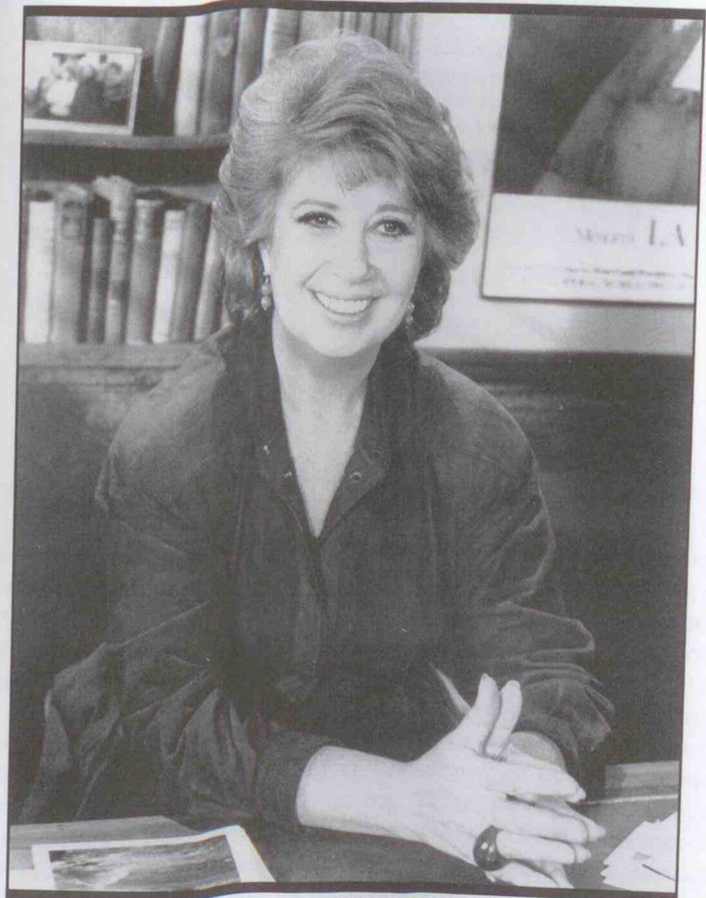
THREE

Undaunted and Undefeated



PHOTOGRAPH BY MARTHA SWOPE ASSOCIATES, CAROL ROSEGG.

BEVERLY SILLS

I once walked on the beach with Mrs. Kennedy. It was after both her boys had been murdered, and I said to her, "I just don't know how you've stood what you have." And she said, "Well, I think that sometimes God inflicts the most suffering on the people he loves the most. And every once in a while, I clench my fist and I shake it up to heaven and I say, I won't be defeated!" I've kept that with me a long time.

There's a little plant over there with printing on the pot that says, "I won't be defeated." That plant was one leaf, and I clipped it off a great big thing that was dying and stuck it in the ground. This whole office got hysterical because, as you can see, we're undergound—we have no windows, no light. They all laughed at me. Look at the size of that plant now. I think you have to take everything that looks like a blow and turn it into a triumph. This is where my energy comes from: I just won't be licked.

—BEVERLY SILLS, 1984

■

The powerful will and self-confidence that this story reveals is apparent immediately upon meeting Beverly Sills. Tall and solid, she gives off the air of being utterly unshakable—not a nervous giggle or fidget to be seen. She is calm, stately, large, and even a trifle stern, in spite of a curly, feminine hairdo and heavy makeup; she is a mixture of queen and mother. But her assurance also makes her easy to be with, and she laughs readily and merrily, her expressive eyebrows arching high above her lively eyes. Indeed, her face changes dramatically with her moods, perhaps a result of her many years performing the melodramas of opera, perhaps a natural talent that added to her acting. When she smiles, her round cheeks bunch up into a happy, girlish grin, which is enhanced by the reddish-blond curls that frame her head. When she is serious—and she often is—the lines circling under those cheeks pull her face down into an expression that is achingly sad. But capability radiates from her every move. She makes you, somehow, want to lay your fate in her hands.

This capability, which she probably possessed ever since the age

of three, when she was already winning talent contests and doing radio shows, has been essential to her dual career as singer and opera director. As an opera singer, she has achieved one of the most distinguished careers in the field. She was a leading soprano for both the Metropolitan and New York City Operas and has sung with famous companies throughout the world, thus becoming one of the first Americans to break through the traditional prejudice that only Europeans can sing opera. When she retired from singing in 1980—"I got out while they were still fighting to buy tickets to hear me. I believe in getting out when you're on top, and that's what I did"—she became general director of the New York City Opera.

In that position, Sills has created the first home company for American singers, who have traditionally gone to Europe for training and experience. She has also embraced new, innovative operas written by young composers and has kept the company predominantly American, unlike the Metropolitan Opera, which follows the time-honored practice of importing famous European singers as its stars. She has worked to get funding and scholarships for young singers, and many in her company are Hispanic, black, or from less-than-wealthy backgrounds.

"I am responsible for everything you see and hear from the minute you walk in here!" she says with a somewhat proud laugh. "I frequently say that I never share blame, I never share credit, and I never share desserts!" Then she adds more seriously, "To run an opera company—well, it only advances by crisis. But the buck stops here."

The work of running an opera company makes Sills's days seem "endless," as she puts it. She gets up at 6:00 A.M. to make breakfast for her husband, Peter Greenough, a retired newspaper executive, and their twenty-five-year-old daughter, Muffy. She goes to her office in Lincoln Center at 8:30 and spends an hour dictating letters and memos. Then she begins an eternal round of fundraising activities, rehearsals, production meetings, and decision making. She takes no lunch, unless it is part of a fundraising event, and if there's a performance she must watch it either in the theater or on her closed-circuit television, so the day doesn't end until 11:00 P.M. If there is no performance, she collapses into bed at 9:00.

"Sometimes, I feel just plain sleepy," she admits.

She tries to get home for dinner, so that she can at least have a couple of hours with her family, but often her husband and daughter have to meet her at Lincoln Center and take her out for the meal. Sometimes her husband brings his books and sits quietly in the office with Sills as she works.

Because she spends so much time at work, Sills has decorated her office to look like a home. It is a surprising sight, for the rest of the "backstage" area of the opera house, which is really underground, has the cold, institutional look of a hospital: corridors of white tile and brown metal lockers in dim electric light. Her living-room-like office is clearly a haven: overstuffed chairs, couches, and a chaise lounge rest on the thick carpet, knickknacks given to her by fans crowd the coffee table, and posters of past operas adorn the walls. On one wall hangs a lush blue-velvet curtain that sweeps from ceiling to floor. It is embroidered with elaborately bejeweled queens, representing the many queens Sills has played in her operatic roles. "I'm here so much and so long that sometimes, I'll stretch out on that chair and put the light on and do my work, just so that I can get the feeling that I'm not surrounded by desks and typewriters" she says.

Beverly Sills did not have the beginnings one might expect of an opera "superstar," as the press has often labeled her. Born Belle Miriam Silverman fifty-five years ago, she grew up in what was then a typical middle-class Jewish area of Brooklyn—Coney Island. It was a far-from-affluent neighborhood, and the family often experienced hard times.

"At one time we had to move to a one-bedroom apartment," Sills recalls, "and the three of us slept in the hallway. My two brothers shared a hide-a-bed and I slept on a cot. We only had a radio because my grandfather built us one, and when my father got a car, the whole neighborhood had a ride in it. And we all wore hand-me-downs. But my father made a good living and we never went without food."

Her father, a Rumanian Jew who came to this country as an infant ("I don't want to forget that I have some gypsy blood in me," Sills says, "I kind of like that"), was the undisputed head of the household. He laid down the law, was served first at every dinner party, paid all the bills, and even accompanied his wife when she went clothes shopping. "She never paid a bill in her life!" Sills says, laughing. "When she went to buy her clothes, he went with her. He thought she was the most beautiful woman he'd ever seen and he told everybody so. He loved to dress her and take her and show her off, and she really was beautiful. In the early days, when

I was auditioning—it was the time of Shirley Temple and all the child stars—we'd go to the movie companies and they were really much more interested in my mother than in me. She was really a knockout."

In spite of her father's old-fashioned values, he encouraged his only daughter to achieve in school as much as his two sons.

"He gave me my sense of discipline," she says. "He didn't have any respect for people who would not finish what they had set out to do. He was also very practical." He made her go to summer camp once, for example, because he wanted her to have interests other than singing, in case that didn't work out for her. "You can't be single-minded about anything," he told her.

When Sills won the Most Distinguished Athlete Award at camp that summer, her father was proud. When she got top grades throughout school and showed an amazing aptitude for languages—by the age of ten she could speak French, Italian, and a little Russian—he was proud, too. He wanted her to be smart. But he never dreamed of her being an opera star. He didn't approve when she began doing radio commercials and programs as a child. The dream of being an opera singer come from her mother.

"My mother wasn't a stage mother, but she gave us the dream that we could be anything we wanted, that nothing was out of our reach and that she was there to help us achieve whatever the dream was. And that's exactly how it turned out—we all became what we set out to be, and it's all due to her. My mother is without question the most dominating force in my life."

The discipline from her father, the dream from her mother—perhaps the perfect combination for the making of success. Yet, probably none of it would have come to anything if Sills herself hadn't had an extraordinary drive and an extraordinary gift—her voice. When did she realize that she had such a talent?

"I knew later, not right away. When I was three, I was having such a good time singing and tap dancing and going on the radio and my Mama making me pretty dresses—it was just a lot of fun. It was really much later, when I began to listen to my mother's collection of recordings, that I got terribly enthralled with the sound of a trained human voice.

"My mother took me to my first opera when I was eight, and I was hooked. I thought it was the most beautiful thing I'd ever heard and I only knew that I wanted to sing like that and be on that stage. And when I told my mother, she hadn't the slightest

idea how to begin. She was only giving me singing and tap dancing and piano lessons because she thought all little girls should do those things. What do you do with a child of eight with such an ambition? If you discuss it with anyone, they look at the child as if she's some sort of monster. And I wasn't. I was just a nice little kid who wanted to be an opera singer!

"When I began to push to learn opera, my mother found me a teacher, Miss Liebling. It turned out to be so expensive my father just couldn't afford it—singing lessons were for daughters of very rich people. So I helped pay for it by doing radio commercials and, later, I sang in an after-hours club for tips. But Miss Liebling became terribly interested in me and let my father pay what he could. In a sense, she was my patron, which was very unusual in those days.

"But I didn't really become engrossed with my own voice till I was about twelve. I couldn't get over what I could do! Suddenly I was hearing it, and it wasn't a baby voice anymore. It was like suddenly looking down and you have bosoms! I put on my mother's Galli-Curci and Lily Pons recordings and found that I could do all the scales and fancy things they were doing! I thought, 'I can do what they can do!' I didn't realize what quality meant yet. As far as I was concerned, if they could turn three somersaults, I could, too. The fact that I finished up landing on my behind and they were landing standing up and looking like ballerinas didn't enter my mind!"

But her gift for singing was not all she had. She was also able to learn an entire operatic role in three or four days—another remarkable talent. And she could devote herself to work in a way that few children that age ever can.

"My life literally changed when I was about ten or eleven because I dropped my friends. I was so hooked on this art form that I spent all my time in the library, looking up operas, the lives of composers." Impatient with her inability to read operas in Italian, she paid a man in the neighborhood fifty cents an hour to teach her. "Reading just opened up a whole new world to me, and I was ready to move."

When she was twelve, Sills's parents put a stop to her life in "show biz" because they wanted her to have a more normal existence. She did—she was popular in school, did well in her studies, and had a boyfriend—but she still devoted every spare minute to music, singing and learning operas. She also kept auditioning for

operatic and chorus parts, and she got almost everything she tried out for. But, until she was fifteen, her father wouldn't hear of her going on stage. "First you go to college, then try the stage," he insisted. Finally, however, when she got a chance to tour Europe singing in a Gilbert and Sullivan repertory, he gave in. To make it up to him, she won a mathematics scholarship to Fairleigh Dickinson College before she left.

Sills was never to take advantage of that scholarship or to go to college, for her career quickly took off. By the time she was nineteen, she was an opera singer. Looking back now, how much does she thing her success was due to her talent and how much to sheer hard work?

"Well, I think having a singing voice is a unique talent. It's kind of like a diamond. You can't manufacture a diamond—if you do, it's a fake. But, it does have to be polished and put in its proper setting in order to be appreciated. In the case of a creative talent such as singing or painting, I think quite a lot is God-given. Then it is honed and polished on earth.

"But opera is a highly disciplined art form. You have to know at least two languages, you have to be a musician. It's a lifetime of study and discipline, not just an overnight thing."

Many people don't realize this. Movies and gossip magazines habitually depict opera stars as leading glamorous and fast lives.

"Forget all that—it's all a joke!" Sills exclaims. "You can't sing with a hangover, you can't sing with a sore throat from a lot of smoking. You can't sing if you're tired because breath control is the key to all singing, and you get winded. It's a very athletic art form, and you have to be fit. It's not an art form that goes on in spite of the way you feel either, it goes on *because* of the way you feel. Yelling at football games is not for a singer. Nor is yelling at the children! My children were blessed because I was so aware of those vocal chords that I never raised my voice!"

Sills laughs her merry laugh, and leans back against the couch. Cool and unruffled in a plain white summer dress, she nevertheless looks weary. Her lifetime of discipline is apparent in her controlled demeanor, and her fifty-odd years of singing can be heard in the huskiness of her voice.

With a life that has always been and still is so busy, it is hard for Sills to find the time to relax. She tries to take six weeks off a year now, although the opera's schedule never allows her to take the time all at once, and during the season she never gets a Sunday off

because there are always two performances that day. Her favorite forms of relaxation are doing jigsaw puzzles, playing word games with her husband, and playing bridge with friends. But getting adequate time to spend with her family has never been easy, and she has a lot of family—three stepdaughters, her own two children, and now grandchildren as well.

"The question is always put to me, 'How did you manage to have it all—career and family?" she says, a little sadly. "Well, I didn't have it all. When you go for all, somebody pays the price. In my case, I think my daughter Muffy paid the price because I was away so much. I kept her with me a lot—by the time she was five, she'd been around the world three times—but I think growing up well was a challenge for her.

"Still, there was one mistake I didn't make. I always let my husband and children know that if at any time they wanted me to stop what I was doing, I would stop. They never asked me to, so I guess I was lucky."

Sometimes, though, there were difficult clashes between family and career demands. With a mixture of amusement and regret, Sills describes two such occasions.

"Once, when I was ready to go out to sing a performance of *The Magic Flute*, I went to say goodbye to one of my daughters, who was miserable with a fever and a cold. I was all dressed up because there was going to be a little opening-night party in the theater afterward. I leaned down, she put her arms around me, I picked her up out of bed, and she threw up all over me!" Sills grimaces.

"So I cleaned us both up, put on a pair of old pants and a shirt, and went down to the theater and sang. I never went to the party." Sills pauses, thinks for a moment, then shrugs. "There are moments when you just can't imagine how you get your act together to go on. I was once so tired from having stayed up all night with the children—three of them had measles and it was like a little hospital ward at home—that, after I did my first aria, I walked off the stage into the dressing room door and gave myself a black eye. I was too tired to realize the door was half open. In between that aria and the next there is about a thirty-minute lapse—this was also *The Magic Flute*—and people ran with ice cubes and everything. The second aria is very hard, and I did it very badly. Sometimes, it is just impossible."

Sills's problems as a mother were not only ordinary ones, however. One of her stepdaughters and both her own children have

disabilities. Muffy is deaf; one stepdaughter is mentally retarded; and her son, Bucky, is deaf, autistic, epileptic, and mentally retarded. She found out about her son's handicaps when he was a baby, only two months after receiving the stunning news that her daughter was deaf. Yet, even in the face of these tragedies—and perhaps partly because of them—she has held on to her refusal to be defeated.

"I've always found that at the very pit, and I've been to the pit a lot, there's something that pulls you back up," she says intensely, the sad lines showing again. "I don't know if we're all assigned a little guardian angel or what, but I believe you can only be defeated by yourself, and I don't believe in self-defeat. They told me Bucky would never feed himself—he feeds himself. They told me he would never be toilet trained—he's toilet trained. And he's twenty-three years old, so don't think *that* wouldn't have been catastrophic. They said that the drugs to control his epilepsy were in their infancy and wouldn't work well. This was twenty-one years ago, and today they're not in their infancy and he is controlled. His autism—we're reaching him. He's been taught six signs that they use for the deaf, so he's finally communicating.

"And if I've given my daughter nothing else, I've given her [the belief] that she isn't going to be licked either. She's a crackerjack athlete because when she started saying, 'I can't do this 'cause I can't hear the commands, I can't do that 'cause I can't hear what my teammates are doing'—I said, 'Your prowess, your capabilities have nothing to do with other people.' So she has to be twice as alert as the next guy, so what? They said it would take her years to learn to speak—she speaks. She said, how could she be an artist? Now she's designing comic books. She designs *Superman* and *Batman* and other comics, and she's very good at it. She wanted to travel but was worried about traveling alone. I said fine, join a group. I don't accept from her, 'I can't, I can't.' I don't believe in handicaps!"

Because of the problems her children have, Sills became the National Chairwoman of the Mothers' March on Birth Defects for the March of Dimes in 1972. She helped to raise $70 million within ten years and, unlike many celebrities, she hasn't just lent her name, she's really worked. She visits hospitals, meets the parents of birth-defected children, fundraises, and spends time with the children themselves. In her autobiography, *Bubbles*, there is a photograph of her that acutely expresses her sadness. She is half turned

toward the camera, reaching down toward a child in a wheelchair, her eyes fixed on him. Her brow is furrowed and the lines that encircle her cheeks are deeper than ever. In that picture, she is not a star—there is no thought for herself or her looks. She quite plainly just hurts.

Yet, she has enjoyed the work, and says that if she had chosen a career other than singing, it probably would have been in the social services, an avocation that is evident in the work she does do. She has, for example, initiated a program to bring opera to disadvantaged children in their own environments. She sends out busloads of singers with costumes and props to schools, where they perform a forty-five-minute excerpt from an opera. According to Sills, they are reaching about 35,000 children a year now in New York State.

"I don't believe in busing children into Lincoln Center and showing them this glamorous, gorgeous theater that they might never go into again. I believe in bringing it to them in their ambiance so that it becomes part of their everyday life. I'd like them to know that every week, somebody's going to come and tell them a story and sing to them a little bit. I don't care if they become opera lovers or rock lovers, it's just that music should be an integral part of their lives."

She has also worked to make the New York City Opera available to people who like it, regardless of how poor they are.

"People think, 'Opera—big, fat ladies with horns coming out of their heads. That's dead and buried," she says vehemently. "Opera is not just for the rich lady who has lots of pearls around her neck."

Opera was originally a popular, family entertainment, and in most of Italy it still is. Opera companies tour the country and perform in large theaters for low prices. People come with food and wine and, instead of acting hushed and reverent like American audiences, they cheer the heroes, boo the villains, and throw flowers at the heroines. Grown men cry at the tragedies, and everyone jumps up and down and yells at the end. Sills wants to revive this spirit in the New York City Opera, so she sells tickets for $5.50 and up, instead of the $75 they can cost at the Metropolitan; sometimes special performances sell for even less. She has seats in the Standing Room Only sections, so that no one has to be uncomfortable, and she is constantly seeking out corporations willing to underwrite tickets to make them even cheaper. In a truly revolutionary move, she has hung a screen above the stage on which the words of the opera are translated into English, so that everyone can follow

the story. Her view is that people should be able to enjoy opera, regardless of how they are dressed or how much they know about music.

"My only requirement for people who come into the theater is that they come with the idea that they would like to have a good time!"

The innovations Sills has introduced have brought criticism as well as praise. Indeed, throughout her life she has been more subject than most to the opinions of others, because she has so long been in the public eye. How does she cope with criticism?

"Well, it all starts with self-belief. You simply have to believe that you are good at what you do and that what you do is special. I think each one of us is special; otherwise God would have made us all alike. Isn't it interesting that there are no two voices that are exactly alike?

"When I sang a good performance, it didn't matter what was said about it. You could not take that performance away from me. On the other hand, if I gave a bad performance, and I read the next day that it was good, it was still bad. You couldn't take that away from me either, or the ache in my heart from knowing that I had done a second-rate job. But I just don't accept other people putting the stamp of defeat on me. They don't have a right to do that. Only I do. And I just don't punish myself by agreeing with people who don't like me!"

She sits back, the determined, triumphant note in her voice still echoing in the room. She seems to be catching her breath, for she has been speaking fast and passionately.

"I don't think my opinion is worth less than anybody else's," she continues. "I don't know anybody who's in that superior a position to me. There's nobody on earth! I came on earth with as much as they've got." She smiles again, then says almost ferociously, "In whatever I do, I do as best I can, and I don't owe anybody any more!"

SILLS COMMENTARY

Beverly Sills was an easy person to profile because she talks like a book. Candid, clear, amusing, she is a natural storyteller—my twenty-two pages of transcribed interview read almost as well as a written autobiography. She has no difficult accent to decipher,

no habit of winding away on distracting diatribes—she is always quotable. The one problem was her fame. She was so used to being interviewed: how was I going to get something different?

I collected the usual wad of files on her from the library, plowed through the interviews, and read her autobiography, *Bubbles* (her nickname). Naturally, I was struck by the tragedies she had undergone in her personal life—a singer, a lover of music, whose children were both deaf; a highly accomplished, brilliant woman whose son was retarded and autistic..The juxtaposition of the effervescent image of "Bubbles" with these private tragedies intrigued me, and I wanted to explore them. But I was also struck by the fact that she'd been in the public eye since she was three. What is it, I began to wonder, that makes people like Sills ambitious and successful? Where did her drive and talent originate? Was she pushed by someone, or did she push herself? Where did she get the confidence to keep trying, even in the face of defeat? Is there something different in the life of highly successful people that makes them able to push so far above the crowd? These questions were not the ones Sills had usually been asked. Perhaps, I thought, this theme could make the piece different.

Sills made the interview easy for me because she was unabashed and not at all secretive about her struggles. She spoke honestly and with affection about her childhood, her parents, and her career. The only time I felt she dissembled was when I asked her whether she was attracted to the idea of being famous as a child, and she insisted that she didn't see opera singers as associated with fame. "I had no idea these were famous people, I just knew that whatever that woman was doing, I wanted to do."

As I listened to Sills, I quickly began to see the power of her will. It was hard to know whether that power was a result of being used to fame or was an attribute that pushed her toward the fame to begin with, but it was unmistakable. She had the same kind of hard-edged confidence I would see in Susan Sontag but was much more at ease with her prominence. She was clearly used to being a boss, to being obeyed, and to being efficient. She was not the sort of person one would easily cross.

As the interview went on, I began to notice other sides of her personality that might have made her "different," too. Her irrepressible humor, her articulateness, her intelligence, her talent, her "presence," and her extraordinary level of energy. She was, in many ways, larger than life.

I also discovered another aspect of her fame as we talked—a set of pet peeves she was going to bring up regardless of my questions. (People who are used to being interviewed often have a range of pat statements they depend upon to get them through interviews. I don't think Sills was particularly guilty of this, but I was wary of the danger. As said earlier, the only way around this is to study up on one's subject enough to find the questions that will elicit original answers.) One of her pet peeves was the importance of family life. "Don't forget I was born fifty-five years ago and 'women's lib' was an absolutely unknown phrase," she said. "So, although I'm very enthusiastic about the liberation movement, the liberation of the woman's mind is what I'm enthusiastic about. I'm not enthusiastic about the destruction of the family unit." She talked about the importance of family, in her own life and in general, for pages.

"There are so many changes from the time that I grew up," she said. "We were more physically affectionate, very demonstrative. There was nothing self-conscious about it. Now we have such difficulty with relationships that, if we see two men earnestly talking with one another, we immediately decide that they are homosexual. Two women walking down the street holding hands, we immediately think they are gay women. But when we were kids it was a very affectionate society. I never saw my brothers leave the house without kissing my father goodbye, even when they were adults."

Sills also was unstoppable when she got into memories of her childhood. Her father died when she was twenty, leaving her obviously sad that he didn't live to see how his children and grandchildren have done, and in a sense she seemed to be reiterating her memories for him. She glowed with love for her parents.

"They were a marvellous team," she recalled. "He had a volatile temper, she had no temper at all—always cheerful, always giggling and laughing. She's sixty now, and she still giggles! She could talk him in and out of anything. But he could shoot off in a second. It wasn't frightening, though.

"I remember we all had chores. My oldest brother's chore was to take the garbage out. There were no disposables, none of the big, fancy garbage bags—it was really a kind of unpleasant task. My mother had asked my older brother several times to do it and he just didn't, so finally she lifted up this heavy thing and took it out herself.

"My father waited until the next night at dinner. We were all seated and suddenly he got up and went over to the garbage pail,

took out the bag of garbage and put it in the middle of the dining room table, right in front of my brother. My brother looked up and my father said to him, 'Since you seem to enjoy living with it so much, you might as well eat it.' So my brother took the garbage out after that!"

The only drawback to Sills's volubility was that it made it difficult for me to maintain control of the interview. I would ask her a question such as "How did your mother influence your ambitions?" and she would go off into a fifteen-minute digression on the importance of fathers as role models. I would then have to steer her back by fishing out a point she'd just made and applying it to my next question. "But it seems that the combination of your parents' personalities was ideal for encouraging ambition." Or, "Talking about discipline, I wanted to ask you how much you think talent is innate, and how much of it is plain work?"

As for tackling the delicate question of her children, she made that easy for me, too. I had planned to wait until we had been talking for some time—until we were both comfortable—to bring it up, but she jumped the gun on me and mentioned it first. Once she had opened the subject, it enabled me to draw her out on her philosophy of life and how she has managed to keep going in the face of tragedy. As she spoke about her children, I saw the same relentless determination to do her best for them that she had used to realize her ambitions. When she went into her speech about God and fate and optimism, ending with the story about Rose Kennedy and the plant that wouldn't be defeated with which I opened the piece, I realized that my two themes—the tragic history behind the happy mask, and how a person gets famous—had finally united. Beverly Sills, I saw, was hard and serious and fierce under the charm. She was, as my title reflected, undefeatable.

I had been assigned this profile by the New York City Commission on the Status of Women, which was putting together a book called *Women Making History*, a collection of fifteen portraits of New York women designed for use in high schools throughout New York State. I and four co-authors were told not to write down to the teenage audience but to make sure to emphasize aspects of our subjects that might be inspirational to our young readers. The book was supposed to provide role models to high school girls, and thus it encompassed profiles of women in all different fields, from all sorts of ethnic, racial, and economic backgrounds. (Some of the other profiles, for instance, were of a Puerto Rican doctor, Maria

Rodriguez-Trias; newscaster Charlayne Hunter-Gault; vice-presidential candidate Geraldine Ferraro; and handicapped marathon champion Linda Down.) This brings up another point I haven't yet mentioned—the demands of the market. As "free" as profile writers are to interpret their subjects, the market—the house style of the magazine, the editor's perceptions of the readers' tastes and prejudices—still controls the form, and to some extent, the language of the piece. Had I been writing a profile of Beverly Sills for *New York Woman*, it probably would have been more irreverent and gossipy; for the *New Yorker*, more thorough, with more emphasis on backstage at the opera; for a music magazine, more technical.

Looking back on this and on the other four profiles I did for that book, I regret that I was forced to write them so fast. If one is to regard a profile as a complete portrait, as a record for posterity—and now that Sills is retired from her position of director of the New York City Opera this piece does take on the aspect of history—one wants it to be thorough. My twenty-two pages of notes contain a lot more of her than I managed to get across in this relatively small, tight piece.

FOUR

Filling Silences with Strong Voices

PAULE MARSHALL