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Box 18

The Unpublished Spike Milligan

Edited by Norma Farnes

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Extract

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THE UNPUBLISHED SPIKE MILLIGAN

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Edited by
Norma Farnes

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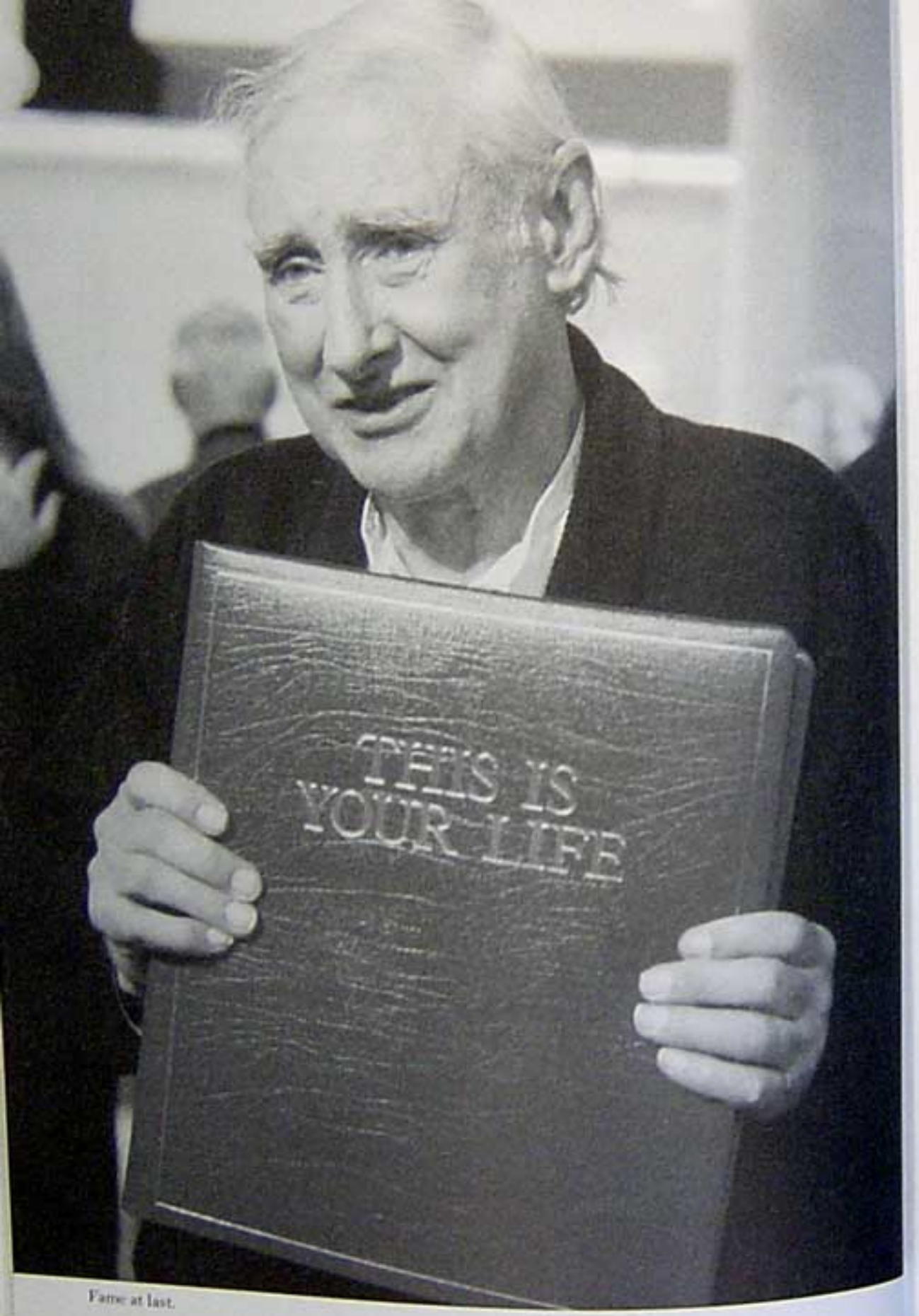

Fame at last.

INTRODUCTION

Spike's list of files (Box 14).

BOX 18 – IDEAS. An extraordinary title, but then Spike was an extraordinary man. His public persona was that of a manic, scatty, undisciplined character, someone who spoke with machine-gun delivery, a thoroughly disorganised individual. This was the complete opposite of Spike in the office; he was the most focused person I have ever met: disciplined, methodical and meticulous about his filing system. Yes – his filing system: large box files for his office work, fourteen and a half inches by ten and a half, numbered 1, 2, 3, 4, etc. Then his household files were ten inches by seven and a half inches, marked a, b, c, d, etc. The labels on the files were in his own calligraphy handwriting, describing what they contained, all except Box 1, which quite simply bore the title 'Files'. This contained one piece of paper listing all the box files and their contents. For example:

Box 18 – Ideas. This contained Spike's ideas. He would scribble a poem and put it in this file. Sometimes it would be incomplete and he would work on it, perhaps a week or a month later, or it would be 'chucked'. The file contained ideas for speeches, stories or sketches for one of his television programmes. Sometimes we would sit and go through them together – and, of course, he would occasionally say, 'I'll bin that. I didn't realise I could be that unfunny.' The longest 'idea' was a children's story called 'The Magic Staircase'. It was in the file for about three years. He would take it out, look at it, put it back and say, 'I like this. It's a good idea. I'll keep it.' One day he took it out of the file and said, 'Today's the day for "The Magic Staircase".' He worked on it for two weeks, by which time it was a novel mixing fact and fiction. It was published in 1990 under the title *It Ends With Magic* and is, in my opinion, Spike's most skilled piece of writing.

One thing never ceased to amaze me: when he decided to work on any one of his ideas he would sit at the typewriter and the writing simply flowed. He really was blessed with a natural gift. Now, having explained Spike's meticulous filing system, every now and then the other Spike would emerge. He'd have a tantrum and want something from one of his files NOW. He would take out whatever he needed and, when he had finished with it, throw it in the bin. So the next time he needed it and it wasn't there, someone had 'fucked up my filing system'. Or, when he was manic, he would for no apparent reason decide to rearrange two or three of the files, or to amalgamate them. He'd stick pieces of paper over the existing meticulous piece of paper, in some cases covering up the list of contents. That's when the trouble would start – and, believe me, this was not infrequent. When the storm was over he would sit quietly and start all over again; it was ever so.

The idea for this book came to me when I was looking for a story that Spike had written. He called it a 'life after death story'. It was a particular favourite of mine and I thought his writing had really captured the essence of life after death. It had been an idea for a radio programme and I had wanted to include it, together with some other stories, in a book entitled *Short Stories by Spike Milligan*. I thought it was too good to lay