

**Ca. 1973**

With John Paul Getty III (shown here in the early '70s, before the 1973 kidnapping), "there was a degree of celebrity that attracted people to him," says his friend Philippe Mora. "But he really was very charming." Getty saw himself differently. "I've always been distant from people, even as a small child," he said in 1974. "I don't trust anybody in the world."

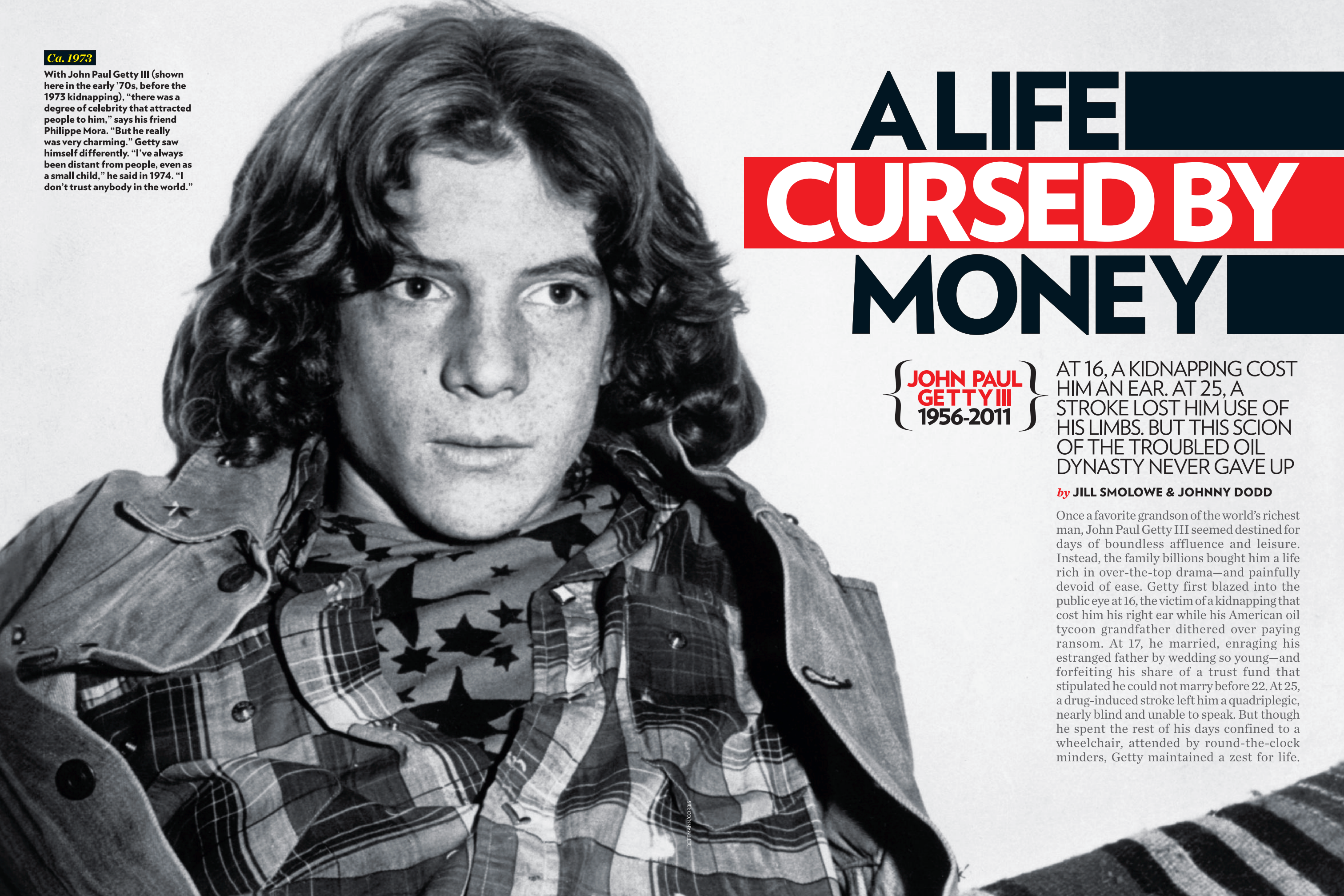
# A LIFE CURSED BY MONEY

**JOHN PAUL  
GETTY III**  
1956-2011

AT 16, A KIDNAPPING COST HIM AN EAR. AT 25, A STROKE LOST HIM USE OF HIS LIMBS. BUT THIS SCION OF THE TROUBLED OIL DYNASTY NEVER GAVE UP

**by JILL SMOLOWE & JOHNNY DODD**

Once a favorite grandson of the world's richest man, John Paul Getty III seemed destined for days of boundless affluence and leisure. Instead, the family billions bought him a life rich in over-the-top drama—and painfully devoid of ease. Getty first blazed into the public eye at 16, the victim of a kidnapping that cost him his right ear while his American oil tycoon grandfather dithered over paying ransom. At 17, he married, enraging his estranged father by wedding so young—and forfeiting his share of a trust fund that stipulated he could not marry before 22. At 25, a drug-induced stroke left him a quadriplegic, nearly blind and unable to speak. But though he spent the rest of his days confined to a wheelchair, attended by round-the-clock minders, Getty maintained a zest for life.







**1965**  
A miserly patriarch who initially refused to pay the ransom for his grandson, John Paul Getty (center) refused J. Paul III's call when the boy phoned to thank him for buying his freedom.



**1973** Getty (at a police station in Lagonegro, southern Italy, soon after he was sprung by his kidnapers) rarely spoke of the incident, but "he suffered quite a bit from it," says Mora.



**1966** After divorcing Getty's mother, J. Paul II married Dutch actress Talitha Pol (together at a nightclub in Rome).



**1975 and 2003**  
Getty and his wife, Martine Zacher (above), with their son Balthazar (in his arms) and her daughter Anna (in her arms). Though divorced when Anna married (right), both attended the wedding.



## “IT’S A MORALITY STORY ABOUT WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU PUT MONEY FIRST” —ROBERT LENZNER, GETTY BIOGRAPHER

“His strength of character was unbelievable,” says his friend Philippe Mora, a film director. “He always had this hunger to know what was going on.”

On Feb. 5 Getty, who spent his final years in Europe, died at the family’s 2,500-acre Buckinghamshire estate, northwest of London, surrounded by his immediate family. He was 54. “[He] never let his disability keep him from living life to the fullest,” said his son Balthazar Getty, an actor, who appears on ABC’s *Brothers & Sisters*. “He was an inspiration to all of us, showing us how to stand up to all adversity.”

Born in San Francisco in 1956, Getty (known as Little Paul) grew up with his three younger siblings in Rome, where his father (called Big Paul) served as head of the Italian wing of the Getty oil conglomerate. Just 8 when his parents

divorced, Getty was subsequently raised by his mother, former actress Gail Harris, and only rarely saw his reclusive father, J. Paul II. A party boy by the time he was 15, Getty once described himself as a “real menace” who was “thrown out of seven or eight schools” before he dropped out of high school and took up a bohemian lifestyle that didn’t play well with all members of the sprawling clan spawned by grandfather J. Paul I and his five wives. By day Getty made and sold paintings and jewelry; by night he partied in Rome’s most fashionable nightclubs. “[My] dad would try to keep us away from [J. Paul III] because he felt he was a bad influence,” says a family member. During this period, this relative claims, Getty “was hanging out with the Red Brigade. He thought it

was the hip, rebellious thing to do.”

That wild-child reputation, compounded by rock-star good looks, earned Getty the press moniker Golden Hippie after his kidnapping in 1973—an event that captured international headlines. In a 1974 interview with *Rolling Stone*, he said he was seized by four men around 3 a.m. (shortly after visiting a Rome newsstand), bound, pistol-whipped, then driven to Calabria, where he spent the next five months blindfolded by day and often tethered. Initially his notoriously tightfisted grandfather refused to meet the ransom demand, saying, “I have 14 other grandchildren, and if I pay one penny now, then I’ll have 14 kidnapped grandchildren.” Some within the Getty clan suspected the matter was a hoax staged by J. Paul III that “became a real kidnapping when things failed to work,” says the relative.

The game changer: the severing of Getty’s ear. “It happened very fast,” Getty told *Rolling Stone*. “It sounded like a *pssst*. . . I bit right through that wad of handkerchief and cried.” After J. Paul III’s ear and a lock of his hair arrived by mail at a newspaper in Rome, according to biographer Robert Lenzner, J. Paul I ended the standoff by contributing \$2.2 million—and charging J. Paul II interest for the rest of the almost \$3 million ransom. As for J. Paul III, “I don’t think he was ever normal again,” says the relative.

Though his subsequent marriage to German filmmaker Martine Zacher, then 24, cut Getty off from his family’s wealth, he remained a familiar face in elite counterculture circles. “He was well-liked by the intelligentsia, folks like [Andy] Warhol,” says Mora. Left to fend for himself, Getty tried to make it in Hollywood, pursuing act-

ing and working as Mora’s assistant. “He was very film literate and had very valuable connections,” says Mora. Among his enthusiasms: an appetite for drugs and booze—a deadly combination that after his stroke left him with a monthly home-care tab of \$25,000. When Getty’s father refused to foot the bill, his mother took the matter to court, where a judge lectured J. Paul II: “Mr. Getty should be ashamed of himself. He’s spending far more money on court obligations than on living up to his moral duties.” Funds and a reconciliation followed. “They became very close,” says Getty’s godfather William Newsom. “They saw each other on a daily basis.” Upon J. Paul II’s death in 2003, Getty was well-off. “He had millions,” says Newsom, “not billions.”

Though his marriage dissolved in 1993, he stayed close to his former

wife. And he remained alert and engaged. A relative recalls taking him for a spin in his wheelchair on the Buckinghamshire estate. “It was sort of like Mr. Toad’s wild ride,” he says. “We zoomed about, and he seemed to have a ball.” To the very end, Getty never lost his sense of humor. “If anyone mentioned anything scandalous or risqué, he loved it,” says Mora. “He definitely didn’t want people feeling sorry for him.” ●



**2003** Getty with his mother, Gail, at a family wedding.

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: DEZO HOFFMANN/REX USA; AP; CROLL/ANZANI/REX USA; RICHARD YOUNG/REX USA; (2) BETTMANN/CORBIS