the scenes of my meeting and the early years of life with Stephen unfold on film brought tears to my eyes because they were so true to real life. Felicity Jones came to dinner a few times during filming and, seeing her on film, a shiver went down my spine. I thought, "Oh that's extraordinary – she's stolen my personality!" She had my body language and the way that I talk, down to a tee. For much of the film, I sat there reliving our romance.

But there are other scenes that I don't relate to at all. Although Stephen's parents play a significant part in the film, I was upset that my parents don't appear as they were so warm and a tremendous moral support. A lot of the characters are conflated – and a lot of the struggle is diminished. But it's hard to fit 25 years into two hours and, on the whole, the film is amazing. The family and I – including Stephen – were all blown away by it.

A couple of months after Stephen and I met, I heard that he'd been having tests and had been diagnosed with some terrible incurable neurological disease. I didn't know anything about Motor Neurone Disease at the time and when I bumped into Stephen at the train station, on my way to a secretarial course I was

doing in London, he didn't say anything about it. He looked more or less OK and we got on so well that when he invited me to the theatre, I accepted. Gradually, we did more and more together and started going out properly.

## A gradual decline

I knew from the start that Stephen had been given two years to live and his illness began to be noticeable very early on. When we first started going out, we'd meet in central London and more than once he stumbled – once in Lower Regent Street, which was quite scary because he fell over in the middle of the road.

But Stephen never wanted to talk about his illness, which I accepted. We didn't want to waste the little time we had discussing hurtful things or letting his illness determine our lives. But, longer-term, avoiding the big issues is not a good recipe for a relationship because eventually a lack of communication causes a wedge.

My parents, when I told them we were getting married, never once tried

For much of the film, I sat there reliving our romance

to deter me even though they knew Stephen's prognosis. My mother said, "I understand how you feel because when your dad went to fight in the war I knew if anything happened to him

I'd want to nurse him." Just knowing that she understood was a tremendous support and she was marvellous throughout; there were times when she sat up all night nursing Stephen, if he had an infection and I was too exhausted.

My relationship with Stephen's parents was not so straightforward. They both went to Oxford and his father was a doctor. They were so different to my family and at first I thought they were quite fascinating. But I sensed that they



**Stephen when he was made a Fellow of the Royal Society** Below (from the film) The worse part of typing his PhD was all those equations!



did not approve of me because I wasn't an Oxbridge graduate, and therefore not good enough for Stephen. Then one day – 12 years into our marriage – his mother said, "I've never liked you – you do not fit into our family." That felt incredibly hurtful.

There were always two other partners in our marriage: Stephen's illness, and physics. The illness was a gradual decline and sometimes I didn't realise until I looked back at photos how much had changed, but things declined quickly. And, even though he had promised my father that he would not be a millstone around my >>



**Our eldest son Robert was only hours old in this picture** Right family life depicted in the film



## personal story

neck, Stephen was very reluctant to allow me to get any help. He felt it would be an admission that things were getting worse.

We lived in Cambridge because Stephen was doing his PhD there, and I soon realised that if I didn't have some academic pursuit I'd be a "nobody". Also, I thought I might have to support the family one day. So in my early twenties, I embarked on a PhD in medieval Spanish poetry, which turned into the longest PhD ever known – I finished it two days before my youngest son was born. I was so committed to Stephen though, and so determined that he'd survive and be a success that everything else was secondary.

When the children came along I was completely besotted by them, but looking after three young children as well as Stephen was unbelievably difficult. There was a stage, when the kids were under ten, when it really was tough. Stephen choked practically at every meal and his voice was so indistinct that only a handful of people could understand him.

When Jonathan came into our lives I truly believed that he was heaven-sent. I met him when I joined the church choir, which he ran. He was very sad because his wife had died of leukaemia a few years before so he was very lonely. And at that point in my life and my marriage,



**Left** This was taken on our favourite beach at Brancaster in Norfolk  
**Above** Captured in the film

I was sad and lonely too, because I had become sole carer for Stephen, and we were not able to communicate properly. When I married Stephen it didn't occur to me that I'd become so lonely – I was young, very enthusiastic, and we didn't think much beyond the two years that Stephen had been given to live.

Jonathan wanted to help, partly as a way of dealing with his own sadness. He started helping with Stephen, doing the physical things like lifting him, the day-to-day care, and chores that husbands normally do like putting the bins out. Jonathan's kindness was a great therapy for me. I was aware very quickly that I had feelings for him, and I knew he felt the same way. But we just had to sublimate it. I'm sure that Stephen must have been aware of it too, but we all had to be very disciplined. Jonathan went home each night and I stood beside Stephen, waving him goodbye.

Then, in 1985, Stephen had a bout of pneumonia that left him so ill I was asked if I wanted to terminate his life support. I refused, and the consequence was his tracheotomy, which removed what remained of his speech. It was really dire for him; just dreadful. But, against all the odds, he pulled through and it was almost miraculous that a speech machine came from America and he could master the technology, which gave him his own voice.

### End of our marriage

The tracheotomy meant round the clock nursing care, and that was when things got very difficult. Pretty quickly, it was as if the family didn't exist. It wasn't Stephen's fault – he had no idea. I was so happy for

Stephen when his career really took off with his book, *A Brief History of Time*. But people assumed he was very wealthy and that attracted the wrong sort of carers. I tried to protect the children from the effects of Stephen's fame but it was very difficult.

In 1990, Stephen sent me a letter announcing his intention to leave the family home. Things had been difficult for a while and this was the end of our marriage but I felt neither sadness nor relief; I was numb. And Jonathan and I had never even contemplated the possibility of a future together without Stephen so we had no fantasies or dreams about it.

We divorced five years later. In that time, I began leading a normal life; a tremendous luxury after more than 25 years of a life which had never really been normal. Jonathan and I were married in 1997 and have always cherished our normality and our privacy.

Stephen now lives round the corner. I still feel very protective towards him and I like to visit and make sure he is all right. The children love their father – and they adore Jonathan too. I'm very close to Lucy, who is a children's author, Robert works for Microsoft in Seattle and Tim is a successful marketing manager. I'm very proud of all of them.

I've always been an optimist, perhaps to my own cost. But justifiably so – because Stephen is still alive at the age of 73! And I've been very lucky: I have wonderful children and grandchildren and I am married to Jonathan. So although we've had extremely difficult times, I've been given a happy ending. **w&h**

The Theory of Everything is in cinemas now. Jane's book is *Travelling to Infinity* (Alma Books)



Jonathan's kindness was a great therapy for me



**Above** My PHD – it took years to complete **Below** My wedding to Jonathan

