

## DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 454 140

SO 032 850

AUTHOR Abbey, Cherie D., Ed.  
TITLE Biography Today: Profiles of People of Interest to Young Readers. Author Series, Volume 9.  
ISBN ISBN-0-7808-0462-7  
PUB DATE 2001-00-00  
NOTE 216p.; For related volumes in the Author Series, see ED 390 725, ED 434 064, ED 446 010, and ED 448 069.  
AVAILABLE FROM Omnigraphics, Inc., 615 Griswold Street, Detroit, MI 48226; Tel: 800-234-1340 (Toll Free); Web site: <http://www.omnigraphics.com/>.  
PUB TYPE Books (010) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)  
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC09 Plus Postage.  
DESCRIPTORS \*Adolescent Literature; \*Authors; Biographies; \*Childrens Literature; Elementary Secondary Education; Language Arts; Popular Culture; Profiles; Student Interests; Supplementary Reading Materials  
IDENTIFIERS \*Biodata

## ABSTRACT

This book presents biographical profiles of 10 authors of interest to readers ages 9 and above and was created to appeal to young readers in a format they can enjoy and readily understand. Biographies were prepared after extensive research, and each volume contains a cumulative index, a general index, a place of birth index, and a birthday index. Each profile provides at least one picture of the individual and information on birth, youth, early memories, education, first jobs, marriage and family, career highlights, memorable experiences, hobbies, and honors and awards. All entries end with a list of easily accessible sources designed to lead the student to further reading on the individual. Obituary entries are also included, written to provide a perspective on the individual's entire career. Obituaries are clearly marked in both the table of contents and at the beginning of the entry. The following authors appear in Volume 9: Robb Armstrong (1962-); Cherie Bennett (1960-); Bruce Coville (1950-); Rosa Guy (1925-); Harper Lee (1926-); Irene Gut Opdyke (1922-); Philip Pullman (1946-); Jon Scieszka (1954-); Amy Tan (1952-); and Joss Whedon (1965-). (BT)

# Biography

Profiles  
of People  
of Interest

# Today

# Author Series

ED 454 140

Featured in  
this issue...

- Robb Armstrong
- Cherie Bennett
- Harper Lee
- Irene Gut Obry
- Phillip Pullman
- ...

Bruce  
Coville

Rosa Guy



SO 032 850

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES  
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Joss Whedon

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# Biography Today

*Profiles  
of People  
of Interest  
to Young  
Readers*

## Author Series

Volume 9

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ISBN 0-7808-0462-7

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Printed in the United States

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# Preface

Welcome to the ninth volume of the **Biography Today Author Series**. We are publishing this series in response to suggestions from our readers, who want more coverage of more people in *Biography Today*. Several volumes, covering **Artists, Authors, Scientists and Inventors, Sports Figures, and World Leaders**, have appeared thus far in the Subject Series. Each of these hardcover volumes is 200 pages in length and covers approximately 10 individuals of interest to readers ages 9 and above. The length and format of the entries are like those found in the regular issues of *Biography Today*, but there is **no duplication** between the regular series and the special subject volumes.

## The Plan of the Work

As with the regular issues of *Biography Today*, this special subject volume on **Authors** was especially created to appeal to young readers in a format they can enjoy reading and readily understand. Each volume contains alphabetically arranged sketches. Each entry provides at least one picture of the individual profiled, and bold-faced rubrics lead the reader to information on birth, youth, early memories, education, first jobs, marriage and family, career highlights, memorable experiences, hobbies, and honors and awards. Each of the entries ends with a list of easily accessible sources designed to lead the student to further reading on the individual and a current address. Obituary entries are also included, written to provide a perspective on the individual's entire career. Obituaries are clearly marked in both the table of contents and at the beginning of the entry.

Biographies are prepared by Omnigraphics editors after extensive research, utilizing the most current materials available. Those sources that are generally available to students appear in the list of further reading at the end of the sketch.

## Indexes

A new index now appears in all *Biography Today* publications. In an effort to make the index easier to use, we have combined the **Name** and **General Index** into one, called the **General Index**. This new index contains the names of all individuals who have appeared in *Biography Today* since the series began. The names appear in bold faced type, followed by the issue in which they appeared. The General Index also contains the occupations and

ethnic and minority origins of individuals profiled. The General Index is cumulative, including references to all individuals who have appeared in the *Biography Today* General Series and the *Biography Today* Special Subject volumes since the series began in 1992.

The Birthday Index and Places of Birth Index will continue to appear in all Special Subject volumes.

## Our Advisors

This publication was reviewed by an Advisory Board comprised of librarians, children's literature specialists, and reading instructors so that we could make sure that the concept of this publication—to provide a readable and accessible biographical magazine for young readers—was on target. They evaluated the title as it developed, and their suggestions have proved invaluable. Any errors, however, are ours alone. We'd like to list the Advisory Board members, and to thank them for their efforts.

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Ethel Stoloff, *Retired*  
Birney Middle School Library  
Southfield, MI

Our Advisory Board stressed to us that we should not shy away from controversial or unconventional people in our profiles, and we have tried to follow their advice. The Advisory Board also mentioned that the sketches might be useful in reluctant reader and adult literacy programs, and we would value any comments librarians might have about the suitability of our magazine for those purposes.

### **Your Comments Are Welcome**

Our goal is to be accurate and up-to-date, to give young readers information they can learn from and enjoy. Now we want to know what you think. Take a look at this issue of *Biography Today*, on approval. Write or call me with your comments. We want to provide an excellent source of biographical information for young people. Let us know how you think we're doing.

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Armstrong's father abandoned the family when Robb was born. He still feels bitter about this. To this day he won't reveal his father's name to interviewers. "I grew up not knowing my father," he said. "One Christmas, he gave me a bike with training wheels. And he had a white car. That's all I remember about my father."

## YOUTH

"I was shy," said Armstrong, describing himself as a child. "I had a terrible stutter, I was nervous and always chewing on my fingernails." The one thing that he enjoyed was drawing. Fascinated by comics and cartoons, he started drawing comics when he was just three years old. His favorites were Fred Flintstone and the "Peanuts" characters. By the time he was five, he was drawing these characters in chalk on the streets of his neighborhood. His mother put the drawings he did on paper on their refrigerator.

Without a father's guidance, Armstrong looked up to his older brother Billy. Billy was like a substitute father to him. But his relationship with his brother ended tragically. One horrible day, Billy got caught in the door of a train and was dragged to his death. Billy was only 13 years old, and Robb was just six.

Fortunately, Robb still had the support of his mother. She encouraged him to do what he loved best: draw. "I can't emphasize enough the confidence she gave me in my art ability," he said. Drawing for him became a kind of "social crutch." It was a way of dealing with the sad things in his life.

## EDUCATION

Even though Armstrong's mother didn't earn much at her job, she managed to put enough money together to enroll her son in private art classes. He was a good student, not only in art class but in his other classes as well at William B. Mann Elementary School in Wynnefield. In fact, his neighborhood friends would make fun of him for studying too hard. Armstrong faced a lot of hostility because of his good grades. Some of the black kids accused him of "acting white" because he was trying to be a good student and called him an "Oreo," a pejorative term for being black on the outside but white on the inside. Their words hurt him, but he kept on studying and getting good grades.

In 1976, when he was in seventh grade, Armstrong received a scholarship to attend the private Shipley School. At the time, all the students there were white girls. The school administrators wanted to integrate the school with boys and minorities. Armstrong became one of 12 boys, only two of whom

were black, to enter the school that year. Even though she could send him there for free, his mother insisted on paying for half of the tuition. Attending Shipley introduced Armstrong to another kind of world, and he grew apart from his old neighborhood friends. "My friends back in Philly kicked me out of the black race," he said. He later added that the decision to break old ties was his as well: "I had to wave goodbye to those guys in my neighborhood almost entirely. There was no other way for me to do it. Everybody wants to have their cake and to eat it too. I would love to say yes, I stayed real close to everybody from the 'hood, but it didn't happen."

The seventh grade was a rough year for him. Armstrong found out that Shipley had much tougher academic standards than he was used to, and he ended up failing his classes. "Seventh grade ended up being the worst two years of my life," he later recalled. His poor performance during his first year at Shipley was a wake up call. Instead of quitting, he worked even harder and got better grades. By the time he graduated from Shipley in about 1981, he was the top student there.

### College Years

Armstrong's exceptional performance at Shipley earned him scholarship offers from many universities, and he decided to attend Syracuse University in upstate New York. But the thrill of going to college soon dimmed when his mother died of cancer during his freshman year. The death of his mother marked a dark chapter in Armstrong's life. He might have quit school had it not been for friends of his mother's. She had made friends with a wealthy family, and they promised to help him. They did not, however, give him money. Instead, they helped him apply for scholarships and gave him moral support. He also made money over the summer breaks by drawing people's caricatures. Caricatures are funny portraits of people that exaggerate their facial features. "I'd do caricatures for five bucks a head. After half an hour, I'd have a big crowd of people around me—until the cops came." Then, he said, "I'd do [drawings of the cops] for three."

—— “ ——

*When Armstrong switched to a private school, he grew apart from his old neighborhood friends. "I had to wave goodbye to those guys in my neighborhood almost entirely. There was no other way for me to do it. Everybody wants to have their cake and to eat it too. I would love to say yes, I stayed real close to everybody from the 'hood, but it didn't happen."*

—— ” ——



*Sunny, Joe, Marcy, and Jo-Jo from "Jump Start."*

Although Armstrong always wanted to be a cartoonist, he also had to be practical. He majored in advertising design so that he would have a better chance of getting a job with a regular paycheck. Though it was far from easy, he completed his bachelor's degree in 1985 with a major in fine arts, specializing in advertising design.

### **FIRST JOBS**

After graduating from college, Armstrong found a job as an art director with a Philadelphia ad agency for \$17,500 a year. His initial plan was to work in advertising for five years while he tried to launch his career as a

comic strip artist. Over the next 10 years he worked for several different Philadelphia advertising agencies as he started his comic strip "Jump Start." Even after "Jump Start" was being carried in newspapers, he continued to work in the advertising business because he believed having a regular day job would provide him with more interaction with people. This, in turn, would give him more ideas for his strip. However, in 1997 he finally gave up his regular day job to focus completely on "Jump Start" and to spend more time with his family.

## CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

There was never any doubt that Armstrong would eventually end up in his chosen career. "My mind was made up at three or four years old to become a newspaper cartoonist," he said. "There's nothing more powerful in the world than a made-up mind." But the road that would lead to "Jump Start" was not that easy.

Armstrong first found some success as a cartoonist in college, when he began drawing the strip "Hector" for the Syracuse University newspaper, *The Daily Orange*. That strip was actually the result of a very sad day in Armstrong's life: the death of his mother from cancer. "I was very grief-stricken and hurt by my mom's death. I made up a cartoon character named Hector. Hector was miserable." Drawing the strip helped Armstrong deal with his anger and sense of loss. An overweight and militant black college student, Hector was so angry at the world and so pathetic that his life was actually funny. The strip focused on Hector and his problems, as well as his friend Meatball and a dog named Julius who had human ears.

### Trouble Getting Started

"Hector" was popular on campus, but Armstrong wanted to reach a wider audience. He wanted to sell it to a cartoon syndicate, which would arrange

“

*When he first started doing "Jump Start," Armstrong says, "There were no strips about cops back then. I realized that newspapers only reacted to what they didn't already have. . . . [I] wanted to do a strip about a cop because that would at least get people's attention. I could see myself writing on that subject for a long time with cop-oriented material in the mainstream media."*

”

for the strip to appear in national newspapers. After he graduated, though, Armstrong had trouble convincing the cartoon syndicates that other readers would like it too. He tried to sell "Hector" to the syndicates for four years with no luck. "It was tough," he recalled, "but my wife kept telling me, 'You have a gift. Don't give up.' It finally hit me to get off of Hector, who was clearly not going to be the next Garfield." He came up with another strip instead. It was called "Cherry Top" and the main character was a black cop based on the character first introduced as Hector's father. "It wasn't that good at first," he admitted. "Actually, it was weak."

——— “ ———

*Armstrong resolved to show his audience that not all African-Americans are poor, use slang, and have rough family lives. "The image of young blacks is so skewed, so false. I don't know anybody who's carjacking. . . . Joe and Marcy and the characters I've developed are deep and based on real life."*

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Getting a comic strip accepted by a syndicate is extremely difficult. These companies receive thousands of cartoon proposals every year. Out of those ideas, only two or three are accepted. The odds are even tougher for black cartoonists, of whom there are currently only five with nationally syndicated strips. Armstrong once said that it's easier to get into the NBA than to have a comic strip published.

Although "Cherry Top" wasn't accepted, it did draw some interest. One of the editors for the syndicate United Feature, Sarah Gillespie, thought the strip had potential. However, she felt that it could be better if the middle-age cop was younger and if Armstrong brought some of his personal experiences into the strip. United

Feature gave him \$2,500 to develop the strip for a year. He gave the cop, Joe Cobb, a more upbeat personality. He also gave him a wife, Marcy, who was a nurse. The strip focused on the struggles of a young married couple, rather than Joe's career as a policeman. Armstrong called the revised strip "From the Hipp," and later changed the name to "Off Duty." However, United Feature didn't like either name. Instead, they called it "Jump Start." When he complained that the name didn't mean anything, he was told, "Nobody knows what it means. It doesn't mean anything. Your work is good and eventually people will like it."

Armstrong came up with the last name "Cobb" for his characters by changing the "R" in his first name to "C." His mother lives on in the strip as Dot Cobb, and the father figure he never had is Frank Cobb. Frank is a

# JUMP START

by Robb Armstrong



former police officer whose partner, the grouchy Crunchy, is now the partner of his son Joe. Early in the strip, Joe and Marcy have a baby girl, Sunny, who is based on the cartoonist's own daughter, Teśs. And when the Armstrongs' son, Rex, was born, he became Jo-Jo Cobb in the strip. Armstrong once said he "was deliberately trying to fill a void at the time" by making Joe a cop. "There were no strips about cops back then. I realized that newspapers only reacted to what they didn't already have. . . . [I] wanted to do a strip about a cop because that would at least get people's attention. I could see myself writing on that subject for a long time with cop-oriented material in the mainstream media."

## "Jump Start" Debuts

"Jump Start" debuted in 40 newspapers nationwide on October 2, 1989. From the beginning it was Armstrong's aim to portray a middle-class family based on his own experiences and those of his friends and family. In the strips that ran during the first couple of months, however, he admits he made a mistake by having the characters use a lot of black slang in their conversation. "I was trying to be blacker," he recalled. "Then a black woman wrote me, and she was just irate. I said, 'You know, she's right—I

don't use this slang.' I was feeding into all those stereotypes." He resolved to show his audience that not all African-Americans are poor, use slang, and have rough family lives. "The image of young blacks is so skewed, so false," he asserted. "I don't know anybody who's carjacking. . . . Joe and Marcy and the characters I've developed are deep and based on real life."

Joe and Marcy are completely committed to their loving marriage. They work hard at their jobs, and they are involved in their children's lives. In this way, the strip bears some resemblance to "For Better or Worse," the comic by Canadian cartoonist Lynn Johnston [see entry on Johnston in *Biography Today*, Jan. 1999]. Johnston, Armstrong once said, was one of his inspirations. As with her strip, he finds humor in the everyday occurrences that people face, such as the crazy neighbor down the hall, parents who

boast about their grandchildren, or a daughter who won't stop sucking her thumb. Armstrong sometimes uses visual humor, too. For example, when Marcy is feeling bloated from her pregnancy, she literally blows up like a float in a Thanksgiving Day parade. In another strip, Marcy and Joe turn into children and Sunny turns into a bossy adult when the parents start suspecting it's their child who is really in charge of the family.

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*"If it entertains and just gives people a chuckle on a semi-regular basis, that's wonderful. . . . If, in the process, it educates a bit and enlightens people about a lifestyle of another ethnic group, that's even better."*

### Facing Criticism

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Because of the gentle humor in the strip, Armstrong has sometimes been criticized for not dealing with serious issues facing African-Americans. But others feel this isn't true. For example, Joe's best friend, who is black, is married to a white woman. The couple experiences several uncomfortable social situations because people don't accept their marriage. In another strip, Joe is almost killed when he's shot on the job. However, his life is saved because he's wearing a bullet-proof vest. Armstrong wrote on this subject to increase awareness of this issue. For this series of strips, "Joe Cobb" was made an honorary member of the International Association of Chiefs of Police/DuPont Kevlar Survivors' Club (DuPont is a company that helps make bullet-proof vests).

Armstrong also strives to introduce readers to people of different ethnic backgrounds. "Jump Start" includes not only white and black characters, but also Asians, Hispanics, and other minorities. About the multi-ethnic

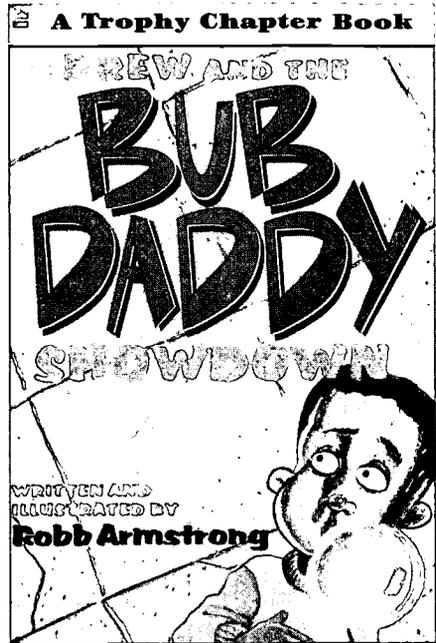
nature of his strip, he once said, "If it entertains and just gives people a chuckle on a semi-regular basis, that's wonderful. . . . If, in the process, it educates a bit and enlightens people about a lifestyle of another ethnic group, that's even better." On the other hand, he also stated, "I'd also love to have people ignore the race problems and say, 'Hey, we're really the same deep down.'" The strip, he insists, "is not about how different black people are from white people, but about human nature."

### Finding Success

By 1999, "Jump Start" was being published in about 400 daily newspapers around the country, including Armstrong's hometown paper, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*. "The whole experience is anticlimactic until you are in your own market," he said. There was also a collection of "Jump Start" strips published in 1997 and a book entitled *Jump Start: A Love Story*, which tells about how Joe and Marcy first met. His characters appear in a line of greeting cards distributed by Gibson Greetings. Joe and Marcy also made an appearance in the CBS-TV special *The Fabulous Funnies*.

In 1997, Armstrong began branching out even more with the creation of Drew, a character who appears in a series of books for middle school readers: *Drew and the Bub Daddy Showdown*, *Drew and the Homeboy Question*, and *Drew and the Filthy Rich Kid*. These books are based on his experiences growing up in Philadelphia. *Drew and the Homeboy Question* is particularly relevant. In this story, Drew goes to a mostly white private school and is shunned by his homeboy friends, just like Armstrong was. He has also written other books that don't feature Drew, such as *Stuffin' It* and *Trashmaster*.

But "Jump Start" will remain at the center of Armstrong's attention. He hopes to be as successful as his idol Charles Schulz, who created "Peanuts." "My ability to draw pictures is not what carries my career," he said. "It's the fact that I have something to say. I'm fortunate to have a forum that lets me have my say as often and as loudly as I want to. I'm using the strip as a psychiatrist's couch."



## MAJOR INFLUENCES

The most important influence on Armstrong's life will always be his mother, who believed in his artistic ability even when he didn't. Outside of the family, Charles M. "Sparky" Schulz, the creator of "Peanuts," was also a great inspiration to him. Schulz actually wrote to him after seeing the

—— “ ——



*"My ability to draw pictures is not what carries my career. It's the fact that I have something to say. I'm fortunate to have a forum that lets me have my say as often and as loudly as I want to. I'm using the strip as a psychiatrist's couch."*

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## FAVORITE COMIC STRIPS

Armstrong's favorite comic strips, which have helped inspire him as a cartoonist, include "Wee Pals" by Morrie Turner, "Peanuts" by Charles M. Schulz, "Beetle Bailey" by Mort Walker, and "Hi and Lois" by Walker and

"Jump Start" strip one day. "When I met him, he was flattering and encouraging and helpful," he said of Schulz. "He encouraged me to try some of the crazy things. I never considered taking off on this whole area of the children in the strip having a separate life. When adults are around, the kids act like children, but when they are around other children, they conduct themselves very differently." The two cartoonists became very good friends. Schulz even gave his character Franklin, the first black character to appear in his strip, the last name of "Armstrong" in his friend's honor.

## MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

Armstrong met his wife, Sherry West, while they were both studying at Syracuse University. She was a chemistry major from Philadelphia and was a fan of his "Hector" comic strip. The two instantly hit it off, and they were married in 1986. The couple has two children: Tess was born in 1994 and Rex Alexander was born in 1997. The family lives in a suburb outside of Philadelphia.

Dik Browne. He also liked to read *Mad* magazine, and he loved the television cartoon show "The Flintstones."

## HOBBIES AND OTHER INTERESTS

When Armstrong is not busy with work or family, he loves to volunteer his time to help inspire students to reach for their dreams. He participates in the Adopt-a-Class program for which he gives regular talks to high school students every year. "Aside from cartooning, this probably gives me the most joy," he once said. He tries to serve as an example to black children to show that their opportunities don't have to be limited, even if they are poor and come from a single-parent home as he did. "Like basketball," he said, "[black kids] have to see somebody out there doing it. If they don't, they won't think it's a black field."

## WRITINGS

"Jump Start," 1989 to present (comic strip)

*Jump Start: A Love Story*, 1996

*Drew and the Bub Daddy Showdown*, 1996

*Jump Start*, 1997

*Drew and the Homeboy Question*, 1997

*Drew and the Filthy Rich Kid*, 1997

*Stuffin' It!* 1998

*In Your Face!* 1998

*Large and In Charge*, 1999

*My Main Man*, 1999

*Trashmaster*, 1999

## HONORS AND AWARDS

Wilbur Award (Religious Public Relations Council): 1995, for excellence in the communication of religious issues, values, and themes

## FURTHER READING

### Books

*Contemporary Black Biography*, Vol. 15, 1997

*Who's Who among African-Americans*, 2000

### Periodicals

*About . . . Time*, Sep. 1996, p.201

*Advertising Age*, Jan. 8, 1990, p.32

*Black Enterprise*, Feb. 1997, p.111

*Booklist*, Sep. 15, 1996, p.236

*Ebony*, Jan. 1993, p.36

*Editor & Publisher*, Dec. 9, 1989, p.44; Sep. 2, 1995, p.26

*Los Angeles Times*, Jan. 27, 1991, p.E3

*People*, Apr. 29, 1996, p.69

*Philadelphia Magazine*, Jan. 1993, p.82

*Time*, Nov. 25, 1991, p.104

## **ADDRESS**

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## **WORLD WIDE WEB SITES**

<http://www.unitedmedia.com/>

[http://www.chireader.com/hottype/2000/000114\\_1.html](http://www.chireader.com/hottype/2000/000114_1.html)



## **Cherie Bennett 1960-**

American Novelist, Playwright, and Advice Columnist  
Creator of the Teen Novel Series "Sunset Island,"  
"Teen Angels," and "Trash"  
Author of *Life in the Fat Lane*, *Searching for David's  
Heart*, *Zink*, and *Anne Frank and Me*

[Editor's Note: Cherie Bennett was kind enough to take the time for an interview with Biography Today while we were preparing this profile, and we want to thank her for her time and information. She was a tremendous help. And she really does answer all her e-mail, just like she says!]

## BIRTH

Cherie Bennett was born Sharon Lynne Berman on October 6, 1960, in Buffalo, New York, although the family soon moved to Detroit, Michigan. Her mother was Roslyn Cantor, and her father was Bennett Berman. Cherie has two brothers: Steven, a neuropsychologist at a California university, and Scott, an executive with a major food-service company.

Bennett, who was called Cherie when she was growing up, changed her last name for professional reasons. She was working in the theater, so she went to sign up at Actors' Equity Association, which is the labor union representing professional theater actors and stage managers. There, she discovered that there was already a Cherie Berman in the theater world. She had to come up with another name to use professionally, so she chose Bennett, after her father.

## YOUTH

When Bennett was growing up in Detroit, both of her parents held a variety of jobs, including some in show business. Her mother, who held a master's degree in counseling, was also an English teacher, a bridge teacher, and a dance instructor. She was such a talented dancer that she even had a small role in the movie *Dirty Dancing*. Bennett's father also worked in a variety of professions. While Cherie was growing up he worked in advertising, writing award-winning commercials for Ford and Hawaiian Punch. In addition, he hosted a late-night horror movie show on local TV, where he slept in a coffin. "We kept all his props in our basement, a coffin, a bloody hand," Bennett recalls. "Needless to say, it made us kind of popular in the neighborhood, as my older brother would charge kids a dime for them to come down and see the props." Later he worked as a television writer, writing for such popular and famous series as "Your Show of Shows" and "Route 66." Later still, he went back to school, earned his doctorate, and became a college professor. Bennett's mother and father divorced when she was 12, and her mother remarried. Her stepfather was Herbert Cantor, a professor of chemistry. Bennett maintained a close and loving relationship with all of these important adults.

Like her parents, Cherie was interested in entertaining as a child. She took dance classes and roller skating lessons, but she didn't have the tall and slender shape considered ideal for these activities. She distinctly remembers being 11 years old and being fitted for a costume for a roller skating exhibition. Her coach praised her athletic abilities, then said "Just when are you going on a diet?" She no longer remembers the praise he gave her, but she still remembers the hurt she felt at his comment about her weight.

High school posed its own challenges. Although she was president of the drama club, she was unhappy in high school and was ecstatic to finish. "I was not happy in high school," Bennett recalls. "I wasn't cute. I was fat. I was never asked out. I counted off the days [until graduation] on the calendar." There was one girl in school that she always looked up to. "It was a girl I thought had everything—looks, brains, personality, friends—and then one day that girl killed herself. I learned that she had an alcoholic parent, and I learned that you cannot tell by the outside what a person is like." Years later, Bennett would recall and rework her feelings and experiences as a teenager in her writings for that age group.

### EARLY MEMORIES

In addition to singing and dancing, Bennett started writing when she was young. But her early work wasn't very good, as she recalls here. "I wrote really, really bad poetry when I was a teenager," she now says. "This should give hope to kids out there who write poetry and think, 'This isn't any good.' I mean, my poetry stunk."

### EDUCATION

Bennett attended Andover High School in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan. She continued her education first at Wayne State University and then at the University of Michigan, planning to become a singer and actress. While attending school, she also did some writing in her spare time. She published her first novel, *With a Face Like Mine*, in about 1980. Bennett earned her bachelor's degree in performing arts in the early 1980s. As soon as she graduated from college, she headed to New York to become an entertainer.

### MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

While living in New York, Bennett met her future husband, Jeff Gottesfeld, a writer and theatrical producer, in October 1987. They were both at a café in New York City in Greenwich Village, a neighborhood that is home to a lot of artists and writers, when he walked up to her table. According to Gottes-

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*There was one girl in school that Bennett always looked up to. "It was a girl I thought had everything—looks, brains, personality, friends—and then one day that girl killed herself. I learned that she had an alcoholic parent, and I learned that you cannot tell by the outside what a person is like."*

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feld, "She said, 'I've written this play.' I was living in the East Village. I said, 'Sure. Everybody's written a play.' She gave it to me to read. It blew me away." That play was an early draft of her musical dramatic comedy *Honky Tonk Angels*.

Bennett and Gottesfeld were married on February 4, 1990, in New York City. Here, Bennett reminisces about that special time. "It was a big, rollicking, raucous, show-bizzy Jewish wedding in the middle of the winter that was full of people kissing and hugging us," she recalls. "On the morning of 5 February, we both woke up on the first day of our honeymoon with the flu." After their honeymoon, they immediately left for Massachusetts, where Bennett's play was in rehearsals. Since then they've become partners in marriage and often in writing as well. Currently, they split their time between homes in Nashville, Tennessee, and Sherman Oaks, California.

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*Bennett recalls how difficult it was to try to become an actress when she wasn't model-thin. "I wasn't fat enough to be fat, and I wasn't thin enough to be thin," she says. "I was always hearing, 'You're really great looking, but we can't cast you as the thin lead. And we can't cast you as her fat friend, either.'"*

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**FIRST JOBS**

Throughout the 1980s, Bennett pursued her interest in developing a career in acting and singing. She joined a musical comedy group called Zaniac that performed in various clubs. She also appeared in regional theater and Off-Broadway productions; her favorite roles were as Angel in *When You Comin' Back, Red Ryder* by Mark Medoff and as Baby Doll in *27 Wagons Full of Cotton* by Tennessee Williams. She later talked about how difficult it

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was to try to become an actress when she wasn't model-thin. "I wasn't fat enough to be fat, and I wasn't thin enough to be thin," she says. "I was always hearing, 'You're really great looking, but we can't cast you as the thin lead. And we can't cast you as her fat friend, either.'" So she tried singing, too. She got signed to a development deal with RCA and started to record for them, although that fell through. She also went on the road singing backup for John Cougar Mellancamp. In the late 1980s, she appeared on Broadway as Cha-Cha in *Grease*.

Bennett was also continuing to write during this time. After becoming frustrated with the lack of good parts, she decided to write a play for her-

self. That's when she created her play *Honky Tonk Angels* (originally titled *Get Any Guy Through Psychic Mind Control or Your Money Back* until she realized that the title wouldn't fit on a theater marquee). *Honky Tonk Angels* was the play that Bennett had just finished writing when she met her husband. It's the story of four sisters in Nashville trying to break into the country music business and win a spot on the Grand Ole Opry. The show features the music of Garth Brooks. An unknown at the time, Brooks wrote the songs for the play just before breaking through and becoming a big country star himself. By that point in the late 1980s, Bennett was involved in so many different aspects of the entertainment world that she seemed on the verge of a successful career in show business.

## CHOOSING A CAREER

But that was about to change. In about 1990, according to Bennett, "I got sick. My joints hurt." She was soon in so much pain that she became bedridden. Doctors diagnosed rheumatoid arthritis, a form of arthritis in which the membrane lining of the joints becomes inflamed, which can also damage the bones and cartilage. Sufferers with rheumatoid arthritis often experience inflammation of the joints, swelling, difficulty moving around, pain, and general fatigue. For Bennett, it soon became clear that life on the road as a singer or a nightly show in the theater was not possible for her. She just couldn't handle the physical demands of live performance.

Bennett knew she needed to find a new career. And the obvious choice was writing. "Everybody always complimented me on my writing in those days," she later said, "but I thought of myself as a singer and an actress, not a writer." Yet she had already been a writer for years: she had been writing poetry since high school, had published a novel while in college, and had recently finished her play *Honky Tonk Angels*. Now she was ready to try something new. She wrote a novel for teenagers called *Sunset Island* (1991), about Sam, Emma, and Carrie on summer vacation in Maine. The novel was such a success that Bennett knew she had found her new career.

## CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

Bennett has had a diverse writing career since then, creating many different types of works in all types of formats. For example, she has written story ideas for the daytime soap operas "Another World" and "Port Charles." She wrote the beginning of an ongoing serial, "Horror Ink," a romantic horror mystery about students who publish a horror magazine at school and get in trouble for it. She composed two chapters and posted it on AOL, and then invited young readers to continue the story.



In addition, Bennett writes an advice column for teens, "Hey, Cherie," that is syndicated to newspapers. In it, she offers frank advice about such topics as dating, sex, smoking, body-piercing, and dealing with parents. In one early column, she offered this advice to a 16-year-old-guy who had written in with dating problems. "Let me be sure I follow your logic," Bennett wrote. "You met a girl at a party and you liked her. You made out with her, but she stopped you. And now, because you heard third-hand that she has a 'bad rep,' you want to skip out on the date you made with her. How can I put this in a way that won't hurt your feelings? You are a big jerk. . . ."

Bennett has also written a variety of different types of works for young adults, including several pop fiction series as well as other novels and plays. Often, she has adapted her work from one genre to another, reworking her novels as plays and her plays as novels. In addition, she has done some TV and film writing as well.

### Starting to Write for Teens: The "Sunset Island" Series

Bennett's first big success as an author came as the writer of series novels for teenagers, mainly for girls. In these books, she writes primarily about girls because she thinks life is tougher for them. "They are always told that they must be pretty, be nice, be sweet, be good, be quiet, be polite. I saw the [statistics on the] slide in self-trust and self-respect and self-confidence in girls when they reached teen age and I want to do what I can to stop that slide." Many consider these series books romance novels, although Bennett doesn't see them that way. "[The publishers have] characterized those books as romance novels because that helps to sell the books. Every book I've written is a girl-empowering, girl-advocate book. Many of them have an element of romance in them, but I have never written a 'romance.'"

Bennett had started out writing for teens with her novel *Sunset Island* (1991), about Samantha, Emma, and Carrie. That grew into the "Sunset

Island” series comprising 41 novels published from 1991 to 1997. These books feature the girls’ activities on an island off the coast of Maine, where they’re working as nannies for families who are vacationing there. They’re away from home for their first time in the ultimate summer jobs. Throughout their adventures—designing perfume and clothing, taking road trips, acting in a movie, visiting New York, and forming a band called *Flirting with Danger*—they experience romance, heartache, adventure, and the joys of devoted friendship. Bennett later followed that up with a similar series for slightly younger readers called “Club Sunset Island” (three novels, 1994).

**Other Series Novels**

Since the success of her first ongoing series, Bennett has written several other shorter series for teen readers. “Surviving Sixteen” (three novels, 1993-94) features teenage girls forced to deal with life-changing crises at a young age, including a bout with rheumatoid arthritis, a social scandal that shakes a family’s foundations, and a serious car accident. In the series “Wild Hearts” (six novels, 1994), a sophisticated girl from New York City moves to Nashville, makes some new friends, and forms a country-rock band. Their band, Wild Hearts, serves as the focus for the novels, which combine romance with the country music scene. Her next series, “Teen Angels” (six novels, 1996), was co-written with her husband, Jeff Gottesfeld. These novels feature three teens who die young and end up in “Teen Heaven,” where they go to learn life lessons. They also help out teens on Earth who are struggling with problems and enjoy romantic relationships in Teen Heaven. In “Hope Hospital” (three novels, 1996), three 13-year-olds volunteer to help out at a hospital where they learn about life, death, and romance.

In her next two series, “Trash” and “Pageant,” Bennett tried something a little different. “Trash” (seven novels, 1997-90), which she also co-wrote with her husband, Jeff Gottesfeld, focuses on Chelsea Jennings as she gets a new boyfriend and a great summer job in New York City as an intern, working

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behind the scenes on a hip TV talk show, "Trash." But Chelsea also has a dark secret that she is trying to conceal—she is the daughter of a mass murderer. Next up for Bennett was "Pageant" (six novels, 1998-99), about a beauty contest hosted by *Teen Spirit* magazine, where thousands of teenage girls compete for cash prizes and fame. The series shows the regional competitions around the country leading up to the national pageant, as well as the pageant itself and the winners' post-pageant national tour. For the final

book in the series, *The Winners on the Road*, Bennett created a story that pulled together the characters from both the "Pageant" and the "Trash" series, fashioning a satisfying ending to both stories.

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*"I write about real girls with real problems. They're not perfect. They don't always make the right decisions. . . .*

*These characters are not holier-than-thou at all. The readers learn vicariously from these girls' mistakes. For instance, you'll have a scene where somebody is lighting a cigarette, and one of the characters, whom our readers admire very much, will say, 'Oooh. Why don't you just put that thing out.'"*

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Bennett followed that up with the series "Mirror Image" (four novels, 1999-2000), also co-written with Gottesfeld. In the first book, Callie Bailey feels like a nerd compared to her sister Laurel, who has everything: popularity, a great body, a modeling career, and a hunky boyfriend. Then Callie finds what looks like a heart-shaped meteorite, sleeps with it under her pillow, and makes a wish. Soon everything changes: she loses her geeky image and become a knockout. But in the end, Callie feels that she's lost more than that. She discards the meteorite, which ends up in the hands of another young teen—who, in the next book in the series, finds out what happens when her greatest wish comes true. Bennett's most recent series, "University Hospital" (four novels, 1999-2000), also co-written with Gottesfeld, takes place at a hospital on the coast of Massachusetts. Five high school graduates have won admission to a prestigious summer medical program there. As they compete to earn an important scholarship, they are also dealing with personal traumas and new romantic relationships.

Recently, Bennett has also contributed to the novel series that is a spin off from the TV series "Dawson's Creek." Writing under the pseudonym C. J.

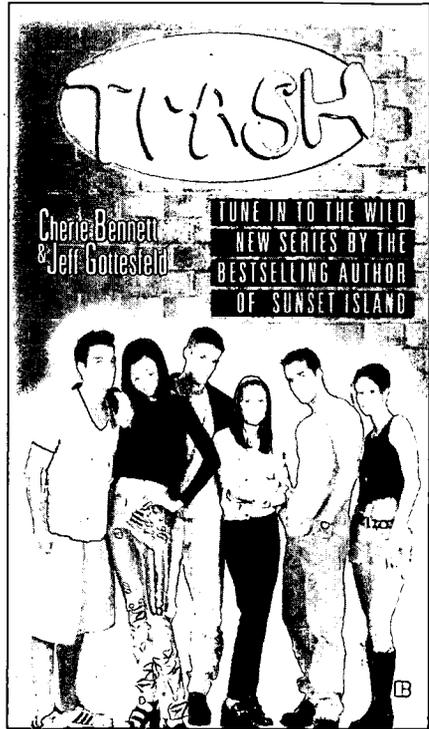
Anders, Bennett has created all new stories that feature the character that viewers love from the TV show: Dawson, Joey, Pacey, Jen, Jack, and Andie. Here, readers get to see them in additional scenes from their lives—creating a Christmas play, helping at a summer camp, working on a movie set, hanging out in New York City, and surviving at a wilderness camp. The series has proved very popular with the many fans of “Dawson’s Creek.”

In her series novels as well as in her other novels and plays, Bennett writes about the serious issues teens face—divorce, illness, loneliness, self-doubt, alcoholism, sexual abuse, anorexia, bulimia, violence, and AIDS. “I write about real girls with real problems,” she says. “They’re not

perfect. They don’t always make the right decisions. I think for all the teaching that parents, clergy, and teachers do, sometimes kids learn better by reading about their peers. But it can be telling them the exact same things. . . . A 13-year-old girl can read about what’s going to happen when she goes out with a boy who’s been drinking, or goes to a party where everybody is smoking dope. . . . These characters are not holier-than-thou at all. The readers learn vicariously from these girls’ mistakes. For instance, you’ll have a scene where somebody is lighting a cigarette, and one of the characters, whom our readers admire very much, will say, ‘Oooh. Why don’t you just put that thing out.’”

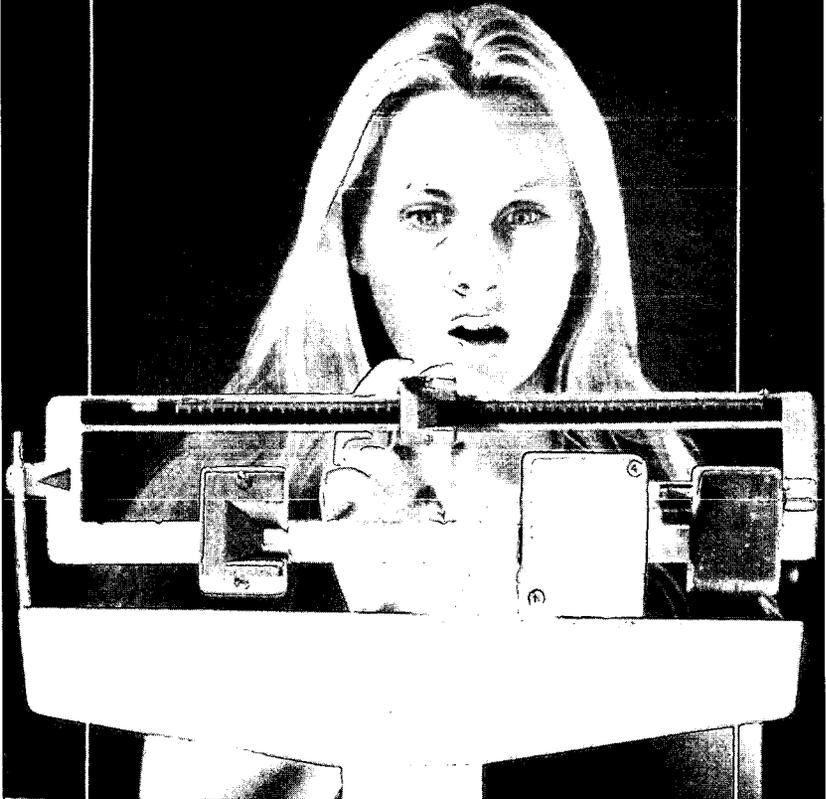
### *Life in the Fat Lane*

Bennett has written about many of these same serious issues in her individual (non-series) works as well, as in her 1998 novel *Life in the Fat Lane*. The book tells the story of Lara Ardeche, who seems to have the perfect life. A top high school student, Lara is beautiful, smart, friendly, well-liked, and popular, and she’s dating a great guy. She’s also a beauty pageant winner who is elected Homecoming Queen when she’s only a junior. But then



LIFE IN THE  
**FAT**  
LANE

CHERIE BENNETT



everything starts to change. She begins to gain weight, until she bulks up to twice her original size. She tries everything to lose weight, but nothing seems to work. Then she finds out she has a rare metabolic disease causing her weight gain. She feels miserable, humiliated. Her perfect world has started to come apart, and she's learned how important her size and her looks are—to her friends, her boyfriend, even her parents.

Bennett was inspired to write the book by several things. One was the mail that she received from her readers. "I'd gotten around 10,000 letters over the last seven years from kids, and second only to the letters about love and sex were those about weight and body image. They would just break your heart," Bennett says. "I've gotten everything from 'I weight 250 pounds and school is a living hell and I want to kill myself' to 'I'm in the binge-and-barf club at my school and we're the popular girls but what people don't know is that every day we go to the bathroom and barf together.' . . . The weight and body image letters are the scariest letters I've received. Girls who wear a size 12 or 14 or 16 refer to themselves as 'disgusting fat pigs'—and they mean it. It's become such a cultural obsession, and it is killing—literally and figuratively, spiritually and emotionally—a generation of young women."

### **Weight Issues and *Life in the Fat Lane***

Another inspiration for Bennett was her own experiences with weight—she based many of Lara's feelings on her own experiences. Some of it was based on her feelings as a child and teenager. "I was a fat teenager," she says. "Actually I wasn't all that fat, but I was fatter than other kids, and I suffered for it. So when I get these letters, I know exactly how these girls feel. Lara's journey was not literally my journey, but her pain is something that I knew."

But some of the book was also based on her difficulties when she first became ill with rheumatoid arthritis. By that time, as an adult, Bennett had lost weight and slimmed down. But the illness and the medication she took soon changed that. Here, she describes how sick she was when she first developed arthritis. "I was bedridden, then in a wheelchair, then walked with a cane. One of the drugs I started on was prednisone, which is a steroid. Plus I couldn't exercise, I could barely walk. And if you take steroids and get no physical exercise, and you have a genetic propensity to gain weight in the first place, and you have utterly wrecked your metabolism with the diet thing from the time you were a kid, you gain weight—and gain weight and gain weight. That's exactly what happened to me. . . . [I gained] 80 pounds. I remember looking in the mirror and seeing my face

blowing up like a balloon, because steroids do that to you. They make your face get round and they cause you to gain weight in the middle of your body. . . . So even though I didn't have the disease in the book, it felt exactly the same. I felt like this monster thing had invaded me and there was nothing I could do about it."

Bennett felt that people treated her differently after she gained weight. "Interestingly, as a fat woman you become both an object of ridicule for taking up too much space and invisible at the same time. Thin people, especially women, feel superior. They think, I can control my appetite and she can't. People would very patronizingly offer me their diet plans. You know, we don't know anything by looking at people from the outside, but people assume they do. I couldn't wear a sign that said, 'Excuse me, I'm taking large amounts of prednisone and I can't walk across the room; ergo, I'm gaining all this weight. It's not because I have an uncontrollable appetite and eat 24 hours a day. Thank you.'"

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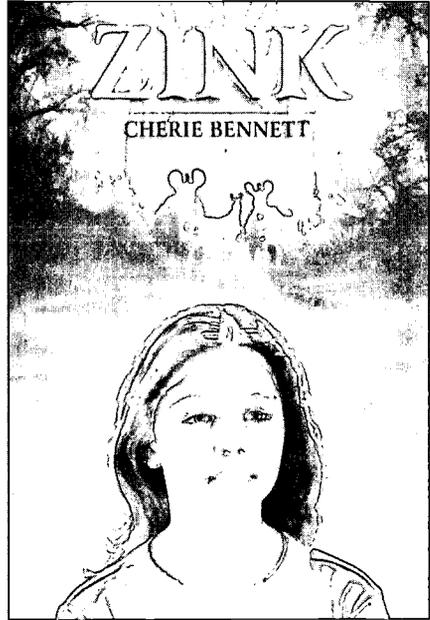
### Other Novels and Plays

Bennett has also written a number of other fictional works, some of which she has adapted as both novels and play. She enjoys moving between the two writing forms, as she says here: "Things I cannot do on the page, I can do on the stage and vice versa," she explains. "With novels, I have so much more latitude, room for exposition

—it's a great luxury." The first work that she presented in two forms was her 1993 novel *Good-Bye, Best Friend*, which she adapted that year as the play *John Lennon and Me*. (It was also staged under the title *Candy Store Window*.) It's an emotional story about a 13-year-old girl struggling with cystic fibrosis, living in a hospice along with other critically ill teens. Her 1998 play *Searching for David's Heart*, which was adapted and published as a novel of the same name in 1999, tells about an 11-year-old girl who feels responsible for the death of her adored older brother. This touching and

bittersweet story explores the issue of organ donation while also looking at racial prejudice, jealousy, and forgiveness.

Bennett completed another play in 1998, *Zink the So-Called Zebra*, which was adapted and published as the novel *Zink* in 1999. The work was inspired by Alicia O'Brien, whom Bennett met when Alicia was 11 years old and dealing with cancer. "I first met her via the mail three years ago when she sent me a fan letter for one of my books," Bennett later wrote. "The letter was typed, with a wobbly signature. Even then, Alicia was being treated for inoperable brain cancer, and the wobbly signature was because the tumor was causing tremors in her hands. But that letter was smart, irreverent, and bursting with life. It was also hilariously funny." Bennett and Alicia soon became close friends, and the young girl became an inspiration to the writer. "Alicia made an illustration for my novel *Zink*, which is about a girl with cancer. You'll also find her photo and bio in that book. She was the source of truth and inspiration for that novel and she is the source of truth and inspiration for my life." *Zink* is the story of Becky, a young girl with cancer, who takes comfort from a fantasy herd of zebras who help her during times of painful treatment. This deeply affecting story uses a magical juxtaposition of reality and fantasy to deal with tough issues and themes, including the nature of courage, honesty, patience, kindness, and self-esteem. The book is illustrated with drawings by Alicia and other young cancer patients.



### *Anne Frank and Me*

Another recent work, *Anne Frank and Me*, was first created as a play in 1995 and adapted and published as a novel of the same name in 2001. These works focus on a contemporary American teenage gentile girl, Nicole Burns, as a means to confront the issue of the Holocaust and contemporary people who deny that the Holocaust ever happened. In *Anne Frank and Me*, Nicole and her girlfriends are preoccupied with daily life, with the boys they like and the upcoming dance. They're not paying much

attention to a school assignment to read *The Diary of Anne Frank*. "What difference does it make?" one character asks. "It's ancient history." In addition, Nicole's parents are "deniers." They deny the Holocaust happened—they don't believe historical accounts of the extermination of Jews by the Nazis during World War II. Then, on a class field trip to an Anne Frank exhibit, an explosive sound transports Nicole to Paris during the German occupation.

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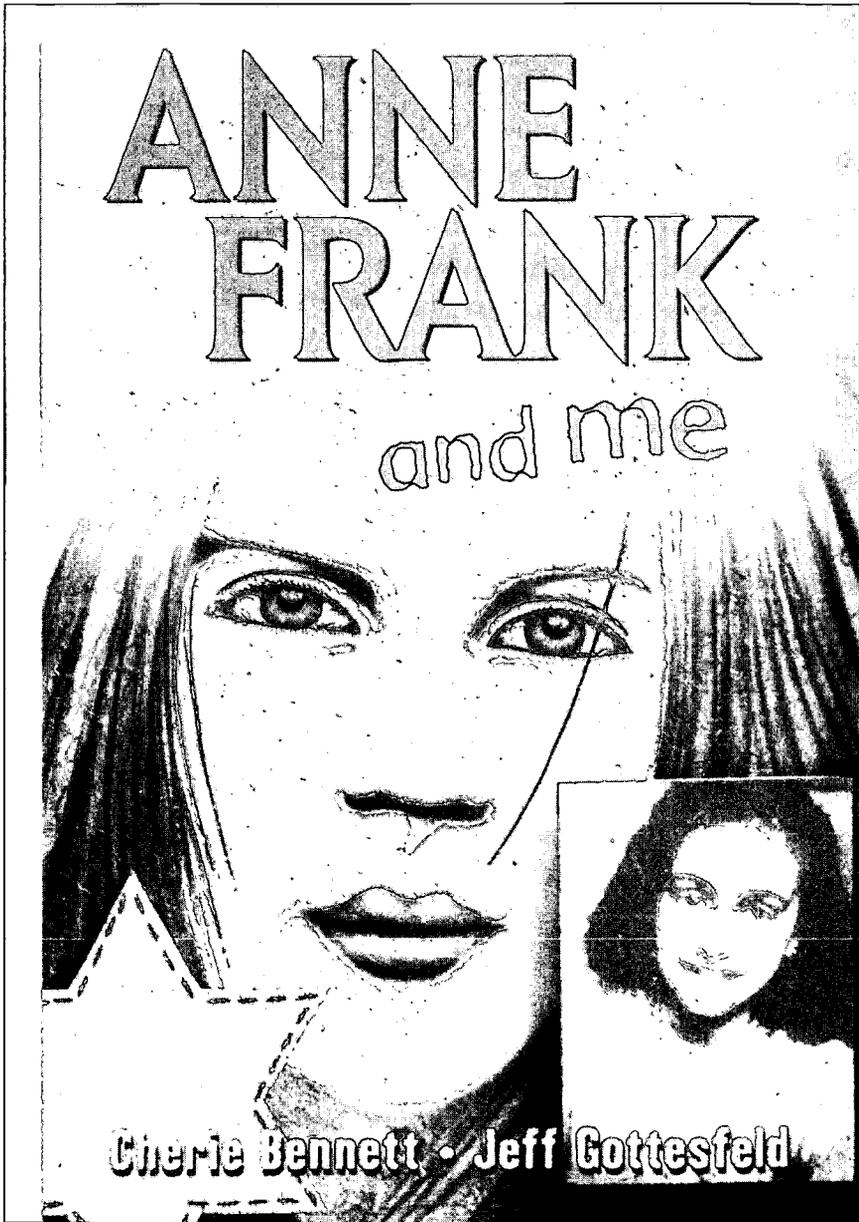
*“Most kids define life narrowly: self, family, friends, school. But they're capable of great passion and mobilization against injustice if given the right example by adults. Miep Gies wrote, 'There had been two kinds of Dutch people: those who collaborated and those who resisted.' It was no different in France. What we tell teens is, when you see an injustice, big or small, realize that by doing nothing you are also making a moral decision.”*

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She's surrounded by the people from home: her school principal is her father, her English teacher is her mother, and her family is Jewish, named Bernhardt. There, she experiences what life was like for a Jewish person under Nazi control. She's faced with many moral choices—about collaboration, resistance, doing nothing. Ultimately, Nicole understands why the Holocaust matters. When Bennett and Gottesfeld reworked the play as novel, they made a few changes. In particular, they introduced the Internet. Near the beginning of the novel, when Nicole is avoiding her assignment to read *The Diary of Anne Frank*, she searches the web for the Cliffs Notes version of the *Diary*. During her search, she comes across a denial web site that is so expertly put together that she believes it. Gottesfeld explains the reason for the change like this: "Six years ago, at the stage premier [of *Anne Frank and Me*], there was no Internet to speak of. Now there are 2000+ hate web sites, some so well disguised that if you didn't

know better, you'd think they were the official site of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. This is scary, because a lot of kids don't know better." So Bennett and Gottesfeld decided to highlight this issue in the novel.

When asked what would inspire kids to become activists, Bennett invoked the words of Miep Gies, the courageous Dutch friend of the Frank family who risked her freedom and her life to hide them in Amsterdam. "Most kids define life narrowly: self, family, friends, school. But they're capable of great passion and mobilization against injustice if given the right example



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## Future Plans

Recently, Bennett and Gottesfeld have been touring the United States, visiting schools to speak to teens about *Anne Frank and Me* and about the Holocaust. Soon, she will be getting back to work on her current writing projects. She and Gottesfeld have been working on a new book tentatively titled *A Heart Divided*, which is set at a high school in the South during a controversy about the Confederate flag. They are also working on a TV adaptation of the novel *Searching for David's Heart* for the Disney Channel.

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*“The tens of thousands of letters I’ve received from you guys over the past few years have made me laugh, cry, and think. . . . I always say that I have the coolest, deepest, most incredible readers in the world. I’m honored when you tell me how much my books mean to you. I promise to keep writing as long as you keep reading.”*

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In addition, they have recently been talking with the WB network about creating an hour-long dramatic series, and they will be writing the pilot for that new series soon.

## Advice to Young Writers

“[No] one ever said that being a writer is easy. But if you’ve got the stories burning inside you to come out, you have to write, and that’s that,” Bennett tells young writers. “I would suggest that teens who want to be writers read, read, read everything they can get their hands on, and do everything that they can do to get published on a small scale. It can be in a newspaper, it can be nonfiction online, . . . it can be in their school literary magazine (don’t have one? start one!), it can be in their own zine. The possibilities are limitless.”

## Bennett’s Relationship with Her Readers

Bennett receives over 100 letters each week from readers of her books and her advice column, and she responds personally to every letter. As she says here, “The tens of thousands of letters I’ve received from you guys over the past few years have made me laugh, cry, and think. . . . I always say that I have the coolest, deepest, most incredible readers in the world. I’m honored when you tell me how much my books mean to you. I promise to keep writing as long as you keep reading.” For Bennett, it’s an issue of respect for her fans. “[Garth Brooks] told me early on that you must always

respect the people who support you. And that's why anyone who sends me a fan letter gets my personal response. If a girl cares enough to read one of my books or my column, I owe it to her trust in me to write back."

### FAVORITE BOOKS

Bennett has listed these books and writers as those that have been most influential: the writings of Carson McCullers, especially *Member of the Wedding*; the plays of Tennessee Williams; *Gone with the Wind*, by Marge Piercy; *She's Come Undone*, by Wally Lamb; *To Kill a Mockingbird*, by Harper Lee; *When You Comin' Back, Red Ryder?* by Mark Medoff; and *The Chosen*, by Chaim Potok.

—— “ ——

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### SELECTED WRITINGS

#### Novel Series

- "Sunset Island," 41 novels, 1991-97
- "Surviving Sixteen," 3 novels, 1993-94
- "Club Sunset Island," 3 novels, 1994
- "Wild Hearts," 6 novels, 1994
- "Teen Angels," 6 novels, 1996 (co-written with Jeff Gottesfeld)
- "Hope Hospital," 3 novels, 1996
- "Trash," 7 novels, 1997-99 (co-written with Jeff Gottesfeld)
- "Pageant," 6 novels, 1998-99
- "Dawson's Creek," 1998 to present (under pseudonym C.J. Anders)
- "Mirror Image," 4 novels, 1999-2000
- "University Hospital," 4 novels, 1999-2000

#### Plays

- Honky Tonk Angels*, 1988
- John Lennon and Me* (also known as *Candy Store Window*; adapted from the novel *Good Bye, Best Friend*), 1993
- Anne Frank and Me*, 1995 (also adapted as a novel)
- Cyra and Rocky*, 1996

*Zink the So-Called Zebra*, 1997 (also adapted as a novel)  
*Searching for David's Heart*, 1998 (also adapted as a novel)

### Novels

*Good-Bye, Best Friend*, 1993 (adapted as the play *John Lennon and Me*)  
*Girls in Love*, 1996  
*Bridesmaids*, 1996  
*The Wedding that Almost Wasn't*, 1998  
*Life in the Fat Lane*, 1998  
*Searching for David's Heart*, 1999 (adapted from the play of the same name)  
*Zink*, 1999 (adapted from the play of the same name)  
*Anne Frank and Me*, 2001 (adapted from the play of the same name)

### HONORS AND AWARDS

RCI Festival of Emerging American Theater Award: 1993, for *John Lennon and Me*  
Wing Walker Award: 1993, for *John Lennon and Me*  
Jackie White Memorial National Children's Playwriting Competition: 1993, First Place for *John Lennon and Me*; 1998, for *Zink: The Myth, the Legend, the Zebra*  
Children's Choice (Children's Book Council): 1994, for *Did You Hear about Amber?*  
American Library Association Award: 1994, for *Did You Hear about Amber?*  
Sholem Aleichem Commission Award: 1995, for *Anne Frank and Me*  
Bonderman Biennial Award: 1995, for *Anne Frank and Me*  
New Visions/New Voices Award (Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts): 1996, for *Cyra and Rocky*; 1998, for *Searching for David's Heart*  
Best Books for Young Adults (American Library Association): 1998, for *Life in the Fat Lane*  
Aurand Harris Memorial Children's Playwriting Award: 1999, for *Searching for David's Heart*  
Quick Picks for Reluctant Young Adult Readers (American Library Association): 2000, *The Haunted Heart*; 2001, *Love Him Forever*

### FURTHER READING

#### Books

*Authors and Artists for Young Adults*, Vol. 29, 1999  
*Contemporary Authors*, Vol. 163, 1998  
*Something about the Author*, Vol. 97, 1998  
*Who's Who among American Women*, 2000-2001

**Periodicals**

*Bergen (New Jersey) Record*, Aug. 19, 1990, Northern Valley section, p.1  
*Knoxville News-Sentinel*, Apr. 27, 1994, p.B3  
*Publishers Weekly*, Aug. 3, 1998, p.21; Jan. 18, 1999, p.198  
*Sacramento Bee*, May 13, 1994, p.SC1  
*The Tennessean (Nashville)*, Mar. 17, 1998, p.D1

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**WORLD WIDE WEB SITES**

<http://www.cheriebennett.com>  
<http://www.dramaticpublishing.com/bennett.html>  
<http://aol.teenreads.com/authors>  
<http://www.myhero.com/hero.asp?hero=aobrien>



## **Bruce Coville 1950-**

American Writer of Science Fiction and Fantasy Books  
for Children and Young Adults

Author of the *My Teacher Is an Alien* Series, the *Space  
Brat* Series, the *I Was a Sixth Grade Alien* Series, and  
the Unicorn Chronicles

### **BIRTH**

Bruce Coville was born in Syracuse, New York, on May 16,  
1950. His father, Arthur J. Coville, was a sales engineer and his  
mother, Jean Coville, worked as an executive secretary.

## YOUTH

Coville was raised in Phoenix, a small town in central New York state. He lived just a short distance from his grandparents' dairy farm, which he describes as the site of "my happiest childhood times." He vividly recalls the huge barns with their hay-filled lofts, mooing cattle, and mysterious relics. There was a swamp behind the house, and woods where he could play all kinds of imaginative games. Coville says that it was during this period of his childhood that he began to develop the kind of imagination that all fantasy writers share.

Coville's father was a traveling salesman who never showed much interest in books. But one night after dinner he took young Bruce into the living room and started reading to him from a book called *Tom Swift in the City of Gold*. That experience, Coville says, changed his life. "I was enthralled. . . . [I] waited anxiously for the next night and the next, resented an intrusion, and reread the book several times later on my own." From this point on, Bruce Coville was "hooked on books."

Coville remembers himself as being "a little strange" when he was a kid. Halloween was his favorite holiday, and he was always looking for the perfect scary book to read to himself on Halloween night. The fact that he was never able to find that book made him start to think about writing one of his own.

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## EARLY MEMORIES

As a child, Coville would get up earlier than everyone else in the house to read *Mary Poppins* and *The Voyages of Dr. Doolittle*. He also read the Nancy Drew mystery series, the Hardy Boys books, and lots of comic books—"things that people consider junk." But in his case, these early childhood reading experiences fostered a love of fantasy and mystery that would later inspire his own efforts as a writer.

## EDUCATION AND FIRST JOBS

After graduating from high school, Coville attended Duke University for a year and the State University of New York at Binghamton. He received his B.A. from the State University of New York at Oswego in 1974.

Shortly after graduating from college, Coville began teaching at Wetzel Road Elementary School in Liverpool, New York, where he taught second and fourth grade for seven years. He calls teaching “the hardest job in the world. I loved doing it, but I couldn’t write full time and teach full time, and I loved writing even more than I loved teaching.”

After he left his teaching job, Coville worked as a co-host and co-producer for *Upstage*, a cable program promoting local theater. He also worked as a cookware salesman, assembly line worker, magazine editor, and toy-maker. He even worked as a gravedigger—but that was because his grandfather ran the cemetery.

“  
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“the hardest job in the  
world. I loved doing it, but I  
couldn’t write full time and  
teach full time, and I loved  
writing even more than  
I loved teaching.”*

## BECOMING A WRITER

Coville was in sixth grade when he first realized that he wanted to be a writer. He had spent most of the year making life miserable for his teacher by failing to respond to her creative writing assignments. Then one day the teacher told the class to just go ahead and write; they could choose

any topic they liked, but they had to produce a short story within a certain amount of time. Once he knew that he could write about whatever he wanted, Coville discovered that he loved what he was doing.

Coville was 17 when he started working seriously at becoming a writer. His neighbor (and future mother-in-law) gave him a copy of *Winnie the Pooh*, a book for children that he’d never really appreciated before. He loved the way there was no transition as the characters moved between the worlds of fantasy and reality, and he particularly admired how perfectly the illustrations fit the text. “Suddenly I knew that what I really wanted to write was children’s books—to give other children the joy that I got from books when I was young,” Coville recalls.

Coville’s decision was also inspired by Katherine Dietz, his future wife, who lived around the corner. She was a talented artist whose style, he be-

lieved, would be perfect for children's books. "Her pictures made me want to write stories to go with them," he says.

Although Coville wrote seriously for ten years and completed four novels, he didn't sell his first book for young readers until 1978, when he was 27 years old. Called *The Foolish Giant* and illustrated by his wife, Kathy, it is about a clumsy giant who has difficulty fitting in with the ordinary people who live in his village until he becomes their hero by saving them from an evil wizard.



## CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

### The Magic Shop Books

During his seven years as a teacher, Coville had written a short story called "Monster for a Day," about a kid who has the ability to turn himself into a monster. Although he thought the story was funny, he was unhappy with it because it didn't seem to have any point. He started looking around his classroom and wondering what kind of kid might use this power to advantage. He saw a student named Russell, who was always being picked on by his classmates. So he re-wrote the story, using Russell as his main character. The result was so much better that he read it to his class every year for Halloween.

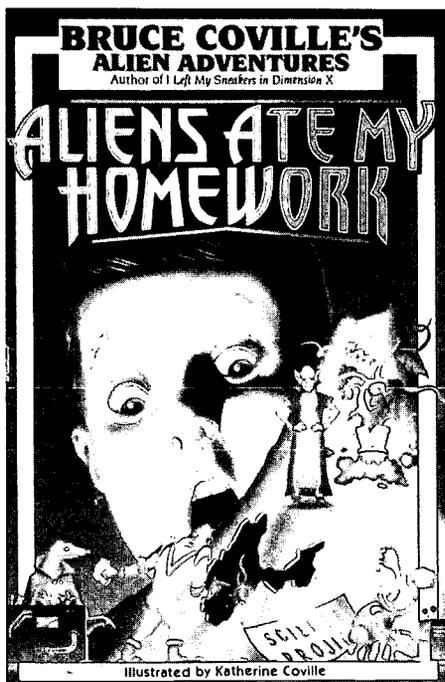
This short story became the basis for *The Monster's Ring*. The book included not only characters based on real students in Coville's class but also visits from his "half-mad twin brother, Igor," who used to visit the class on Halloween and jump on the desks when over-excited students tried to catch him.

*The Monster's Ring* was the first in what would eventually become a series of books about Mr. Elives' Magic Shop. Each book focuses on a different character who visits the magic shop and buys something there that leads to an adventure. In *Jeremy Thatcher, Dragon Hatcher*, for example, young Jeremy's life is changed forever when he buys an unusual egg in the magic shop, from which a baby dragon emerges. He raises the creature himself,

and they end up sharing an emotional bond as well as many exciting adventures. In *Jennifer Murdley's Toad*, Jennifer buys a toad hatched from a witch's mouth that she names Bufo. A fifth-grader who is often taunted by her classmates about her appearance, Jennifer discovers that Bufo has the ability to mimic other people's voices. She uses his talent to get revenge on a nasty classmate, with some surprising results. *The Skull of Truth* focuses on Charlie Eggleston, a habitual liar. When he encounters Mr. Elives' Magic Shop, he feels compelled to steal a skull. It turns out to be the Skull of Truth, which forces Charlie to tell the truth and face the consequences.

### Aliens and Space Brats

During the 15 years that separated the first and last Magic Shop books, Coville wrote other fantasy and science fiction books for young readers. He went on to create several popular series for middle grade readers devoted to aliens and other space creatures. He started out in 1989 with the novel *My Teacher Is an Alien*, which sold more copies in one year than any of his previous books had sold in 12 years. The story—about a substitute teacher whose behavior seems merely “suspicious” until one day a student catches him peeling off his face—quickly caught young readers' attention. It became the first in a series, followed by four other titles featuring aliens in the classroom.



*Space Brat*, published in 1992, launched a series about a boy named Blorck who lives on the planet Splat and is known for his terrible temper tantrums. Eventually Blorck discovers that throwing a tantrum is no guarantee that he'll get his way and that, in fact, it turns other people against him. Critics were quick to point out how Coville's story, set in a foreign time and place, made it easier for young readers to see how obnoxious Blorck's tantrums could be, and thus to confront their own misbehavior. There are now six books in the Space Brat series.

Coville went on to write two other series of fantasy books for young readers featuring aliens who come to earth. *Aliens Ate My Homework*, the first book in the Rod Allbright Alien Adventures series, features a young hero based on Coville himself—even the illustrations resemble his childhood photographs. Young Rod can hardly believe his eyes when a spaceship flies into his bedroom window one day. But then the ship's crew asks for his help in catching an alien criminal who is masquerading as Billy Becker, Rod's arch-enemy at school. Billy gets what he deserves in the end, and the aliens carry him off to a faraway planet. Coville has continued the Rod Allbright Alien Adventures in three additional novels as well.

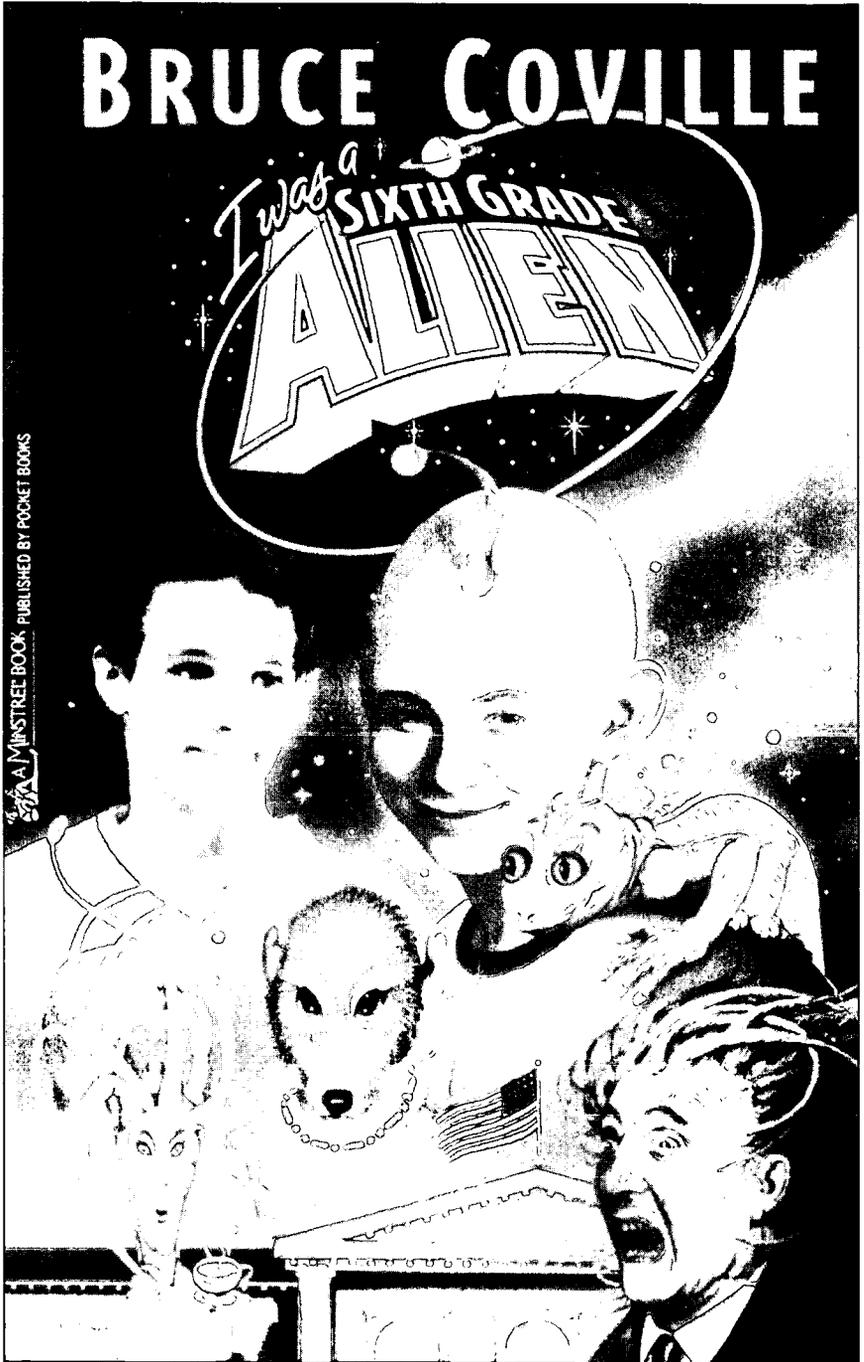
*I Was a Sixth Grade Alien*, published in 1999, marked the beginning of a new series, this time based on the adventures of Pleskit Ventraa, a blue-haired boy from the planet Hevi-Hevi, whose father is a diplomat with the League of Galactic Bodies. Pleskit enrolls in school and becomes friends with Tim Thompkins, who describes himself as "a sixth grade alien, the weirdest kid in the class"—until, that is, he meets Pleskit. As they struggle to find their way through the complicated social maze of sixth grade, the two get caught up in an interplanetary mystery. *I Was a Sixth Grade Alien* was so popular that it became the basis for a television series for kids on the Fox Family Channel and Canada's YTV. To date, Coville has written 11 subsequent books in the series.

Coville has spent a lot of time thinking about why aliens would want to visit the Earth. "It would have to be because they see us as dangerous," he says. "We make them nervous." But he also believes that they would be very smart. "Any aliens that could get here would be way ahead of us in technology and civilization," he points out. "The idea that they would come here and not understand anything about our culture is ridiculous."

—— “ ——

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## Ghosts, Unicorns, Shakespeare, and More

In addition to his books about alien adventures, Coville has written a wide variety of other books for middle grade readers. A prolific author, he has created some series containing just a few titles, and individual titles as well. Many of his books deal with fantastical, supernatural, or other spooky events. One of these is the A. I. Gang series—*Operation Sherlock*, *Robot Trouble*, and *Forever Begins Tomorrow*—which follows the adventures of a group of super-smart kids as they tackle adult-size problems. In the Nina Tanleven stories, *The Ghost in the Big Brass Bed*, *The Ghost in the Third Row*, and *The Ghost Wore Gray*, he introduces Nina, a sixth grader who keeps encountering ghosts wherever she goes. In the Camp Haunted Hills series—*How I Survived My Summer Vacation*, *Some of My Best Friends Are Monsters*, and *The Dinosaur that Followed Me Home*—some kids sign up for summer camp only to discover that it's run by a movie maker who just happens to make the scariest movies around. And now he wants to try out his new special effects on the kids!

Coville has also shown a special interest in unicorns. The Unicorn Chronicles—*Into the Land of the Unicorns* and the eagerly awaited sequel, *Song of the Wanderer*—take place in a far-away secret world, Luster, that is home to the unicorns. Luster is discovered by a young girl named Cara as she is walking home from the library one day, and she is soon sent off on an important and perilous quest. These appealing stories are filled with unicorns, dragons, fantasy, adventure, magic, and myth. And the ending of the second book, *Song of the Wanderer*, implies that there just might be another unicorn book to follow. Coville has also put together two anthologies of classic and original stories and poems about unicorns called *Herds of Thunder*, *Manes of Gold* and *A Glory of Unicorns*. In addition, he has edited a series of anthologies of other writers' scary stories under such titles as *Bruce Coville's Book of Monsters*, *Bruce Coville's Book of Nightmares*, and *Bruce Coville's Book of Spine-Tinglers*. Coville's anthologies are especially popular with young readers. "I try to [create] the kind of books I would have wanted to read when I was a kid," he explains. "I wanted to read alien, ghost, and monster stories, and I could never find enough of them."

——— “ ———

“I try to [create] the kind  
of books I would have  
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and I could never find  
enough of them.”

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### Young Adult Fiction

As in his writings for middle grade readers, Coville has created a mix of different types of stories in his writings for young adults as well. In his series *Chamber of Horrors*, he explores different supernatural and suspenseful happenings among some young adults, like a girl who finds an ancient deck of tarot cards in her grandmother's attic, a haunted house game that leads to unexpected consequences, and the mysterious powers of an ancient piece of jewelry. In his two collection of *Oddities*, *Oddly Enough* and *Odder than Ever*, Coville includes short fantasy tales from the worlds of angels, unicorns, werewolves, vampires, and monsters, where nothing is quite what it seems.

Coville has also written several individual novels for young adults. *Space Station Ice-3* takes his readers into outer space, in a suspenseful story about Rusty McPhee's quest to discover the identity of a dead body he discovers in the space station's waste converter tanks. Because the body is "converted" before he has a chance to show it to anyone, no one believes his story. Everyone on the orbiting colony is accounted for, but Rusty is unwilling to let the mystery remain unsolved. In a different vein, Coville has also written an historical novel for young adults called *Fortune's Journey*. It follows the adventures of a 16-year-old who leads a group of actors on an overland

journey to California in 1853. Fortune Plunkett's journey in a covered wagon along the Oregon Trail manages to combine action, mystery, and romance with its historical background.

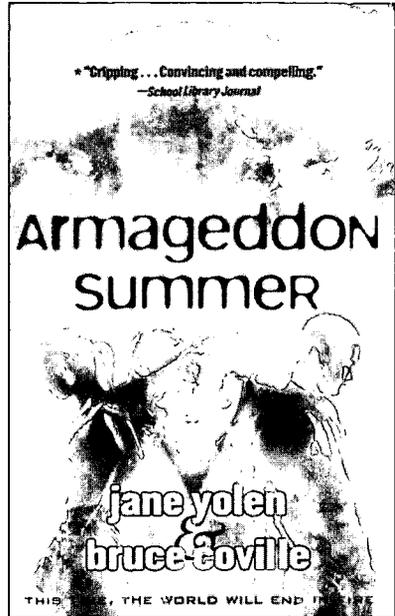
In a new approach, Coville co-wrote his next young adult novel, *Armageddon Summer*, with fellow young adult author Jane Yolen (for additional information on Yolen, see *Biography Today Authors*, Vol. 7). It's a provocative novel on the nature of faith, the dangers of religious fanaticism, and blossoming friendship and love. *Armageddon Summer* takes place at a religious retreat in the mountains, set up by a fundamentalist preacher who believes the world is about to end. Jed and Marina are two teenagers

who have been taken there by their parents in anticipation of the world's end. But they begin to wonder what's really going on when they notice that the compound is surrounded by electric fences and guarded by men with automatic rifles. The novel is told in alternating chapters from the two main characters' points of view, with Coville writing the chapters in Jed's voice and Yolen writing those in Marina's voice. According to Roger Leslie in *Booklist*, "Yolen and Coville, writing in alternating chapters from Marina's and Jed's points of view, explore their rich, thought-provoking theme with the perfect balance of gripping adventure and understated pathos, leavened by a dollop of humor."

### The Role of Myth

For Coville, myths are crucial to his storytelling. Myths are traditional stories handed down from one generation to the next that explain how the world came to be the way it is. Coville suggests that his books are strongly rooted in these basic mythic patterns, which give them a structure and depth that many children's fantasy and science fiction books lack. He believes that a knowledge of mythic patterns can help young readers make sense of an otherwise confusing and chaotic world.

"I do not expect a child to read my picture books and suddenly discover the secret of the universe," Coville comments. "I do hope that something from my works will tuck itself away in the child's mind, ready to present itself as a



piece of the puzzle on some future day when he or she is busy constructing a view of the world." Myth-making aside, however, Coville says that a writer's first and foremost job is "to tell a whacking good story." Because today's young readers watch so much television and have so much less patience, he says that he writes "in constant terror of losing their attention."

## MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

Coville married Katherine Dietz, who has illustrated many of his books, on October 11, 1969. They have three grown children, Orion, Cara, and Adam. They also have three cats and a Norwegian elkhound named Thor. Aside from a brief period spent living in New York City, Coville has lived most of his life in the Syracuse area.

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*Coville advises young writers to keep a journal. "If you want an idea, your mind will probably refuse to give it to you. Sometimes ideas just come floating by. The trick is to save ideas when they come to you. If you get a great idea today, it will probably be gone before you get around to writing about it—unless you write it down in your journal."*

Coville and his wife were still teenagers when they got married, and their relationship as partners and professional collaborators has been a complicated one. They lived together for 12 years, separated for another 12 years, then decided to live together again. But even when their marriage wasn't working, they never stopped producing books together.

## ADVICE TO YOUNG WRITERS

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ideas just come floating by. The trick is to save ideas when they come to you. If you get a great idea today, it will probably be gone before you get around to writing about it—unless you write it down in your journal." He calls journal-writing a way of "saving yourself for yourself," and advises beginning writers to use their journals "like a fishhook to pull up images."

## FAVORITE BOOKS AND MOVIES

Coville's favorite authors include C. S. Lewis, who wrote *The Chronicles of Narnia*, and Lloyd Alexander, author of *The Chronicles of Prydain*. He con-

siders them his personal role models and two of the best fantasy writers. He thinks Natalie Babbitt's *Tuck Everlasting* is "the best children's book in the last 50 years," and he also admires the work of William Sleator and Jane Yolen.

Coville's favorite movie scene comes from *Star Wars*. It's the scene where Han Solo stops at a space hangout and meets all sorts of weird-looking life forms. This scene supports Coville's belief that an alien's physical appearance should give some clues about what kind of planet it comes from.

## SELECTED WRITINGS

### Magic Shop Series

*The Monster's Ring*, 1982  
*Jeremy Thatcher, Dragon Hatcher*, 1991  
*Jennifer Murdley's Toad*, 1992  
*The Skull of Truth*, 1997

### My Teacher Is an Alien Series

*My Teacher is an Alien*, 1989  
*My Teacher Fried My Brains*, 1991  
*My Teacher Glows in the Dark*, 1991  
*My Teacher Flunked the Planet*, 1992  
*Is Your Teacher an Alien?* 1997

### Space Brat Series

*Space Brat*, 1992  
*Blork's Evil Twin*, 1993  
*The Wrath of Squat*, 1994  
*Planet of the Dips*, 1995  
*The Saber-Toothed Poodnoobie*, 1997

### Rod Allbright Alien Adventures Series

*Aliens Ate My Homework*, 1993  
*I Left My Sneakers in Dimension X*, 1994  
*The Search for Snout*, 1995  
*Aliens Stole My Body*, 1997

### I Was a Sixth Grade Alien Series

*I Was a Sixth Grade Alien*, 1999  
*The Attack of the Two-Inch Teacher*, 1999

*I Lost My Grandfather's Brain*, 1999  
*Peanut Butter Lover Boy*, 2000  
*Zombies of the Science Fair*, 2000  
*Too Many Aliens*, 2000  
*There's an Alien in My Backpack*, 2000  
*There's an Alien in My Classroom*, 2000  
*Snatched from Earth*, 2000  
*Don't Fry My Veeblax*, 2000  
*The Revolt of the Miniature Mutants*, 2001  
*There's an Alien in My Underwear*, 2001

### **Middle Grade Fiction (Non-Series)**

*Goblins in the Castle*, 1992  
*Monster of the Year*, 1990  
*The World's Worst Fairy Godmother*, 1996  
*The Dragonslayers*, 1997  
*Night*, 1997  
*The Ghost Saw Red*, 1998  
*Angells Players*, 1999

### **Young Adult Fiction (Non-Series)**

*Oddly Enough*, 1994  
*Space Station Ice-3*, 1996  
*Fortune's Journey*, 1997  
*Armageddon Summer*, 1998 (with Jane Yolen)  
*Odder than Ever*, 2000

### **The Chamber of Horrors Series**

*The Eyes of the Tarot*, 1983  
*Spirits and Spells*, 1983  
*Waiting Spirits*, 1984  
*Amulet of Doom*, 1985

### **The A.I. Gang Series**

*Operation Sherlock*, 1986  
*Robot Trouble*, 1986  
*Forever Begins Tomorrow*, 1986

**The Nina Tanleven Stories**

*The Ghost in the Third Row*, 1987

*The Ghost Wore Gray*, 1988

*Ghost in the Big Brass Bed*, 1991

**The Camp Haunted Hills Series**

*How I Survived My Summer Vacation*, 1988

*Some of My Best Friends Are Monsters*, 1989

*The Dinosaur that Followed Me Home*, 1990

**The Unicorn Chronicles**

*Into the Land of the Unicorns*, 1994

*Song of the Wanderer*, 1999

**Anthologies**

*Herds of Thunder, Manes of Gold*, 1989

*A Glory of Unicorns*, 1998

**Shakespeare Retellings**

*The Tempest*, 1996

*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 1996

*Macbeth*, 1997

*Romeo and Juliet*, 1999

**Bruce Coville's Book of . . .**

*Bruce Coville's Book of Ghosts*, 1994

*Bruce Coville's Book of Nightmares*, 1995

*Bruce Coville's Book of Aliens*, 1996

*Bruce Coville's Book of Monsters*, 1996

*Bruce Coville's Book of Magic*, 1996

*Bruce Coville's Book of Spine Tinglers*, 1996

*Bruce Coville's Book of Aliens 2*, 1996

*Bruce Coville's Book of Nightmares 2*, 1997

*Bruce Coville's Book of Ghosts 2*, 1997

*Bruce Coville's Book of Magic 2*, 1997

## FURTHER READING

### Books

Graham, Paula W. *Speaking of Journals*, 1999

McElmeel, Sharron. *100 Most Popular Children's Authors*, 1999

*Something About the Author*, Vol. 77, 1994

### Periodicals

*Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, May 1, 1995, p.B3

*Newsday*, June 13, 1995, p.B15

*Time for Kids*, Feb. 2, 1996, p.6

## ADDRESS

Pocket Books

1230 Avenue of the Americas

13 Floor

New York, NY 10020

## WORLD WIDE WEB SITES

<http://www.brucecoville.com>

<http://teacher.scholastic.com/authorsandbooks/authors/coville/bio.htm>



## **Rosa Guy 1925-**

American Novelist and Fiction Writer for Young Adults

Author of the Harlem Trilogy and the Imamu Jones Trilogy

### **BIRTH**

Rosa Guy (pronounced "ghee") was born Rosa Cuthbert on September 1, 1925, in Diego Martin, Trinidad, in the British West Indies. Her father, Henry Cuthbert, and her mother, Audrey (Gonzales) Cuthbert, emigrated to the United States soon after her birth to establish a new life for the family. Rosa

and her sister Ameze, who was two years older, stayed behind and lived with relatives until their parents were settled in their new home.

## YOUTH

Rosa and Ameze arrived in Harlem in 1932. Their mother became ill with cancer the following year, and the girls were sent to live with their cousins in the Bronx. Their mother, Audrey Cuthbert, died in 1934. Even though

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*Guy often went with her cousins to meetings devoted to the cause of Marcus Garvey, the leader of the "Back to Africa" movement. There, she was exposed to political activism for the first time. "I had an awareness of Africa that other people didn't have," she recalls.*

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she died when her daughters were very young, she had a lasting impact on their lives. When she found out that the girls were spending their Saturdays at the local movie theater watching actors playing roles she found degrading to African-Americans, she insisted that they stay at home. Rosa began to spend her Saturday afternoons reading instead, and the discussions that she and her mother had about books marked the start of her interest in writing.

After their mother's death, Rosa and Ameze left their cousins' home in the Bronx and returned to Harlem to live with their father, who spent most of his time running a

restaurant. He was a tyrant who had no idea how to raise two daughters, so he hired the West Indian woman who lived next door to keep an eye on the girls.

Henry Cuthbert soon remarried, and he and his two daughters went to live with their new stepmother. For a short time she became, in Guy's words, "the driving force in our lives." But the marriage fell apart, Guy's dad lost his business during the Depression, and he died in 1937. Rosa and Ameze, who were now orphans, became wards of the state and lived for several years in foster homes and institutions. Ameze tried to take care of Rosa but became ill herself in 1939, forcing Rosa to drop out of school so she could care for her older sister. By the time she turned 14, Rosa had experienced more losses than many people experience in a lifetime. She had faced leaving the country in which she'd been born, the death of both her parents, the disruption of living with her cousins, and the responsibility of taking care of Ameze.

## EARLY MEMORIES

The cousins with whom Rosa lived in the Bronx were followers of Marcus Garvey, the founder of the Universal Negro Improvement Association and the leader of the "Back to Africa" movement. Often referred to as the "Black Moses," Garvey was a charismatic speaker who promoted racial pride by supporting black-owned businesses and by publishing black American writers in his organization's newsletter. Rosa often went with her cousins to the local Garveyite meetings, where she was exposed to political activism for the first time. "I had an awareness of Africa that other people didn't have," she recalls.

Rosa particularly remembers having a fight in elementary school with one of her black classmates, who disagreed when Rosa told her that "We all come from Africa." Her friend insisted that her "ancestors" lived right there in New York City. When Rosa tried to explain, the other girl started hitting her and pulling her hair. At the time, very few black children had any knowledge of their African roots.

## EDUCATION AND FIRST JOBS

Because she was constantly changing homes, Guy's formal education was frequently disrupted and ended altogether when she was 14. But she did attend New York University for a while in the 1940s and studied writing with Viola Brothers Shaw.

Guy's first job at age 14 was working at a brassiere factory in New York City's garment district. Although she hadn't wanted to drop out of school when Ameze became ill, she was happy to escape the abuse of her classmates, who constantly taunted her because she came from the West Indies. It didn't take Guy long to realize, however, that she was being given the worst jobs at the factory because she was black. So she got involved with the union and started doing what she could to improve conditions for other black workers.

## BECOMING A WRITER

Two factors played an important role in Rosa Guy's decision to become a writer: the seven years she spent as a child in the West Indies and the experience of growing up as an orphan. The storytelling tradition is very strong in Trinidad, and many aspects of life there—the calypso, the superstitions, the belief in voodoo and zombie—had a profound effect on Guy. Being an orphan always made her feel as though she were on the outside looking in, a perspective that many writers share.

Perhaps because Guy had always felt so isolated and alone, she married Warner Guy when she was only 16 and had a son, Warner, Jr., the following year. Her husband went off to fight in World War II, and while he was away, Guy got involved with the American Negro Theatre. Founded in 1940, the purpose of the ANT was to display the talent and capability of black actors, and to eliminate stereotypes about blacks in the performing arts. Its members included the actors Sidney Poitier and Ruby Dee, along with the playwright Alice Childress and the singer Harry Belafonte. Although Guy

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*“Bird at My Window reveals the depth of anguish suffered by black Americans, forced to view freedom and justice only through shuttered windows.*

*It points up the resulting poverty and prejudice inherent in such denial; the devastating quality of black life — through this novel on the life of one brilliant young man and his family, friends, and the Harlem community.”*

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loved having an outlet for her artistic talents and creativity, she gave up the ANT when her husband returned in 1945 and the family moved to Connecticut.

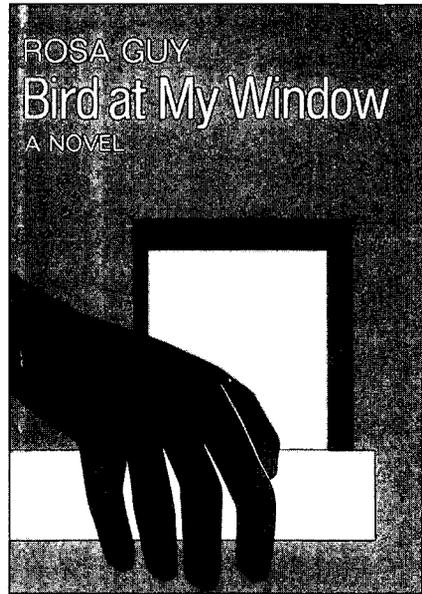
Guy’s marriage ended just five years later, in 1950. After that, she returned to Harlem and got involved with the Committee for the Negro in the Arts, which had replaced the ANT as an organization that promoted the talents of black artists. Realizing how few plays were being written for black actors, Guy tried her hand at writing a one-act play herself. *Venetian Blinds* was performed at New York City’s Topical Theater in 1954, but she quickly became discouraged because she saw playwriting as a dead end for black artists. So she turned to fiction instead.

### **The Harlem Writers Guild**

In 1951 Guy and several other young black writers formed the Harlem Writers Guild, a workshop in which they shared and critiqued each other’s writing. Although she continued to work at the brassiere factory and to raise her young son, Guy managed to write every evening when she got home. The Harlem Writers Guild was an important influence on her life, filling in some of the gaps in her formal education and providing her with a supportive group of friends who encouraged her to continue writing. The Guild also got involved in many of the political issues of the day, particularly the civil rights movement.

At a meeting of the Guild in 1960, Guy met the African-American poet and novelist Maya Angelou, who became a lifelong friend and fellow political activist. Together with the singer Abbey Lincoln, they formed the Cultural Association for Women of African Heritage (CAWAH), a group of dancers, teachers, singers, writers, and musicians who wanted to support black civil rights groups. One of their first efforts was to go to the United Nations to protest the assassination of Patrice Lumumba, the black leader of the newly independent African nation of Congo. The protest quickly turned into a massive demonstration, one of

many marches, sit-ins, riots, and other protests that swept across the nation during the 1960s. Guy began to realize that getting involved in politics was one way to draw attention to the plight of black people.



## CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

### *Bird at My Window* and *Children of Longing*

In 1960, Guy published two short stories set in Trinidad. After that, her writing was increasingly influenced by the civil rights movement in the U.S. and the struggle for independence that was going on in several African countries. She was also deeply affected by two tragic events that occurred at that time: the 1962 murder of Warner Guy, her former husband, and the 1965 assassination of Malcolm X, the former Nation of Islam leader and African-American political activist. After these tragedies, Guy left the United States and went to Haiti. There, she wrote *Bird at My Window* (1966), her first published novel. "*Bird at My Window* reveals the depth of anguish suffered by black Americans, forced to view freedom and justice only through shuttered windows," Guy explained. "It points up the resulting poverty and prejudice inherent in such denial; the devastating quality of black life — through this novel on the life of one brilliant young man and his family, friends, and the Harlem community."

Wade Williams, the main character of *Bird at My Window*, is full of contradictions. He is a bright student who graduates at the head of his high

school class. But he is also violent, a product of his upbringing on the streets of Harlem. He begins by stealing so he can bring money home to his mother and ends up murdering a white army captain in France who calls him a "nigger." When he attacks his own sister in what appears to be a fit of rage, he is committed to the psychopathic ward of a New York City hospital. The story moves backward and forward in time to reveal the sources of Wade's anger and frustration and to examine racial prejudice and its destructive effects on family relationships. One critic called *Bird at My Window* "the most significant novel about the Harlem Negro since James Baldwin's *Go Tell It on the Mountain*."

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*Maya Angelou greeted a new edition of Bird at My Window with these words: "This book was welcomed when it was first published in 1966. Its brave examination of a loving, yet painful relationship between a black mother and her son is even more important today. Rosa Guy is a fine writer and she continually gives us new issues to contemplate. Welcome Bird at My Window."*

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Luther King, Jr., was assassinated. She was so affected by his death that she decided to travel through the South to find out how young people were responding to the loss of their black leaders. The result was *Children of Longing* (1970), a book of essays written by young adults ages 13 to 23 and accompanied by Guy's own interviews and personal commentary. *Children of Longing* marked the point at which her concerns as a writer and as a political activist came together. In addition, it was during these conversations with young people that she gathered the raw material for the themes and characters she would later develop in her novels for young adults.

Now considered a powerful and timely cultural critique, the book has recently been re-released in a new paperback edition, which was hailed by Maya Angelou with these words: "This book was welcomed when it was first published in 1966. Its brave examination of a loving, yet painful relationship between a black mother and her son is even more important today. Rosa Guy is a fine writer and she continually gives us new issues to contemplate. Welcome *Bird at My Window*."

In 1968, not long after Guy's return from Haiti and the publication of her first novel, the African-American civil rights leader Martin

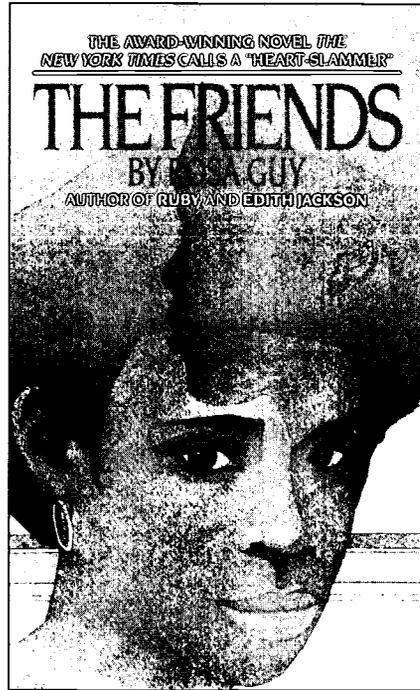
## The Harlem Trilogy

In her next three novels Guy created what is now called the Harlem Trilogy, her first works for young adults. These novels explore the relationships among three African-American girls—the sisters Ruby and Phyllisia Cathy, who have recently come to Harlem from the West Indies, and Edith Jackson, a “ragamuffin” from a poor Harlem family. Each of the books focuses on the perspective and experiences of one of the girls as she grows to adulthood and faces the challenges of inner-city life.

*The Friends* (1973) tells the story of Phyllisia Cathy, who is shunned by her classmates because she speaks with a West Indian accent and because her father, who owns

a restaurant, has brought her up to feel superior to the poor blacks of her Harlem neighborhood. The only one who is willing to befriend her is the unattractive, sloppily-dressed Edith, whose socks have holes and whose hair is dirty and matted. Phyllisia responds to her offer of friendship only because she thinks she can “use” Edith to protect her from her hostile classmates. When she finally brings Edith home to meet her middle-class parents, they are horrified, and the one-sided friendship falls apart. Once she has lost Edith, Phyllisia’s loneliness and isolation increase when her mother dies and her relationship with her father continues to deteriorate. The novel is said to draw upon Guy’s own experiences following the loss of her mother.

*Ruby* (1976) portrays a lesbian relationship between Ruby Cathy, who is two years older than Phyllisia, and Daphne Dupree. Calvin Cathy, the girls’ father, becomes a tyrant to his daughters after their mother’s death because he has no idea how to handle his new responsibilities as a single parent. When he discovers what is going on between Ruby and Daphne, he punishes his daughter with a brutal beating. Ruby is so depressed after Daphne leaves for college that she tries to commit suicide, but her father walks in just as she is about to jump to her death. The emotional confrontation between them changes the nature of their relationship.



*Edith Jackson* (1978) follows 17-year-old Edith after her parents have died and she struggles to hold her siblings together. She has a brief love affair with a man nearly twice her age and becomes pregnant. After much soul-searching, she finally decides that she must take charge of her own destiny by having an abortion. *Edith Jackson* completes the trilogy and Guy's message about the failure of American society to meet the complex needs of its young people.

The Harlem Trilogy redefined the traditional coming-of-age novel by focusing on the lives of young, inner-city women and by treating controversial issues with honesty and realism. It was translated into many languages, and *The Friends* became required reading for school-age children in Great Britain—the first novel by an African-American to be honored in this way.

### **The Imamu Jones Trilogy**

By the end of the 1970s, Guy had started writing another trilogy, this time with a central character who was not only male but an amateur detective. In the first book, *The Disappearance* (1979), she introduced her readers to 16-year-old Imamu Jones. His father was killed in Vietnam, his mother has become an alcoholic, and Imamu has just dropped out of school. He gets involved in a grocery store robbery in which his friend ends up killing the owner. After Imamu is found innocent in court, a volunteer social worker named Ann Aimsley persuades the judge to make her his legal guardian. When Perk, the Aimsley's youngest daughter, mysteriously disappears shortly after Imamu joins the middle-class Brooklyn family, he is immediately suspected and taken into temporary custody. When he is released, he vows to solve the mystery and clear his name.

In *New Guys Around the Block* (1983), the second Imamu Jones book, smooth-talking and more experienced newcomer Olivette Larouches has arrived in the Aimsley's neighborhood. Iggy, a childhood friend of Imamu's who has been serving time in prison for murder, is released, and almost immediately a series of burglaries start occurring in an adjoining white neighborhood. Since all the young black men who live nearby are considered suspects, Imamu decides to find the burglar himself, assisted by Olivette. The story takes some surprising and tragic turns, but Imamu's skillful detective work reveals the mastermind behind the crimes.

The Imamu Jones trilogy was completed when Guy published *And I Heard a Bird Sing* in 1986. In this book Imamu, who is living with his recovered mother in Brooklyn, meets a very wealthy white woman who is physically disabled. While delivering groceries to her estate he becomes a prime sus-

AN IMAMU JONES MYSTERY

# THE DISAPPEARANCE

## ROSA GUY



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*Lying in her bed in the institution where she had been sent to live when her father became ill, Guy had a vision of a young girl's face on the darkened ceiling above her. "Through her eyes, I glimpsed a depth of yearning, of loneliness — a reflection of my own inner self. Then she was gone . . . leaving me alone in darkness. That was my summons — my call to consciousness — which through the years has structured my life. That vision, in a New York City orphanage on the eve of losing my only remaining parent, gave me a sense of urgency that remains with me always. It is an urgency that keeps me searching for ways to relate the plight of the poor, the young, the lonely, and the damned in our society."*

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pect in a murder and must once again solve the crime himself to prevent his own arrest.

Although most critics found the Imamu Jones books dramatic and moving, some were offended by the realism with which the characters and the setting were portrayed. Some thought the books were too harsh for young adult readers. But other commentators, those who had lived in the city and knew the conditions under which many African-American young people were growing up, admired Guy's unwillingness to glamorize their environment.

#### **Other Novels and Children's Books**

In addition to the trilogies, Guy has written other works for adults, children, and young adults. Her works for adults include *A Measure of Time* (1983), a rags-to-riches story about a young girl from Montgomery, Alabama, who becomes a self-made millionaire in Harlem by the time she is 40. She does this by becoming a "booster," someone who shoplifts and sells what she steals for money. Guy based the character, named Dorine Davis, on her own stepmother. Her novel *My Love, My Love; or, The Peasant Girl* (1985) is a West Indian story based

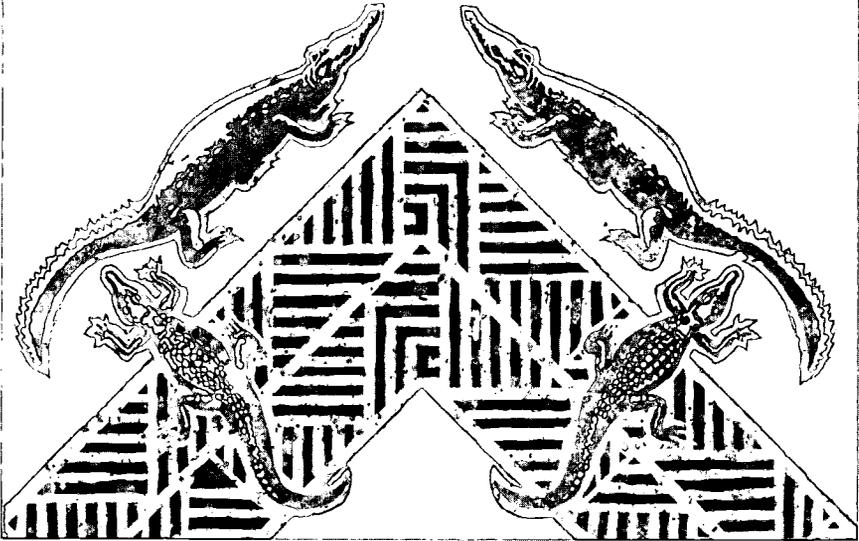
on Hans Christian Andersen's tale of "The Little Mermaid." It's about a poor peasant girl who falls in love with a wealthy landowner's son whose lighter skin color and higher social standing ultimately put him beyond her reach. In addition to illustrating Guy's favorite themes of race and class barriers, *My Love, My Love* was turned into a successful musical called

# Mother Crocodile

"MAMAN-CAÏMAN" BY BIRAGO DIOP

Translated and adapted by Rosa Guy

Illustrated by John Steptoe



*Once on This Island*, which won London's Olivier Award for Best Musical in 1993. In *The Sun, the Sea, a Touch of the Wind* (1995), her most recent adult novel, Guy tells the story of an African-American artist who is on the verge of a nervous breakdown when she travels to Haiti in search of identity and renewal. What she finds there, though, presents unanticipated challenges—and new opportunities for growth.

Guy has also written books for young children. Her first came about after a 1980 trip to the African nation of Senegal, where she discovered a folktale

called "Maman-Caiman" by the Senegalese writer Birago Diop. She translated this tale from French into English and adapted it for her first children's picture book, *Mother Crocodile: An Uncle Amadou Tale from Senegal* (1981). Her first book for young readers won the Coretta Scott King Award, a prestigious award given by the American Library Association to "authors and illustrators of African descent whose distinguished books promote an understanding and appreciation of the 'American Dream.'" Since then she has published two other children's books, *Paris, Pee Wee, and Big Dog* (1984) and *Billy the Great* (1992).

Among her books for young adults, Guy is best known for the Harlem Trilogy and the Imamu Jones Trilogy; yet she has also written several other young adult novels. During the years when she was working on the Imamu Jones Trilogy, she also wrote *A Mirror of Her Own* (1981), which was the first of her novels to be set entirely outside of Harlem and to feature affluent white characters instead of struggling African-Americans. Two sisters, 17-year-old Mary and 22-year-old Roxanne Abbot, live with their parents in suburban Oak Bluff, on New York's Long Island. Both girls are in love with John Drysdale, a neighbor who is involved with drugs. Roxanne is mature enough to recognize the flaws in John's character, but Mary has a harder time learning about love. *A Mirror of Her Own* is generally acknowledged to be one of Guy's least successful novels, primarily because the characters aren't as true-to-life as those in her earlier writings for young adults. In *The Ups and Downs of Carl Davis III* (1989) she tells the story of young Carl, who is sent to South Carolina to live with his grandmother. He is determined to teach the kids in his new school about black history, although they don't seem very interested. Guy's most recent young adult novel, *The Music of Summer* (1992), addresses the difficult issue of the effect of color and skin tone on friendship. The novel focuses on Sarah Richardson, a dark-skinned teenager who spends two weeks on Cape Cod. She finds herself an outcast there because her former friend Cathy has found some wealthier, lighter-skinned friends. Sarah learns some hard lessons about a society where status is based on skin tone and where racial bigotry can turn even friends against one another.

### **Inspiration for Her Writing**

Today, Guy is recognized for several different aspects of her writing. She is an adept storyteller, a talent that was shaped by the oral traditions of her native island of Trinidad, where skill with language is highly prized. She is also widely admired for creating compelling and believable African-American and African-Caribbean characters. Her characters may suffer the

effects of racism, poverty, and lack of hope, yet they still provide a positive example of how young people at a turning point in their lives can save themselves. Indeed, this is very similar to Guy's own life story. In fact, much of the inspiration for her writing has come from her own early experiences. She still remembers lying in her bed in the institution where she had been sent to live when her father became ill. She had a vision of a young girl's face on the darkened ceiling above her. "Through her eyes, I glimpsed a depth of yearning, of loneliness—a reflection of my own inner self. Then she was gone . . . leaving me alone in darkness."

"That was my summons — my call to consciousness," Guy says, "which through the years has structured my life. That vision, in a New York City orphanage on the eve of losing my only remaining parent, gave me a sense of urgency that remains with me always. It is an urgency that keeps me searching for ways to relate the plight of the poor, the young, the lonely, and the damned in our society."

### ADVICE TO YOUNG WRITERS

"If you want to be a writer," Guy says, "you have to believe in hard work. Writing is a lonely profession. Believe in what you do. A novel is an emotional history of a time and a place. To keep the reader's interest, you have to make it enjoyable—make it readable so they can learn, understand, and empathize."

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*"If you want to be a writer, you have to believe in hard work. Writing is a lonely profession. Believe in what you do. A novel is an emotional history of a time and a place. To keep the reader's interest, you have to make it enjoyable—make it readable so they can learn, understand, and empathize."*

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### HOME AND FAMILY

Guy was married in about 1941 to Warner Guy. They had one son, Warner Jr., before splitting up in 1945. Her son died in 1995, but she has five grandchildren. She still makes her home in New York City, but travels widely and has lived in Geneva, Switzerland, for long periods of time. She has given lectures and readings in Africa, Europe, and Japan, and continues to spend much of her time pursuing her interest in the history and culture of people of African descent.

## SELECTED WRITINGS

### Young Adult Fiction

- The Friends*, 1973  
*Ruby*, 1976  
*Edith Jackson*, 1978  
*The Disappearance*, 1979  
*A Mirror of Her Own*, 1981  
*New Guys Around the Block*, 1983  
*And I Heard a Bird Sing*, 1986  
*The Ups and Downs of Carl Davis III*, 1989  
*The Music of Summer*, 1992

### Adult Fiction

- Bird at My Window*, 1966  
*A Measure of Time*, 1983  
*My Love, My Love; or, The Peasant Girl*, 1985  
*The Sun, the Sea, a Touch of the Wind*, 1995

### Children's Fiction

- Mother Crocodile: An Uncle Amadou Tale from Senegal*, 1981  
*Paris, Pee Wee, and Big Dog*, 1984  
*Billy the Great*, 1992

### Other

- Children of Longing*, 1970 (essays)  
*Venetian Blinds*, 1954 (play)

## HONORS AND AWARDS

- New York Times Outstanding Book: 1973, for *The Friends*  
Best Book for Young Adults (American Library Association): 1973, for *The Friends*; 1976, for *Ruby*; 1978, for *Edith Jackson*; 1979, for *The Disappearance*; and 1981, for *Mirror of Her Own*  
Children's Book of the Year (Child Study Association of America): 1973, for *The Friends*; 1986, for *Paris, Pee Wee, and Big Dog*  
Outstanding Book of the Year (*New York Times*): 1973, for *The Friends*; 1979, for *The Disappearance*  
Best of the Best Books (*School Library Journal*): 1979, for *The Friends*

- Books for the Teen Age (New York Public Library): 1980, for *The Disappearance*
- Notable Book (American Library Association): 1981, for *Mother Crocodile: An Uncle Amadou Tale from Senegal*
- Coretta Scott King Award: 1982, for *Mother Crocodile: An Uncle Amadou Tale from Senegal*
- Parents' Choice Award for Literature (Parents' Choice Foundation): 1983, for *New Guys Around the Block*
- Olivier Award for Best Musical (England): 1993, for *Once on This Island* (adaptation of *My Love, My Love; or, The Peasant Girl*)

## FURTHER READING

### Books

- Authors & Artists for Young Adults*, Vol. 4, 1990
- Contemporary Authors, New Revision Series*, Vol. 83
- Contemporary Black Biography*, Vol. 5, 1994
- Kutzer, Daphne. ed. *Writers of Multicultural Fiction for Young Adults*, 1996
- Norris, Jerrie. *Presenting Rosa Guy*, 1988
- Notable Black American Women*, 1992
- Something About the Author*, Vol. 62, 1990

### Periodicals

- Essence*, Oct. 1979
- The Guardian* (London), Feb. 6, 1995, p.T4
- New York Times*, Nov. 17, 1990, p.13
- Quarterly Black Review of Books*, Feb. 28, 1994, p.33
- The Guardian* (London), Feb. 6, 1995, p.T4

### ADDRESS

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 Minneapolis, MN 55401

### WORLD WIDE WEB SITES

- <http://members.aol.com/HarambeeCo/guy.htm>  
<http://www.puffin.co.uk>



## **Harper Lee 1926-**

American Novelist

Author of *To Kill a Mockingbird*

### **BIRTH**

Harper Lee was born Nelle Harper Lee in Monroeville, Alabama, on April 28, 1926. Her father, Amasa Coleman Lee, was a well-respected lawyer who served in the Alabama state legislature for 12 years and who edited the *Monroe Journal* for almost 20 years. Her mother, Frances (Finch) Lee, was a pianist. Nelle (pronounced nail), as she was known to her childhood friends, had two older sisters, Alice and Louise, and an older brother, Edwin.

## YOUTH

Nelle was a tomboy in a small southern town where girls were expected to wear dresses and act like ladies. She lived next door to the Faulks, three middle-aged sisters and their brother who often took care of a young cousin named Truman Capote. Truman, who would later become a famous writer himself, was Nelle's best friend and constant companion every summer throughout the years of her childhood. They would often slip back and forth through the hedge that separated the Lee and Faulk houses.

When asked to describe her early years, Lee once said, "We didn't have much money. . . . We didn't have toys, nothing was done for us, so the result was that we lived in our imaginations most of the time." She and Truman spent hours playing in her backyard treehouse, acting out stories from their favorite books, inventing wild tales about their Monroeville neighbors, and getting into mischief. Sometimes they would drag an old typewriter and a Webster's dictionary up to the treehouse so they could play at being writers. They were an odd pair: Nelle would go around in bare feet and overalls, while Truman was a delicate child who always dressed in perfectly pressed clothes.

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*“We didn't have much money. . . . We didn't have toys, nothing was done for us, so the result was that we lived in our imaginations most of the time.”*

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Nelle's mother had a reputation for being eccentric. She was a talented pianist who would often get out of bed in the middle of the night and start banging out tunes on the big upright piano in the living room. But both Nelle and Truman idolized her father, who stressed the importance of education and who, despite his responsibilities as a lawyer and the editor of the local newspaper, spent as much time as he could with his children. Nelle often watched from the balcony as her father argued cases at the Monroe County Courthouse.

## EARLY MEMORIES

When Nelle and her friend Truman were still in elementary school, they decided to have a huge Halloween party for both the adults and children in town, all of whom arrived in costume. Yet the party was soon interrupted by the Ku Klux Klan, a secret organization in the South that was responsible for many acts of violence against African-Americans. The Klan

# TO KILL A *Mockingbird*



THE 40<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY EDITION  
OF THE PULITZER PRIZE-WINNING NOVEL

H A R P E R L E E

heard that there was a black man at the party dressed up as a robot. They pursued and captured him in the Lees' yard. They were threatening to hang him when they discovered that it was really Sonny Boular, a shy young white man who lived nearby.

Nelle's father stood on his front porch and angrily addressed the Klansmen, scolding them for what they had done and sending them home, embarrassed. This incident, which both Nelle and Truman witnessed, revealed a side of her father's personality that she had never really appreciated before. Seeing her father stand up for the rights of those who couldn't defend themselves inspired her many years later to create the character of Atticus Finch.

## EDUCATION

Lee attended public elementary and high schools in Monroeville before enrolling at Huntington College in Montgomery for a year. In 1945 she transferred to the University of Alabama at Tuscaloosa, where she wrote satires, reviews, and editorial columns for the college humor magazine. After spending a year as an exchange student at Oxford University in England, she enrolled in the University of Alabama Law School with the idea that some day she would join her older sister Alice in their father's law firm.

But in 1950, six months before completing her law degree, Lee left the university and moved to New York City to pursue a writing career. She later observed that her law studies were "good training for a writer" because they encouraged her to think logically and because law cases provided an excellent source of ideas for stories and novels.

## BECOMING A WRITER

When she arrived in New York, Lee worked as an airline reservation clerk, first with Eastern Air Lines and later with British Overseas Airways. She wrote in her spare time, mostly essays and short stories. When a literary agent encouraged Lee to expand one of her stories into a full-length novel,

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*The characters in To Kill a Mockingbird reflect the moral and racial tensions that people faced at the time. But Lee did more than write a novel about racial prejudice. In the words of one reviewer, she portrayed racial prejudice as "something that arises from fear and lack of knowledge, and finally as something that disappears with the kind of knowledge or education that one gains through learning what people are really like when you finally see them."*

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*Director Alan Pakula, left, and Lee watch the filming of  
To Kill a Mockingbird, 1962.*

she started to think about quitting her job with the airlines and becoming a full-time writer. Then a group of her friends got together and, as a Christmas gift, gave her enough money to cover her expenses for a year. So Lee moved into a small apartment that had only cold running water and makeshift furniture and started to work seriously on completing her first novel.

## CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

### *To Kill a Mockingbird*

Lee spent a number of years on the manuscript of *To Kill a Mockingbird* before submitting it to the J. B. Lippincott Company in 1957. The editors there said that the plot structure was too disjointed, so she worked on it for another two-and-a-half years. It was finally published in July 1960, and Lee began to emerge from what she describes as “a long and hopeless period of writing the book over and over again.”

*To Kill a Mockingbird* is a novel about a young girl’s coming of age in the South during a period of social and political upheaval. The story is told from the perspective of Jean Louise Finch, better known as Scout, who is six years old when the novel opens and eight when it ends. The tomboy Scout closely resembles Lee herself as a young girl, and the similarities between Lee’s hometown of Monroeville the fictional town of Maycomb, Alabama, are unmistakable. Scout and her brother Jem live with their widowed father, Atticus Finch, a lawyer who displays many of the same qualities that Lee admired in her own father. Dill Harris, Scout’s mischievous next-door neighbor, is clearly modeled on her childhood friend Truman Capote. Although she has claimed that the novel is not autobiographical, Lee admits that a writer “should write about what [he or she] knows and write truthfully.”

There are two major plot lines. One concerns Tom Robinson, an African-American who has been falsely accused of raping a white woman named Mayella Ewell. Atticus Finch must defend Robinson in front of a jury made up of people whose racial prejudice is deeply ingrained. Scout and Jem are taunted by their classmates and neighbors because their father is defending a black man, but as they spend long hours in the Maycomb courthouse watching the trial, they come to appreciate their father’s courage and integrity. In the novel’s climactic scene, the jury finds Robinson guilty, even though Atticus has clearly proven his innocence. Robinson is shot trying to

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*Lee never published again after To Kill a Mockingbird, and no one really knows why.*

*When her cousin was interviewed a few years ago, he said, “I asked her one time why she never wrote another book.*

*She told me, ‘When you have a hit like that, you can’t go anywhere but down.’”*

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escape from jail, and his death is compared to the senseless killing of a mockingbird, an innocent songbird that is often regarded as a symbol of the South.

A second plot concerns Arthur "Boo" Radley, who has remained secluded in his house since he was arrested for some teenage pranks several years earlier. Jem and Scout decide they're going to make Boo come out of hiding. They're joined by Dill, who is spending his summers in Maycomb with his aunt. The wild stories they have heard about him — that he eats squirrels and stray cats, that he has rotten teeth and drools most of the time, and that he wanders around town at night — reflect the town's attitude toward people who are "different." Eventually the three children discover that Boo is not a monster but a human being who has done a number of kind

things for them. For example, when Atticus Finch reveals that Mayella Ewell has been beaten by her father for making sexual advances toward Tom Robinson, and the father tries to strike back by targeting the lawyer's children, it is Boo Radley who saves them.

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*“By turns funny, wise, and heartbreaking,” according to reviewer Alix Wilber, “To Kill a Mockingbird is one classic that continues to speak to new generations, and deserves to be reread often.”*

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### Critical Reaction

When Lee wrote *To Kill a Mockingbird*, racial tensions were running high in the South, especially Alabama. This was the time of the 1954 U. S. Supreme Court decision

*Brown v. Board of Education*, in which the Court ruling that segregation in public schools was unconstitutional, and the 1955 bus boycott in Montgomery, Alabama, which was triggered when Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat to a white passenger. [For further information on Parks, see *Biography Today*, April 1992 and Update 1994]. These events deeply affected Harper Lee, and the characters in her novel reflect the moral and racial tensions that people faced at the time. But Lee did more than write a novel about racial prejudice. In the words of one reviewer, she portrayed racial prejudice as “something that arises from fear and lack of knowledge, and finally as something that disappears with the kind of knowledge or education that one gains through learning what people are really like when you finally see them.” It has been said that *To Kill a Mockingbird* did more to change Southern attitudes about race than any other work of art in this century.



Gregory Peck (Atticus Finch) and Mary Badham (Scout) in a scene from the movie version of *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

The book also provoked controversy. Some reviewers criticized Lee for trying to tell a complex "adult" story through the narrative voice of a six-year-old child, and readers in Monroeville were particularly upset about the book's autobiographical elements. The fact that Atticus was a lawyer and the Finch family shared Lee's mother's maiden name encouraged people to search for other similarities, and there was a rumor that someone had threatened to sue Harper Lee because Boo Radley too closely resembled a family member. In New York literary circles, there were rumors that Lee's childhood friend Truman Capote, the well-known author of *Breakfast at Tiffany's* and *In Cold Blood*, had actually written the book for her. But despite these rumors, *To Kill a Mockingbird* became an overnight classic, appearing on the best-seller lists almost immediately and winning Lee the prestigious Pulitzer Prize.

### The Movie

The 1962 film adaptation of *To Kill a Mockingbird* proved to be an even greater success. Starring Gregory Peck in the role of Atticus Finch and

Robert Duvall, in his first big screen role, as Boo Radley, the movie was nominated for eight Academy Awards and won four, including one for Gregory Peck as "Best Actor" and another for Horton Foote, who wrote the screenplay.

When the movie was being made, set designers came to Monroeville to study the county courthouse so they could build an exact replica back in Hollywood. That same courthouse has since been converted to a museum devoted to Harper Lee and Truman Capote, the town's two most famous authors. And every May, Christopher Sergel's 1969 play based on the novel is performed there.

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*According to reviewer Marilyn Meyer, "To Kill a Mockingbird only gets better with rereading; each time the streets of Maycomb become more real and alive, each time Scout is more insightful, Atticus more heroic, and Boo Radley more tragically human."*

———— ” ————

### **Life after *Mockingbird***

If the book had made her famous, the movie made Harper Lee a celebrity. Journalists and fans started flocking to Monroeville, hoping to catch a glimpse of her, but she declined to open her door to visitors or to speak in public. She has refused all requests for interviews since the 1960s and has often been compared to J.D. Salinger, author of *Catcher in the Rye*, who also disappeared from the spotlight at the height of his fame.

Harper Lee and Truman Capote remained close friends until his death in 1984. She traveled with him to Kansas to research *In Cold Blood*, a non-fiction book about the murder of a farmer and his family, and he dedicated the 1965 best seller to his childhood friend. Just as there were rumors that Capote had written *Mockingbird*, some people said that Lee had helped Capote write *In Cold Blood*.

There were also rumors that Harper Lee was hard at work on a second novel, but it was never published. In fact, aside from a few short pieces that appeared in popular magazines in the early 1960s, Lee never published again. Whether she was disillusioned by her celebrity status or had simply run out of things to write about, no one really knows. When her cousin was interviewed a few years ago, he said, "I asked her one time why she never wrote another book. She told me, 'When you have a hit like that, you can't go anywhere but down.'"



*Lee in the local courthouse in Monroeville while visiting her hometown, 1961.*

### **An American Classic**

Today, *To Kill a Mockingbird* is considered one of the seminal works of American literature for both teenagers and adults. The novel has sold more than 30 million copies, has been translated into 40 languages, and has never been out of print. In a 1991 survey of "Lifetime Reading Habits" conducted by the Book of the Month Club and the Library of Congress, it was cited more often than any book except the Bible for having made a difference in people's lives. It remains especially popular with young adult readers, and it is frequently seen on junior high and high school reading lists.

"By turns funny, wise, and heartbreaking," according to reviewer Alix Wilber, "*To Kill a Mockingbird* is one classic that continues to speak to new generations, and deserves to be reread often." Indeed, it is that timeless and universal appeal that has earned the work its reputation as a contemporary masterpiece. According to reviewer Marilyn Meyer, "[Shopping malls] may have replaced the main street of Maycomb, Alabama, but not even [40] years of Civil Rights laws or the gentrification of antebellum estates render this book an anachronism. Harper Lee combines two of the most common themes of Southern writing—a child's recollection of life among eccentrics in a small town seemingly untouched by the 20th century and the glaring injustice of racial prejudice—to create a contemporary American classic. . . .

*To Kill a Mockingbird* only gets better with rereading; each time the streets of Maycomb become more real and alive, each time Scout is more insightful, Atticus more heroic, and Boo Radley more tragically human."

## HOME AND FAMILY

Harper Lee never married, and she continues to divide her time between Monroeville and her New York City apartment. When she's in Monroeville, she stays with her sister Alice, who is in her late 80s and still practicing law. Alice is fiercely protective of her younger sister's privacy, and she refuses to

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*Lee offered the following advice to young writers: "You must not write 'for' something; you must not write with definite hopes of reward. . . . People who write for reward by way of recognition or monetary gain don't know what they're doing. They're in the category of those who write; they are not writers."*

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talk to reporters who knock on her door. Lee's brother Edwin died of cerebral hemorrhage in 1951, but her other sister, Louise, lives in Alabama.

## ADVICE TO YOUNG WRITERS

In a 1964 interview, Lee offered the following advice to young writers: "You must not write 'for' something; you must not write with definite hopes of reward. . . . People who write for reward by way of recognition or monetary gain don't know what they're doing. They're in the category of those who write; they are not writers."

## FAVORITE BOOKS

Lee prefers 18th- and 19th-century literature and music. Her favorite authors are Jane Austen, Charles Lamb, Thomas Love Peacock, and Robert Louis Stevenson. She once said in an interview that her goal in life was to become "the Jane Austen of south Alabama."

## HOBBIES AND OTHER INTERESTS

Lee has always enjoyed golf, and she still plays regularly when she is in Monroeville. Crime is another of her interests, and she has been known to spend days in the Monroeville County Courthouse following the various criminal cases that are tried there.

**WRITINGS**

*To Kill a Mockingbird*, 1960

**HONORS AND AWARDS**

Pulitzer Prize for Fiction: 1961, for *To Kill a Mockingbird*

Brotherhood Award (National Conference of Christians and Jews): 1961,  
for *To Kill a Mockingbird*

**FURTHER READING****Books**

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Johnson, Claudia D. *To Kill A Mockingbird: Threatening Boundaries*, 1994

*St. James Guide to Young Adult Writers*, 2nd ed., 1999

*World Authors 1950-1970*, 1975

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**Periodicals**

*Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, Sep. 17, 1995, p.C1

*Booklist*, Sep. 15, 1998, p.217

*Chicago Tribune*, Aug. 24, 1990, p.1

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*Washington Post*, June 10, 1999, p.A3

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**ADDRESS**

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New York, NY 10022



## **Irene Gut Opdyke 1922-**

Polish-American Holocaust Rescuer  
Author of Memoirs about Her Bold Actions to Save  
Jews during World War II

*[Editor's Note: We owe a debt of thanks to Opdyke, who very graciously agreed to speak to Biography Today for this profile. We thank her for the generous gift of her time and her assistance. Her life and her words are an inspiration to all of us at Biography Today.]*

### **BIRTH**

Irene Gut Opdyke was born Irena Gut on May 5, 1922, in the village of Kozenice in eastern Poland. Her father, Wladyslaw

Gut, was an architect and chemist. Her mother, Maria (Rebies) Gut, was a homemaker. Irene had four younger sisters: Janina, Marysia, Bronia, and Wladzia. Their family name, Gut, pronounced "goot," is of German origin and means "good."

## YOUTH

Family and Catholic faith were the center of Irene Gut Opdyke's childhood. She is certain that God and her parents' example gave her the courage to risk her life for others during World War II. In contrast to the horrifying war experience of her late teens, her childhood was serene and happy. Opdyke and her sisters enjoyed cooking and baking with their mother, especially during the Christmas holidays. "My mother was a disciplinarian, but she taught us what we needed to know, how to cook and clean," Opdyke recalled. "We had a maid, but we had to know how to do these things ourselves." The family loved to sing folk songs while their father played the piano. And they often devoted themselves to sick or stray animals. One notable patient was an ungainly stork named Bociek, who spent a bitter winter warm and well-fed in the family's cellar.

But the Guts' charitable acts extended beyond animals. As Opdyke got older, she often helped her mother prepare baskets of food for the sick and the poor. She and her sisters collected bits of colored glass for needy women to craft into picture frames. On more than one occasion, the family took in ill Gypsies, nomads who were generally scorned by the community. "In every charitable act we performed, Mamusia and Tatus [Mother and Father] were our models; they were generous and kind to everyone," Opdyke recalled. "They raised me the right way. I couldn't stand by and see wrong and not do something about it."

## EDUCATION

Opdyke enjoyed school and was an eager pupil. By the time she was a teenager, her family had moved to a Polish town very near the German border. At that time, menacing changes were occurring in Germany with the rise of Adolph Hitler, who lusted for power and domination beyond Germany's borders. But Opdyke was too engrossed in her own activities to think of politics. She loved to ride horses, climb trees, and make up adventure stories that featured her own heroic deeds. As a member of her high school dance troupe, she performed at folk festivals across Poland. She auditioned for plays at school, and harbored daydreams of starring in movies. But in the end, her caring side won out. She became a volunteer "Candy Stripper" for the Red Cross, and began to help in a local hospital. Inspired

by the devotion of the Roman Catholic sisters there, Opdyke decided to become a nun herself. Her surprised father convinced her to learn nursing as a first step. In 1938, at age 16, Opdyke enrolled in a nursing program at St. Mary's Hospital in Radom, Poland, about 120 miles away from her family.

Lonely and shy, Opdyke threw herself into her books and hospital training. Throughout her first year, she tried to ignore the growing signs of coming war, as Hitler threatened to claim land that belonged to Poland. On a visit home to her family in the summer of 1939, Opdyke found that many neighbors had renounced their Polish heritage to align themselves with Hitler and his National Socialist Party, the Nazis. Even more menacing, anti-Jewish signs appeared in some local shop windows with such slogans as "Don't Buy from Jews," or "A Poland Free from Jews Is a Free Poland!"

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*"In my home, there had never been any distinction made between people. Many of our friends were Jewish, but we did not say to ourselves 'Our Jewish friends, the Gonsiorowicz's.' It had never occurred to me to distinguish between people based on their religion. But this is precisely what Hitler was doing a mere six kilometers away. We did not imagine where it would lead. How could we?"*

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neighbors had renounced their Polish heritage to align themselves with Hitler and his National Socialist Party, the Nazis. Even more menacing, anti-Jewish signs appeared in some local shop windows with such slogans as "Don't Buy from Jews," or "A Poland Free from Jews Is a Free Poland!"

"This mystified me," Opdyke recalled. "In my home, there had never been any distinction made between people. Many of our friends were Jewish, but we did not say to ourselves 'Our Jewish friends, the Gonsiorowicz's.' It had never occurred to me to distinguish between people based on their religion. But this is precisely what Hitler was doing a mere six kilometers away. We did not imagine where it would lead. How could we?"

## EARLY WAR EXPERIENCES

In August 1939, Opdyke returned to Radom to resume her studies. Within weeks, her nation's worst fears were realized when Hitler and his forces attacked Poland. Stunned to find herself in the midst of a bomb raid, Opdyke had to pull herself together quickly to help with the hordes of wounded at St. Mary's Hospital. She had little time to dwell on her family, whose town now had been annexed to Germany by Hitler's army. Unable to contact her family, she had no idea whether they were dead or alive. "I



*Irene on a dorożka, 1943, headed for  
Puszcza Janówka.*



*Irene at age 15 with Lalka, 1937,  
Kozłowa Góra.*



*Irene and William  
Opdyke on their  
wedding day,  
November 14, 1956.*



*The Gut sisters, 1941, Radom. From left to right,  
Władzia, Irene, Marysia, Bronia, and Janina.*

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*“It must be said that I was  
now a slave,” she wrote.*

*“What else do you call someone  
put to work in an ammunition  
factory, kept under guard, and  
paid no wages?”*

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worked in a daze of grief for Poland and for myself,” Opdyke said. “I feared I would never see my beloved family again.”

Yet when the beleaguered Polish Army asked for volunteers to join them in fighting against the Germans, Opdyke instantly volunteered. The Polish Army was defeated, and Poland was defeated by the Germans and the Soviets, who divided the nation between them. Opdyke became a fugitive with a resistance group. In early

1940 she was captured by Soviet soldiers, who brutally beat her, raped her, and left her for dead. The experience is still difficult to recount, she wrote in her memoir. “I was 17. I was shy with men; I had never had a boyfriend, never been kissed,” she said. “But I did not die.”

Instead, Opdyke found herself in a Russian hospital, where she was forced to work. She escaped, and eventually made her way back to Radom, where she was reunited joyfully with her family. But the happiness was short-lived. Plucked by German soldiers from a Catholic church service, Opdyke was forced to work in a faraway city, in a factory for the Nazi cause. “It must be said that I was now a slave,” she wrote. “What else do you call someone put to work in an ammunition factory, kept under guard, and paid no wages?” But the move was ultimately to prove fortuitous, not just for Opdyke, but for many that she rescued. Only weeks later, she fainted on the factory floor and was questioned by a German Army officer. Although she could easily have passed as German with her fair coloring and command of the language, she declared herself a Pole. The officer, Major Eduard Rugemer, was impressed with her honesty. He transferred her immediately to a waitress job in a military dining room at a plush local hotel.

## QUIET HEROISM

Soon after beginning her new job, Opdyke discovered Hitler’s solution to what he called “the Jewish problem.” One day as she folded napkins and set tables for the hotel’s luxurious luncheon, she was distracted by the sound of gunshots coming from the Jewish ghetto behind the hotel. Rushing to the window, she saw a scene that resembled an “anthill kicked to pieces.” Nazi soldiers were spilling from trucks, firing openly at terrified

Jews, men, women, and children. When she had recovered from her horror, she took action. Although acutely aware that she could be executed for helping Jews, she began stealing food and leaving it under the fence enclosing the ghetto.

As weeks went on, she grew bolder. Overhearing officers' plans for deporting Jews, she sent warnings to the work camps and helped smuggle some friends to a nearby forest. Then she placed herself in continual danger by bringing the food and supplies that allowed the escaped Jews to survive. "I did not ask myself, Should I do this? But, How will I do this?" Opdyke said. "Every step of my childhood had brought me to this crossroad; I must take the right path or I would no longer be myself."

But her most daring act was still to come. One mealtime she overheard an SS officer reveal plans to deport all the local Jews. Desperate to save six Jewish co-workers from an almost certain death, she hid them overnight in an air duct off the hotel room where Major Rugemer slept. She then moved them to the basement of the Major's new villa, where she had just become housekeeper. There she kept them, and eventually six other Jews, literally under the nose of the Rugemer and his many military visitors. When he discovered some of the refugees in his kitchen several months later, Opdyke became Rugemer's mistress in order to buy his silence. Her friends in the basement knew nothing of her sacrifice. "I could never tell my friends how I had bought their safety. Their honor would never allow them to hold me to this bargain."

## THE END OF THE WAR

In March 1944, the German army began to withdraw from Poland. Refusing to go with the Germans, Opdyke fled to the forest and worked as a partisan against Poland's enemies, both the Germans and Soviets. At the war's end in spring 1945, she was captured by the Russians and interrogated about her war-resistance efforts. And then her Jewish friends rescued their rescuer. Dyeing Opdyke's hair black, they took her to Germany, where they all found refuge in a camp for displaced Jews. Opdyke was able to learn that her father had not

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*Opdyke placed herself in continual danger by bringing food and supplies to the escaped Jews. "I did not ask myself, Should I do this? But, How will I do this? Every step of my childhood had brought me to this crossroad; I must take the right path or I would no longer be myself."*

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*The Gut sisters, 1984, Poland. Standing, from left to right, Wladzia, Bronia, Marysia; seated, from left to right, Irene and Janina.*

survived the war: he was shot by the Germans after failing to step aside for two Nazi officers. Her mother died soon thereafter. Opdyke did not learn the fate of her four sisters until the 1980s, when they were reunited: all four survived the war and live in Poland.

After being interviewed by an American delegate to the United Nations, Opdyke moved to New York City in 1949. Five years later she happened upon the delegate, William Opdyke, in a Manhattan coffee shop. Within weeks they were married. "Many miracles happen in my life," she said. The couple moved to California and had one daughter. Opdyke worked as an interior designer and lived quietly, speaking little of her war experiences.

## **SPEAKING OUT**

But eventually she was spurred, once more, to action. "In 1975 I heard a neo-Nazi say that the Holocaust was a hoax," Opdyke explains, "and I decided I had to start talking." In spite of her imperfect command of English, and in spite of her nervousness, she began giving talks to groups large and small. As people became aware of her story, Opdyke traveled widely around the United States and beyond sharing her experiences. At one

point, she was home only five days a month, and traveling the rest to speak. Now that she is near 80 and tires more easily, she is barely slowing down. Her audiences range from retired Jewish senior citizens to Rotary Clubs to skeptical youths. "My favorite groups are the children," she said. "They give me standing ovations, and then the big macho boys come and give me a big hug and kiss. This is the most important thing for me now, to reach the young people."

Opdyke's fame grew as she became well known as a speaker. After years of verifying the details of her story, the Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial in Jerusalem named her a Righteous Gentile in 1982. This supreme honor is accorded to non-Jews who risked their lives to help Jews during the Holocaust. Another honoree is Oskar Schindler, the subject of the well-known film, *Schindler's List*.

## WRITING ABOUT HER EXPERIENCES

Opdyke was such an effective speaker that people often urged her to write about her experiences. So in 1992, she worked with writer Jeffrey M. Elliot to publish *Into the Flames: The Life Story of a Righteous Gentile*, an account of her life that has been described as having primarily historical rather than literary interest. In 1999, Opdyke collaborated with Jennifer Armstrong, a noted author of historical fiction for young people. Together, they created a more detailed and imaginatively rendered version of her experiences. The result, *In My Hands: Memories of a Holocaust Rescuer*, has been praised as a classic for all ages, but especially for teenagers. Critics particularly praised the work's ability to create a powerful, moving, inspiring, and spellbinding story that is captivating to young readers, bringing history to life and making it compelling and real for today's teens.

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*"There are so many Holocaust books these days, each touching in its own way."*

*[In My Hands: Memories of a Holocaust Rescuer] is special, not only because of its unique perspective . . . but also because it speaks so personally to teenagers. Irene is one of them. The fear, horror, worry, and bravery she recounts so affectingly could have been theirs. The question becomes more than what would you do?*

*It is also who will you be if you survive?"*

— Ilene Cooper, Booklist

——— ” ———



in my hands

memories of a  
holocaust rescuer

"Powerful and life-affirming, this is the kind of exciting memoir that marks a reader forever." —*The Plain Dealer*



irene gut opdyke  
with jennifer armstrong

"There are so many Holocaust books these days, each touching in its own way," Ilene Cooper wrote in *Booklist*. "[*In My Hands: Memories of a Holocaust Rescuer*] is special, not only because of its unique perspective . . . but also because it speaks so personally to teenagers. Irene is one of them. The fear, horror, worry, and bravery she recounts so affectingly could have been theirs. The question becomes more than what would you do? It is also who will you be if you survive?"

To Opdyke, her speeches and books are only the means to reach out to people, especially the young. Her mission, she says, is to continually remind them that we must not let the horrors of World War II ever recur. Her message, which she tells urgently and often, is simple: "We are all members of one human family. We all have to reach out to know we're not alone in the world. We must help each other or die." She exhorts her young audiences: "You can do what I did! Right now! Stand up when you hear name-calling, when you see skinheads. You are the future of the nation!" As Opdyke reminds readers in *In My Hands*, "You must understand that I did not become a resistance fighter, a smuggler of Jews, a defier of the SS [the dreaded Nazi police] and the Nazis, all at once. One's first steps are always small: I had begun by hiding food under a fence."

When asked where she got the courage to risk her life for others, she continually cites God and her beloved parents. "Courage is a whisper from above," she said. "If you think only with your head not with your heart, the head will tell you, 'Oh, that's danger, don't do this.' So you have to involve your heart." Despite the difficult circumstances she faced, Opdyke has never become bitter about life; instead, she is grateful. "I am the richest woman in the world," she says. "I asked God for an opportunity to help, even if my life depended on it. And God put me in the right place at the right time."

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*Opdyke's message, which she tells urgently and often, is simple: "We are all members of one human family. We all have to reach out to know we're not alone in the world. We must help each other or die." She exhorts her young audiences: "You can do what I did! Right now! Stand up when you hear name-calling, when you see skinheads. You are the future of the nation!"*

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## WRITINGS

*Into the Flames: The Life Story of a Righteous Gentile*, 1992 (with Jeffrey M. Elliot)

*In My Hands: Memories of a Holocaust Rescuer*, 1999 (with Jennifer Armstrong)

## AWARDS AND HONORS

Righteous among Gentiles (Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial Museum, Jerusalem): 1982

Blessing of Pope John Paul II (The Vatican): 1995

Award of Recognition (Museum of Tolerance): 1997

## FURTHER READING

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Opdyke, Irene Gut, and Jennifer Armstrong. *In My Hands: Memories of a Holocaust Rescuer*, 1999

### Periodicals

*Dallas Morning News*, Nov. 29, 1999, p.C1

*Los Angeles Times*, May 18, 1986, Part 6, p.1; Apr. 21, 1988, Part 9, p.2

*Newsday*, Aug. 18, 1999, p.B9; Sep. 8, 1999, p.B27

*Publishers Weekly*, June 14, 1999, p.22

*Washington Post*, Sep. 20, 1984, p.C1

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<http://www.randomhouse.com/teachers/authors/opdy.html>

<http://www.achuka.co.uk/special/opdyke.htm>



## **Philip Pullman 1946-**

English Writer of Fantasy Books for Children and Young Adults

Author of *The Golden Compass*, *The Subtle Knife*, and *The Amber Spyglass*

### **BIRTH**

Philip Nicholas Pullman was born on October 19, 1946, in Norwich, England. His mother was Audrey Pullman, and his father was Alfred Pullman, a pilot in the Royal Air Force. He has one brother.

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*"I adored Superman, and  
Superboy, and Captain  
America, and Dick Tracy, but  
most of all I adored Batman.  
Those poorly printed stories on  
their cheap yellowing  
newsprint intoxicated me,  
enthralled me, made me dizzy  
with passion."*

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## YOUTH

When Philip was growing up, his father was in the military. For the Pullmans and for most other military families, frequent moves were a way of life. But because it was the 1950s, they traveled long distances by ship rather than plane—an experience that gave Philip a sense of the earth's size and strangeness at a very early age. He recalls seeing flying fish and whales during these long sea voyages, and noticing the way the color of the ocean changed. It was always exciting when the ship pulled into a new port filled with exotic sights and smells.

When Philip was seven and living in Zimbabwe (then known as Rhodesia), his father was killed in a plane accident. His mother married another RAF pilot and the family moved to Australia. It was during the two years they lived in Australia that he discovered comic books. "I adored Superman, and Superboy, and Captain America, and Dick Tracy," he says, "but most of all I adored Batman. Those poorly printed stories on their cheap yellowing newsprint intoxicated me, enthralled me, made me dizzy with passion." It was also in Australia that Pullman felt the first stirrings of his own storytelling impulse. He would make up bedtime stories to tell his brother, and he vividly remembers "the sense of diving into the dark as I began the story, with no idea at all what was going to happen."

By the time he turned 11, Philip's family had settled in North Wales. Philip spent a great deal of time with his grandfather, who was a priest in the Church of England. "He was the center of my life," Pullman says, remembering in particular his grandfather's talent for making up stories that would excite a young boy's imagination. "We'd go for a little walk, and he'd say, 'You see that tree over there? That's the very tree Robin Hood used to hide in!'"

## EARLY MEMORIES

As a child, Philip's favorite stories were ghost stories. "I used to enjoy frightening myself and my friends with the tales I read," he recalls. "I also liked making up stories about the tree in the woods we used to call the

Hanging Tree. My friends and I would creep past it in the dark and shiver as we looked at the bare, sinister outline against the sky.”

## EDUCATION

Pullman attended a school in Harlech, Wales, called Ysgol Ardudwy. A spirited child who had seen much more of the world than most of his classmates, he never hesitated to stand up to bullies or compete in spitting contests. His favorite subject was English, because he loved reading books. “Spelling and grammar and that kind of thing came very easily to me, unlike science and mathematics, which I found much harder,” he says. He particularly loved poetry and committed dozens of poems to memory.

Pullman was greatly influenced by his English teacher, Miss Enid Jones. He remembers boasting one time about how he was sure he would get the highest score in the class on a test. Miss Jones turned to him and quietly said one word: “Hubris,” which means “pride.” “I’d seen the word written down but never heard it spoken aloud,” Pullman says. “She taught me to reign myself in, but in such a witty, quiet, and non-damning way.” He has stayed in touch with her ever since, and still sends her copies of his books when they are published.

Pullman was the first member of his family to go to college. He studied English at Oxford University’s Exeter College, where he received his degree in 1968. Although he had gone there to learn how to write, he discovered that the university wasn’t really interested in teaching him that. So he didn’t enjoy his English courses and wasn’t a particularly good student. He often says he wishes he’d gone to art school instead.

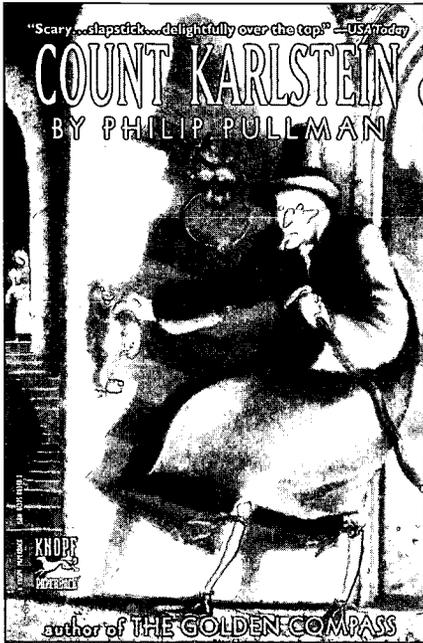
## FIRST JOBS AND BECOMING A WRITER

Pullman set out to become a rich and famous writer immediately after graduating from college, only to discover that it wasn’t as easy as he’d thought. He worked in a men’s clothing store and a library during his first few years out of Oxford, trying to discipline himself to write three pages every night

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*“I used to enjoy frightening myself and my friends with the tales I read. I also liked making up stories about the tree in the woods we used to call the Hanging Tree. My friends and I would creep past it in the dark and shiver as we looked at the bare, sinister outline against the sky.”*

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when he got home. He eventually finished his first novel and found a publisher, but the book was a flop and he prefers not to mention the title.

After getting married, Pullman moved back to Oxford and accepted a teaching job. For the next 12 years he taught at various middle schools in the Oxford area, where he learned the art of storytelling by practicing on his students. Every year he would tell them fairy tales, folk tales, and Greek legends; he re-told the story of *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* to every class he taught for 12 years. "It taught me an immense amount about storytelling," Pullman comments. "I learned what

sort of things I can do and what sort of things I can't do. For example, I can make people want to know what happens next. But I find it much harder to make them laugh. When I try and tell a funny story, it generally falls flat. . . . Another thing I can do is bring a scene vividly before their eyes. But something I can't do is tell a story that is set in the present day in an ordinary, everyday family with ordinary, everyday things going on."

During his years as a middle school teacher, Pullman completed his first recognized book, an adult novel called *Galatea* (1978), about a flutist who sets out to find his missing wife. He also started writing plays for his students. The father of one of his students, a publisher, complimented him after seeing one of these plays and told him he should consider writing for children. Pullman turned the play into a children's story called *Count Karlstein*, a scary, suspenseful, exciting, and funny story about two young girls' who escape from their wicked uncle. Published by the student's father in 1982, it became Pullman's first published book for children. *Count Karlstein* was described by *School Library Journal* like this: "The pacing is delightful, with horrific crescendos every few chapters and comic relief in the others. . . . There are enough demon horsemen, evil guardians, and brooding castles to please even the most desensitized readers." And *Kirkus Reviews* called it "A thrilling page-turner that's breathlessly paced. . . . Its whirlwind plotting [is] manipulated into a pulsing tale of darkened hearts, treachery, and at long last, redemption."

In 1986 Pullman became a part-time lecturer at Westminster College in North Hinksey, teaching courses on the Victorian novel and folk tales and using the rest of his time to write. Since that time, Kathleen Odean writes in *School Library Journal*, Pullman “has consistently created suspenseful adventures with thought provoking ideas and compelling characters.”

## CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

### The Sally Lockhart Trilogy

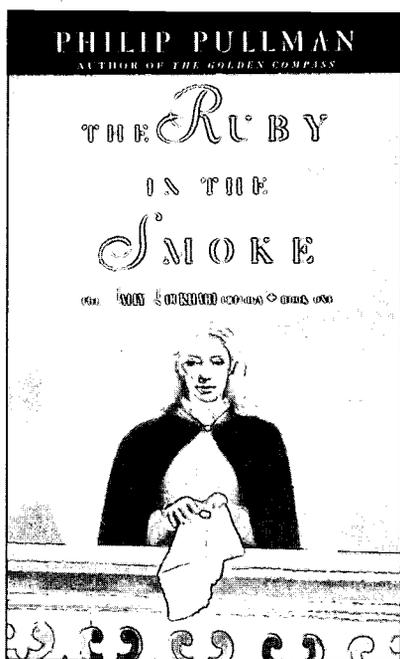
Pullman’s career as a writer for young adults began in earnest with the publication of the Sally Lockhart trilogy: *The Ruby in the Smoke* (1985), *Shadow in the North* (1988), and *The Tiger in the Well* (1990). Pullman was inspired by a picture postcard that showed a Victorian girl sitting in her father’s lap. He decided to tell the story behind the picture, and it turned out to be so compelling that he turned it into the trilogy. *The Ruby in the Smoke* takes place in 19th-century London, where 16-year-old Sally Lockhart has received a mysterious warning in a letter sent to her by her father before his death. She ends up on a quest to find her legacy, a ruby with hypnotic powers. Along the way she gets involved with Chinese gangs, the opium trade, and a dangerous woman named Mrs. Holland. Pullman’s storytelling style was compared to that of Charles Dickens, and the book was praised not only for its memorable characters and fast-paced action but also for the historical background it provided about the opium wars in England.

*Shadow in the North* picks up the story six years later, when Sally has graduated from Cambridge University and is working as a financial consultant.

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*When Pullman was a teacher, he would tell stories to his classes from fairy tales, folk tales, and Greek legends. “It taught me an immense amount about storytelling. I learned what sort of things I can do and what sort of things I can’t do. For example, I can make people want to know what happens next. But I find it much harder to make them laugh. . . . Another thing I can do is bring a scene vividly before their eyes. But something I can’t do is tell a story that is set in the present day in an ordinary, everyday family with ordinary, everyday things going on.”*

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With the help of Frederick Garland, her boyfriend from the first book, she confronts the wealthiest man in Europe about his questionable financial dealings. The book also features a conspiracy to produce the "ultimate weapon" of the Victorian period: a steam-impelled machine gun that can be mounted on a railway carriage. Many reviewers found the plot of this book to be too graphic and disturbing for younger readers, but most agreed that it proved Pullman's "mastery of atmosphere and style."

In *The Tiger in the Well*, Sally is now a successful businesswoman and single mother. She is being pursued by a stranger who claims to be her husband and who is trying to get custody of her two-year-old daughter, Harriet. Much of the plot revolves around London's shadowy underworld as Sally tries to find out who is trying to steal her identity and ruin her life. She is eventually forced to hide out in London's East End slums, where she is befriended by Jewish immigrants and a sympathetic social worker. One critic called *The Tiger in the Well* "a suspense novel with a conscience," because Pullman makes it clear that the same tactics used to undermine Sally's existence are also being used against Russian Jews in London's ghetto.

*The Tin Princess*, published in 1994, continues the story of some of the characters introduced in the Sally Lockhart trilogy. It follows the adventures of Sally's friend Jim Taylor and his long-lost girlfriend, the orphan Adelaide, as they journey to the mountains of central Europe, where a surprised Adelaide is crowned the queen of Razkavia. Pullman says that "people kept asking me what happened to Adelaide after the first book. . . . And I thought it would be nice to do a book which gave Jim a bit of a bigger part, because I put him on the sidelines in *The Tiger in the Well*."

Pullman says that he is fascinated by the Victorian period in England. "There's so much material available—especially photographs—and it's close enough to the present day for the language not to be too different. . . . [Besides] that, it's on the cusp of the modern world, with things like telephones and careers for women just coming in."

## Other Fiction for Children and Young Adults

Pullman is perhaps best known for his two trilogies, the Sally Lockhart trilogy and the three volumes in the trilogy called *His Dark Materials*. But in the midst of writing those books, he has also written a number of other books for young adult and younger readers. *Spring-Heeled Jack* (1991) reflects his interest in both comic books and Victorian London. It tells the story of three orphans—Rose, Lily, and Ned—who escape the orphanage where they're living and make their way toward a ship bound for America. The "comic book" character is a superhero named Spring-Heeled Jack, who helps them find safety and their real father.

Two other young adult novels, *The Broken Bridge* (1990) and *The White Mercedes* (1993), take place in modern times. *The Broken Bridge* is set in a predominantly white Welsh village where 16-year-old Ginny, who is half Haitian and half English, is surprised to discover that she has a white half-brother. This discovery sends her on a quest to find out more about her childhood and her mother. *The White Mercedes* tells the story of 17-year-old Chris, who falls in love with a more experienced girl named Jenny, who has had a mysterious and difficult past. Chris's naivete gets him in trouble when he places his trust in

the wrong person. Although the book was criticized for featuring some graphic scenes, Pullman insisted that there were no topics that were off-limits for teenagers, "except what they wouldn't understand."

Pullman's books for younger readers offer new perspectives on traditional themes. In *The Firework-Maker's Daughter* (1995), a headstrong young Asian girl sets out to become a master firework maker like her father, despite his warning that it's no job for a girl and that she'll never find a husband if she pursues her goal. She runs away to Mount Merapi, where every firework-maker must go to claim some of the royal sulphur that is the magic ingredient in all fireworks, and has many adventures during the course of her journey. *Clockwork* (1996) is a story-within-a-story about a

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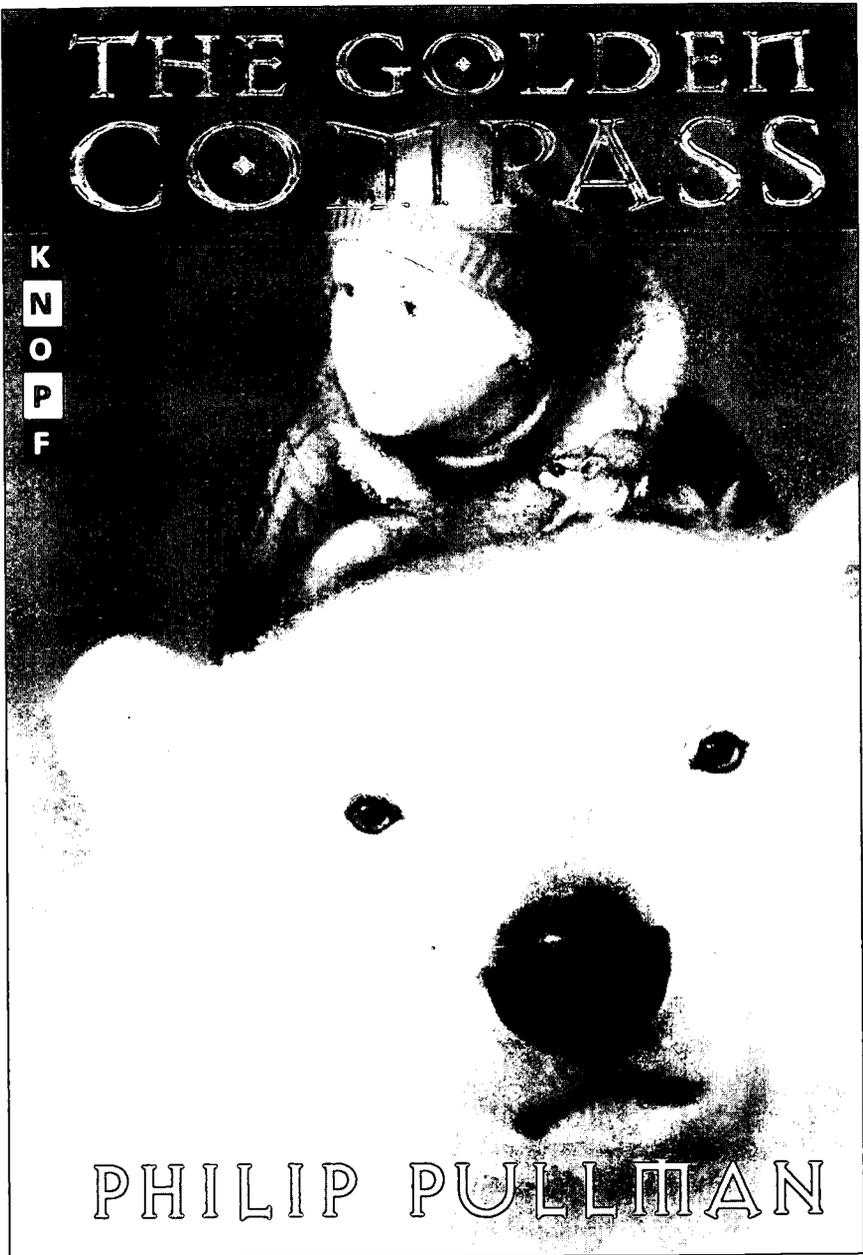
clockmaker's apprentice, Karl, who sells his soul to the evil Dr. Kalmenius rather than face the humiliation of being the first apprentice in hundreds of years to fail in the task of providing a new figure for his town's clock. It's a deliciously spooky new twist on a fairy tale. In *I Was a Rat!* (1999), Pullman offers a sequel to the Cinderella story. The story tells what happens when the rat who was turned into her pageboy misses the pumpkin-coach ride home and gets trapped in the form of a young boy.

### **His Dark Materials Trilogy**

In 1995 Pullman published the first volume in what would become another trilogy, called His Dark Materials. The first book was published in England as *Northern Lights* in 1995 and then republished in the U.S. as *The Golden Compass* in 1996; that was followed by *The Subtle Knife* in 1997 and *The Amber Spyglass* in 2000. Pullman derived his title His Dark Materials from a line in *Paradise Lost*, a 17th-century epic poem by John Milton about the creation and fall of man. Pullman decided to re-create the epic story for young adults, but with a significant difference: while *Paradise Lost* reflects traditional Christian beliefs, His Dark Materials presents the fall of man as "the beginning of true human freedom—something to be celebrated, not lamented." The books attempt to answer the same questions as organized religion, questions like "Where do we come from?" and "What happens when we die?" But the answers are not always those that traditional Christians would agree with.

Each of the three books focuses on an object around which the story revolves. *The Golden Compass* features a truth-telling device that reveals the destiny of Lyra Belacqua, the trilogy's main character. In *The Subtle Knife*, it's a knife so sharp it can cut through the material that separates one world from the next. And *The Amber Spyglass* depicts a device for seeing the mysterious substance called Dust. Although the trilogy features talking animals, dramatic prophecies, and other standard elements of fantasy, Pullman calls it "stark realism" because he is telling a story about what it means to grow up. "I wanted to make this fantasy as realistic in psychological terms as I possibly could," he explains.

In *The Golden Compass*, 12-year-old Lyra lives in a world similar to that of modern-day Oxford, England. But every human has a "daemon," which is the soul of the individual in animal form. As long as the humans to whom they are attached are children, the daemons can change form; for example, when she becomes angry, Lyra's daemon often changes into a polecat. But once humans grow up and become adults, their daemons become fixed, a reflection of the individual's inner nature. Lyra and her daemon, Panta-



laimon, overhear a secret conversation about the mysterious entity known as Dust. At around the same time, children in Oxford begin to disappear. In her eagerness to find out what Dust is, Lyra sets off on a series of adven-



tures that eventually lead her to the Arctic, where she learns what is happening to the kidnapped children. In the process, she learns how to use the “alethiometer,” a rare and powerful instrument with the power to reveal the truth in all things. She finds out who her real parents are and also discovers that she will have a fateful destiny, which Pullman reveals in the next two books.

*The Subtle Knife* introduces a modern-day English boy named Will Parry, who is searching for his father, an explorer who disappeared while on an expedition

in the North. While trying to protect his mother, Will accidentally murders a man who breaks into their home to steal his father’s letters. He escapes punishment by slipping through a tear between this world and Lyra’s parallel universe. Will and Lyra find each other and travel together—Will in search of his father and Lyra in search of her alethiometer, which has been stolen. Getting it back entails a ferocious fight for the subtle knife, a weapon that is both deadly and sharp enough to cut the boundaries between worlds. Will wins the fight and becomes the bearer of the knife, but they must still get back Lyra’s alethiometer and find Will’s father. The book ends with a startling event that left readers eager for the story’s conclusion.

*The Amber Spyglass* brings the story of the first two books to a climax. With its many overlapping and complex plot lines, this third book depends on readers’ familiarity with the first two. It is here that Lyra’s role is fully realized, and where the battle between good and evil is finally waged. Lyra has been smuggled away by her mother to a cave high in the mountains, where she is kept sedated, although she is able to communicate with the dead in her dreams. Meanwhile, Will is determined to find and save Lyra. Together Lyra and Will complete their quest and learn the secret of Dust.

### **Thematic Issues and Readers’ Response**

The trilogy deals with some serious and complex issues, particularly on the topic of religion. Pullman specifically rejects the Judeo-Christian tradition and depicts it in a negative light. He presents organized religion as a cor-

rupt, mendacious, repressive, and bigoted force whose teachings have subjugated people. He even rejects the idea of God as the Creator, instead depicting him as an angel. "Mr. Pullman has done more than appease his eager readers" with the publication of the long-awaited *The Amber Spyglass*, writes Sarah Lyall in the *New York Times*. "He has produced a thrillingly ambitious tale inspired by Milton's *Paradise Lost* with a radical view of religion that may well hold the most subversive message in children's literature in years." That view was echoed by Erica Wagner in *The Times* of London, who expressed hope that younger readers would understand the philosophy underpinning the story. "This is remarkable writing, courageous and dangerous, as the best art should be. Pullman envisions a world without God, but not without hope."

As he wrote the book, Pullman has said, he defined and wrote out his own personal religious philosophy, which forms the philosophical foundation of the books. "Underlying the whole story is a consistent myth," he explained. "It's not explicitly written in the books, but I did write it out for myself. Throughout all three books, I kept returning to it and refining it. It serves the same function for me that the Genesis story served for Milton when he

was writing *Paradise Lost*; it's the floor on which the stories are built. . . . [My myth] takes this physical universe as our true home. We must welcome and love and live our lives in this world to the full."

To that end, one of the themes of the book is celebrating the world of the senses and the physical body. "It seemed to me that people waste so much of their lives waiting for what's going to happen after they die," Pullman explains. "And this world is the only world we know or we can be certain of. And it's a place of the most extraordinary and exquisite beauty and delight. . . . What I was trying to do, though, was really awaken readers to the glory, the wonder of our physical senses." It is these efforts to depict the physical life that make His Dark Materials not fantasy, in Pullman's view, but stark realism. Here, he explains what he means. "When I found myself

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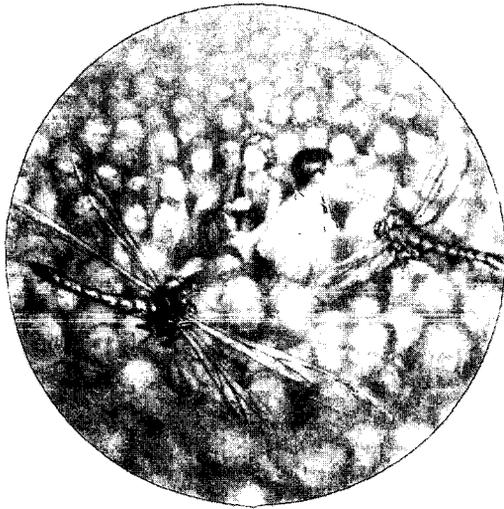
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— Sarah Lyall,  
New York Times

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HIS DARK MATERIALS • BOOK III

# THE AMBER SPYGLASS



PHILIP PULLMAN

writing this book, what I wanted to do was to use the apparatus of fantasy in order to do what writers of realism are more typically interested in doing, namely, to explore this business about being a human being—what it feels like and what it's like, what it means for us to grow up, to pass

away from our childhood, to suffer, to learn, to grow, to develop, to die, and so on. And that's what I mean by saying that it's not really a work of fantasy. It's as realistic as I could make it."

While the trilogy has aroused some controversy for its negative portrayal of organized religion, the books have become extremely popular. More than a million copies of the three books have been sold to date in the U.S. alone, and they have been translated into 21 languages. *The Amber Spyglass* won Pullman a British Book Award, beating the latest Harry Potter book, and the earlier two novels have won major awards in Britain and the United States. And the books may yet make the transition to the screen: Scholastic Entertainment has bought the film rights to the trilogy, although Pullman doesn't plan to get involved in writing the screenplay.

### No Comparisons

It irritates Pullman to be compared to C. S. Lewis, author of the *Narnia Chronicles*, and J. R. R. Tolkien, author of *Lord of the Rings*. "The *Lord of the Rings* is a very good story," he says, "but it says nothing about human beings. . . . [It's] all school-boys having a jolly big adventure." He also dislikes the *Narnia* books, which he thinks support such activities as bullying, racism, and negative attitudes toward girls.

Pullman also sets himself apart from J. K. Rowling, the author of the Harry Potter books. "Harry Potter was born to be a wizard, and I don't really like that idea. I wanted to get away from the notion that somebody is born with a particular destiny," he says. "Lyra is a very ordinary child, and so is Will. . . . Lyra's and Will's responses are the responses of every young person who is faced with something difficult and is courageous enough to deal with it."

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*"When I found myself writing this book, what I wanted to do was to use the apparatus of fantasy in order to do what writers of realism are more typically interested in doing, namely, to explore this business about being a human being — what it feels like and what it's like, what it means for us to grow up, to pass away from our childhood, to suffer, to learn, to grow, to develop, to die, and so on. And that's what I mean by saying that it's not really a work of fantasy. It's as realistic as I could make it."*

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One of the things that makes Pullman's trilogy stand out is its popularity with adults as well as with teenagers and younger readers. His complex imaginative world and his unconventional views on religion give adults plenty to think about, while younger readers are entranced by his unusual cast of characters, which includes armored polar bears, tiny spies known as Gallivespians who carry poison in their spurs, and small-horned, elephant-like creatures called the mulefa who ride on wheels made of seed pods. In addition,

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*"The most valuable thing I've learned about writing is to keep going, even when it's not coming easily. You sometimes hear people talk about something called 'writer's block.' Did you ever hear a plumber talk about plumber's block? Do doctors get doctor's block? Of course they don't. They work even when they don't want to. There are times when writing is very hard, too. . . . Your job is to sit there and make things up, so do it."*

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Pullman is known for his strong female characters, who face danger with great courage — characters like Sally Lockhart and Lyra. "But I certainly don't think . . . that in order to show girls being strong, you have to show boys being weak," he explains. "And so I try to make my male characters admirable and worthy in their ways as well."

#### MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

Pullman married Judith (Jude) Speller, who works as a therapist, in 1970. They live in Oxford with their his two sons: Jamie, a professional viola player, and Tom, who is studying music in college. Pullman works in a shed he built in the corner of his garden 15 years ago to escape the noise as Jamie learned to play the violin. He has worked in it ever since, and he still tries to turn out three pages a day.

#### ADVICE TO YOUNG WRITERS

"The most valuable thing I've learned about writing," Pullman says, "is to keep going, even when it's not coming easily. You sometimes hear people talk about something called 'writer's block.' Did you ever hear a plumber talk about plumber's block? Do doctors get doctor's block? Of course they don't. They work even when they don't want to. There are times when writing is very hard, too, when you can't think what to put next, and when staring at the empty page is miserable toil. . . . Your job is to sit there and make things up, so do it."

## FAVORITE BOOKS

Growing up, Pullman loved to read Rudyard Kipling's *Just So Stories*. He also liked Finnish writer Tove Jansson's *The Moomins* series.

## SELECTED WRITINGS

### The Sally Lockhart Trilogy

*The Ruby in the Smoke*, 1985

*The Shadow in the North*, 1988 (originally published in England as *The Shadow in the Plate*, 1987)

*The Tiger in the Well*, 1990

### His Dark Materials Trilogy

*The Golden Compass*, 1996 (originally published in England as *Northern Lights*, 1995)

*The Subtle Knife*, 1997

*The Amber Spyglass*, 2000

### Fiction for Young Adults

*The Broken Bridge*, 1990

*Spring-Heeled Jack*, 1991

*The White Mercedes*, 1993 (published in England as *The Butterfly Tattoo*, 1998)

*The Tin Princess*, 1994

*Detective Stories*, 1998 (compiler)

### Fiction for Younger Readers

*Ancient Civilizations*, 1978

*Count Karlstein*, 1982

*How to Be Cool*, 1987

*The Wonderful Story of Aladdin and the Enchanted Lamp*, 1993

*Thunderbolt's Waxwork*, 1994

*The Firework-Maker's Daughter*, 1995

*The Gas-Fitter's Ball*, 1995

*Clockwork*, 1996

*I Was a Rat!* 1999

### Fiction for Adults

*Galatea*, 1978

## HONORS AND AWARDS

- Best Books for Young Adults (*School Library Journal*): 1987, for *Ruby in the Smoke*
- Children's Book Award for Older Readers (International Reading Association): 1988, for *Ruby in the Smoke*
- Best Books for Young Adults (American Library Association): 1988, for *Ruby in the Smoke*; 1988, for *Shadow in the North*
- Carnegie Medal (Youth Libraries Group of England): 1996, for *The Golden Compass [Northern Lights]*
- The Guardian* Children's Fiction Award: 1996, for *The Golden Compass*
- Nestle Smarties Book Prize: 1996, Gold Award, for *The Firework-Maker's Daughter*; 1997, for *Clockwork*
- Best Children's Book (Book Links): 1997, for *The Subtle Knife*
- Parents' Choice Gold Book Award: 1997, for *The Subtle Knife*
- British Book Award for Best Children's Book: 2000, for *The Amber Spyglass*

## FURTHER READING

### Books

- Authors and Artists for Young Adults*, Vol. 15, 1995
- Contemporary Authors, New Revision Series*, Vol. 50, 1996
- St. James Guide to Young Adult Writers*, 2nd ed., 1999
- Who's Who in America*, 2001

### Periodicals

- Booklist*, Oct. 1, 2000, p.354
- Boston Globe*, Mar. 1, 1998, p.F5
- Horn Book*, Nov. 2000, p.735
- New York Times*, Nov. 7, 2000, p.E1
- New York Times Book Review*, Nov 19, 2000, p.22
- Newsweek*, Oct. 30, 2000, p.80
- Publishers Weekly*, May 30, 1994, p.24; Sep. 25, 2000, p.119; Dec. 18, 2000, p.25
- School Library Journal*, Oct. 2000, p.50
- Seattle Times*, Oct. 7, 2000, p.D1
- Washington Post*, Nov. 6, 2000, p.C13
- Washington Post Book World*, May 21, 2000, p.X19; Oct. 29, 2000, p.X15

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<http://www.powells.com/authors.pullman.html>  
<http://www.teacher.scholastic.com/authorsandbooks.authors/pullman/bio.htm> -  
<http://www.achuka.co.uk.ppsg.htm>



## **Jon Scieszka 1954-**

American Writer for Children

Author of *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs*, *The Stinky Cheese Man and Other Fairly Stupid Tales*, *Math Curse*, and the "Time Warp Trio" Books

### **BIRTH**

Jon Scieszka was born on September 8, 1954, in Flint, Michigan. He is the son of Louis Scieszka, an elementary school principal, and Shirley Scieszka, a nurse. Jon was the second of six brothers. "Scieszka" is pronounced SHESS-ka, and it rhymes with Fresca.

## YOUTH

Scieszka's childhood overflowed with twisted humor and an irreverent love of language, stories, math, and science. "I always was the quietly subversive kid, sitting in the back row cracking jokes but really enjoying what was going on in class," he said. In the midst of a rough-and-tumble household of six boys, his parents always read to their children. Jon loved *Go, Dog, Go!* by P.D. Eastman and *The Carrot Seed* by Ruth Krauss and Crockett Johnson. A top favorite was Dr. Seuss's *Green Eggs and Ham*, which his mother read to him "four bazillion times," according to Scieszka. The book inspired his early wish to become a writer. "I loved the sound and goofy meaning of those words read aloud, and thought it would be wonderful to do the same," he said. Scieszka's parents also encouraged his love of math and science. His mother once took Jon's Cub Scout den on a field trip to a hospital pre-natal ward. And his father performed "weird" magic tricks related to science—tricks that turn up in Scieszka's "Time Warp Trio" books.

Scieszka sharpened his sense of humor on comic books, the English comedy troupe Monty Python's Flying Circus, and the satirical *Mad Magazine*. He also loved cartoons, like Krazy Kat and the "Rocky and Bullwinkle Show." That show's "Fractured Fairy Tales" segment may have planted the seed for Scieszka's own upside-down

versions of classic stories. And the constant company of five brothers nurtured the kid-friendly perspective and humor that makes his books ring so true to readers. Scieszka remembers babysitting for his four younger brothers. "I'd tell stories—and terrorize them! They were a great audience. And if they got out of line, I'd just say we were going to call the Bad Boys' home to come and get them." His childhood showed him the dynamics of guys who show "how much they care for each other by smacking each other around," he said. He tapped into this understanding when creating characters like Joe, Fred, and Sam of the Time Warp Trio.

## EDUCATION

Scieszka attended Catholic school in Flint for nine years. When he was a high-school sophomore, he transferred to the Culver Military Academy in

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*The book Green Eggs and Ham inspired Scieszka's early wish to become a writer. "I loved the sound and goofy meaning of those words read aloud, and thought it would be wonderful to do the same."*

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Indiana. At Culver, he met his most memorable teachers, including a math instructor who could write complicated equations on the blackboard behind him — while never taking his eyes off the class in front of him. “It was like a party trick,” he remembered. “And we all thought, ‘If he can solve these equations backward, we should at least be able to figure them out the usual way.’”

Scieszka took his passion for math and science to Albion College, in Michigan, where he studied to become a doctor. But he never lost his passion for reading and writing. “I’d be in the biology class at eight in the morning with all the pre-med kids,” he said. “In the afternoon, I’d hang

out with the la-de-da English majors, writing all sorts of stuff.” When he graduated in 1976, Scieszka was accepted at the prestigious Johns Hopkins Medical School. But, by this time he had admitted to himself that “sick people make me nervous.” So he opted for a master of fine arts degree (M.F.A.) in creative writing from Columbia University in New York City. According to Scieszka, “It did serve its purpose because, at the time, I could tell my mom I was in school.”

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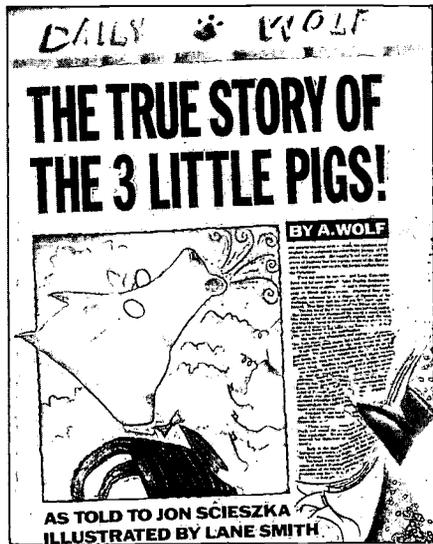
*Scieszka was working as a teacher and trying to write fiction for adults, but nobody would publish it. “Then one day, I realized my audience was sitting right in front of me. They were just a lot smaller and shorter than I thought they’d be. But every bit as smart and dedicated.”*

### CHOOSING A CAREER

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After graduate school, Scieszka worked on fiction for adults in his spare time and painted apartments to earn money. “That’s what you can do with an M.F.A. in Brooklyn,” he said. “Hang it on your drop cloth.” Eventually he got a job at a private school for boys. He taught for ten years in a variety of positions, as a first-grade assistant, second-grade homeroom teacher, and then a computer, math, science, and history teacher for third to eighth grades. All the while, he kept writing fiction for adults. But nobody would publish it. “Then one day, I realized my audience was sitting right in front of me,” Scieszka said. “They were just a lot smaller and shorter than I thought they’d be. But every bit as smart and dedicated.” He turned to writing children’s books, with a particular interest in reaching 8-to-12-year-old boys “with goofy senses of humor,” the ones who had a hard time finding books they were interested in.

Scieszka took a year off from teaching to write, and concentrated on funny re-tellings of fairy tales. At around the same time, he met Lane Smith, a successful magazine artist who had written and illustrated a couple of children's books of his own. Smith's dark, quirky style was "my kind of humor translated into the visual sense," Scieszka said. The two put together a sample version of *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs* and began shopping it around to publishers. But nobody wanted it. The tale was too dark, too strange, and above all, too sophisticated for children, the pair were told. Finally, the Viking publishing company said, "It's a little weird, but we'll take a chance."



Although it took him a while to reach his goal, Scieszka had always dreamed of being an author. "I thought about writing from the first time I heard my mom read *Green Eggs and Ham* to me," he said. "I can remember in fourth and fifth grade looking on the library shelves for the place where books by me would be, in alphabetical order. I always looked in the adult section. There was just one problem. I wasn't sure how to spell 'Scieszka.' . . . Even now, late at night, I can't quite get all the letters."

## CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

Working primarily with Smith as his illustrator, Scieszka has contributed uniquely inventive, irreverent books to children's literature. His most popular and respected works include *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs*, *The Stinky Cheese Man and Other Fairly Stupid Tales*, *Math Curse*, and the "Time Warp Trio" series of novels.

### *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs*

*The True Story of the Three Little Pigs*, published in 1989, launched Scieszka as the popular author of many upside-down fairy tales and fables. As the book's fans know, *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs* allows Alexander T. Wolf ("Call me Al") to tell his side of the famous story. He never meant to hurt the swine, he claims. He only wanted to borrow a cup of sugar to

bake his granny a birthday cake. All the trouble started at the door when his nose began to itch—and the ensuing sneeze toppled the house. Al claims he was “framed” for the crime—and pleads for the readers’ understanding. “Hey, it’s not my fault wolves eat cute little bunnies and sheep and pigs. That’s just the way we are,” he said. “If cheeseburgers were cute, folks would probably think you were Big and Bad too.”

The book was a fantastic success, eventually selling over a million copies in ten languages. Readers of all ages love the sly humor of the writing and of Smith’s pictures. It may have surprised many adults that kids “got” its hu-

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*“People don’t give kids enough credit for knowing the fairy tales and being able to get what parody is. When I taught second grade, that’s the age when they first discover parody. They’re just getting those reading skills and nothing cracks them up like a joke that turns stuff upside down.”*

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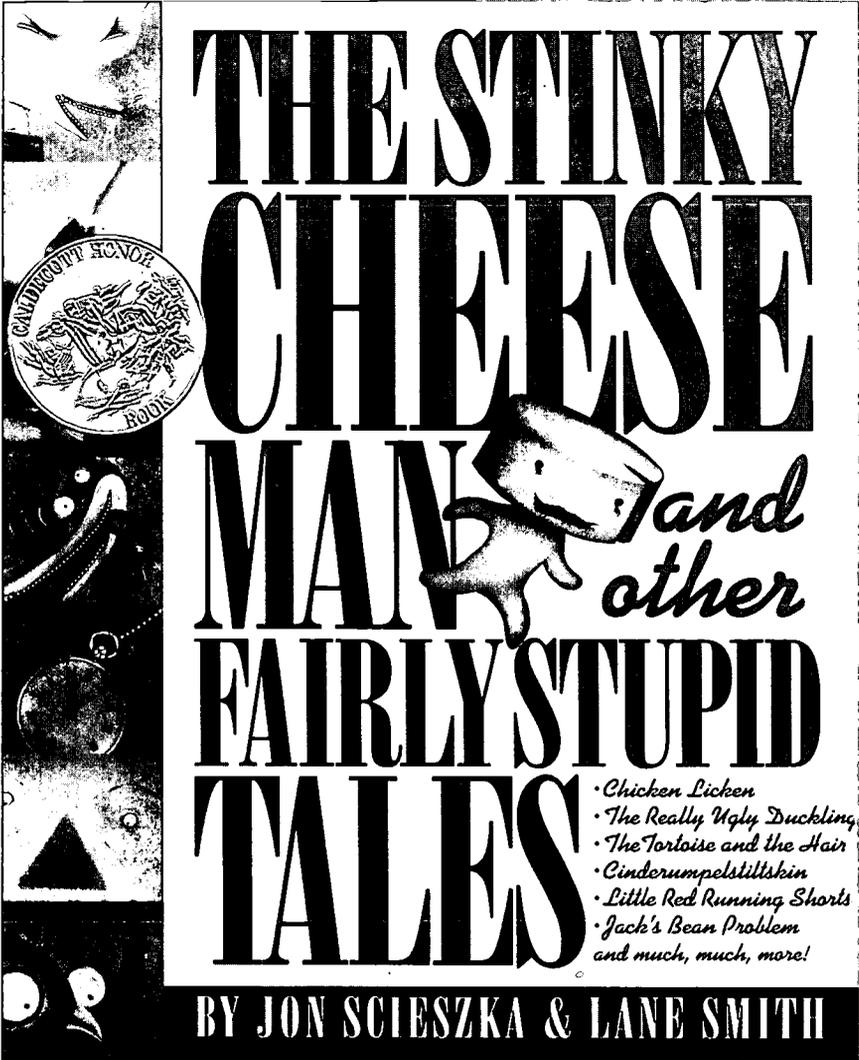
mor—but it didn’t surprise Scieszka. “People don’t give kids enough credit for knowing the fairy tales and being able to get what parody is,” he said. “When I taught second grade, that’s the age when they first discover parody. They’re just getting those reading skills and nothing cracks them up like a joke that turns stuff upside down.”

### *The Stinky Cheese Man and Other Fairly Stupid Tales*

Scieszka continued to crack kids up with new takes on old tales. In *The Frog Prince, Continued* (1991) he explored what happened after the frog married the princess (he misses the pond and she never stops complaining). *The Book That Jack Wrote* (1994) adapts “The

House that Jack Built” and creates an endless circle—the first page loops to the last, with Jack crushed on both pages beneath a fallen painting. Each of those books paired Scieszka with a different illustrator.

But in *The Stinky Cheese Man and Other Fairly Stupid Tales* (1992), Lane Smith returned to create pictures for Scieszka’s richest feast of wackiness yet. Here he skewers a whole collection of classic tales, from “Cinderumplestiltskin” (she doesn’t win the prince) to “Little Red Running Shorts” (Red beats the wolf to grandma’s house). In the title story, the little old woman runs out of gingerbread, so she fashions a man out of smelly cheese instead. Unlike the original, hotly pursued Gingerbread Man, nobody wants to go near him.



Scieszka's "fairly stupid tales" are not what readers expect, and neither are the typefaces or the arrangement of text. Words shrink, grow, and change dramatically to emphasize points of the story. The red hen always "speaks" in red type to suggest her annoying voice. The type and pictures of the Stinky Cheese Man melt because he smells so awful. The table of contents appears in the middle of the book — then crashes down on the characters. A blank page appears in the middle of a story. Endpapers pop up mid-volume. And the dedication page is upside down. Scieszka has credited Smith

with helping him mastermind many of these innovations. He also applauds the work of Molly Leach, Smith's wife and a graphic designer who often works on the overall "look" of Scieszka's books. "Maybe good design is magic," Scieszka said. "How else could text plus illustrations equal more than the original words and pictures? I can't think of any other way to describe what Molly does." Readers and critics certainly responded to the volume's overall magic. The book has been popular with readers and with critics of children's literature, earning a Caldecott Honor Medal in 1993 as one of the year's most distinguished books for children. Scieszka and Smith have sold a movie studio the rights to turn it into a full-length movie, with their creative help.

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*"I was always looking for a way to write a goofy math book. But the mere mention of it would just make people fall over and die."*

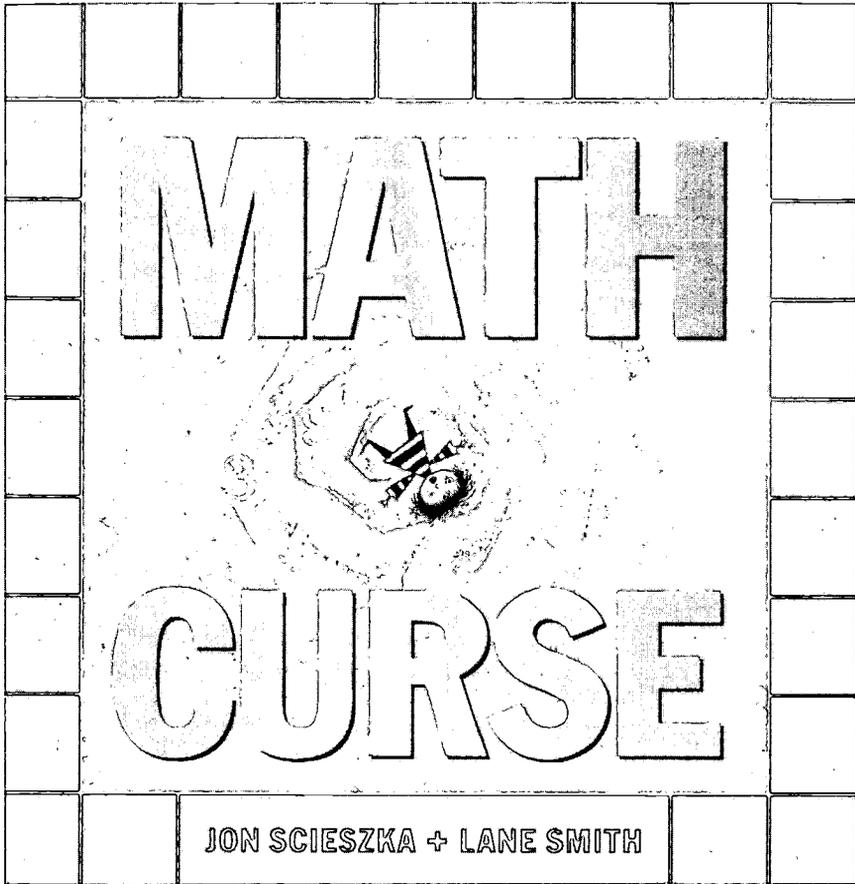
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### *Math Curse*

In addition to his crack-up classics, Scieszka also has turned his humorist's eye to numbers. The result, *Math Curse* (1995), is what seems to be a contradiction in terms and a possible "first" in children's literature: a funny book about math. Although it's a picture book, *Math Curse* is considered fun for a wide range of ages—for anyone who has struggled with math.

In *Math Curse*, a girl is obsessed by her teacher's remark that everything can be seen as a math problem. (Alert math scholars will note that the teacher, Mrs. Fibonacci, is named after a leading mathematician who lived 700 years ago.) Soon, the girl's head is spinning. How many feet in her shoes? How many yards in her neighborhood? And does tunafish plus tunafish equalournafish? "I was always looking for a way to write a goofy math book," Scieszka said. "But the mere mention of it would just make people fall over and die." So he spent about five years playing with ideas and figuring out, he said, "what form a goofy math book would take." Typically, the results are hilarious. The book's comic climax arrives when the heroine realizes she has 24 cupcakes for her 24 classmates. So far, so good, until she realizes that she needs one for her teacher, too! "Children learn better and more through humor," Scieszka said.

The book was a big hit with readers and with critics of children's literature. Called distinctive, witty, sophisticated, and original, it was a success with young kids and older readers as well. It also won a host of awards, testifying to its wide appeal.



### *Squids Will Be Squids*

Having plumbed the depths of silliness in the fairy-tale genre, Scieszka also has teamed with Smith to tackle the beast fable, as made famous by the Greek slave, Aesop. In *Squids Will Be Squids: Fresh Morals, Beastly Fables* (1998), Scieszka highlights the foibles of modern kids through the ancient fable form. In a typical example, "Straw and Matches," Straw realizes that his "friend" Matches is a boorish bully who will only play the games he wants. So Straw goes home. The moral? Don't play with Matches. The book's other 17 tales deliver similarly silly but true-to-modern-life lessons. All of them were inspired, Scieszka said, by stories his teen-age daughter told him or by incidents in their own home. "Even thousands of years ago," he wrote in the foreword to the book, "people were bright enough to



figure out that you could gossip about anybody — as long as you changed their name to something like “Lion” or “Mouse” or “Donkey” first.”

### The “Time Warp Trio” Books

When he’s not turning classic children’s stories on their heads, Scieszka is busy writing tales about the Time Warp Trio— three boys who travel backward and forward in time through a magical book. So far the three have had nearly ten adventures, including stints in ancient Egypt, in Neanderthal times, and on a pirate ship. All feature Lane Smith’s sophisticated illustrations.

The “Time Warp Trio” series of novels aim for younger boys who want books to be hilarious, action-packed, life-like, and cool-looking. “When I taught third and fourth grades, I couldn’t find cool-looking books to hand to boys, who, for the most part, were reluctant readers and didn’t want to be seen as dummies,” Scieszka said. “I saw a need for something between a picture book and a chapter book. Kids get stuck in that lull there.” The “Time Warp Trio” books appeal to many boys because of the “short chapters, cliff-hanger endings, fast action, [and] understandable plots,” Scieszka said. “And, most important, they look cool.” The books have been so successful that Scieszka and Smith are working with public television to adapt them into an animated television series.

### *Baloney (Henry P.)*

Scieszka and Smith have recently teamed up on a new fractured picture book, *Baloney (Henry P.)*, to be published in 2001. Henry P. Baloney is a school kid from another planet. According to Scieszka, he received Henry’s story directly from deep space, translated it, then passed it on. Henry’s in big trouble: he needs to come up with a great excuse for being late for “szkola” (school), or his teacher will give him permanent Lifelong Detention. So he tells his teacher a whopper of a tale. The book includes

words from about 20 languages from around the world. The story is told using a smattering of foreign words that sound similar to their English equivalents, with pictures and context to help readers understand the meanings of those words. Lane used a comic book/graphic novel style layout of panels and letterings to reinforce the idea of “reading” both the design and the pictures to understand the story. Together, Scieszka and Smith have created another fun and funny tale.

**WRITING PROCESS**

Scieszka gets his ideas for books from “thinking—and from other books. . . . I like the idea that one book can point readers to others they might like to read,” he said. He likes to write at home or in public libraries. “In some of my ‘Time Warp’ books I included a special thank you to the Brooklyn library because I spent so much time there,” he said. Scieszka enjoys visiting bookstores and schools—and has traveled to hundreds of them, as far away as Alaska and Hawaii. He is eager for the chance to try out new stories when he’s on the road. “I give them a test run, like working out club material out of town,” he said.

**ADVICE TO WRITERS**

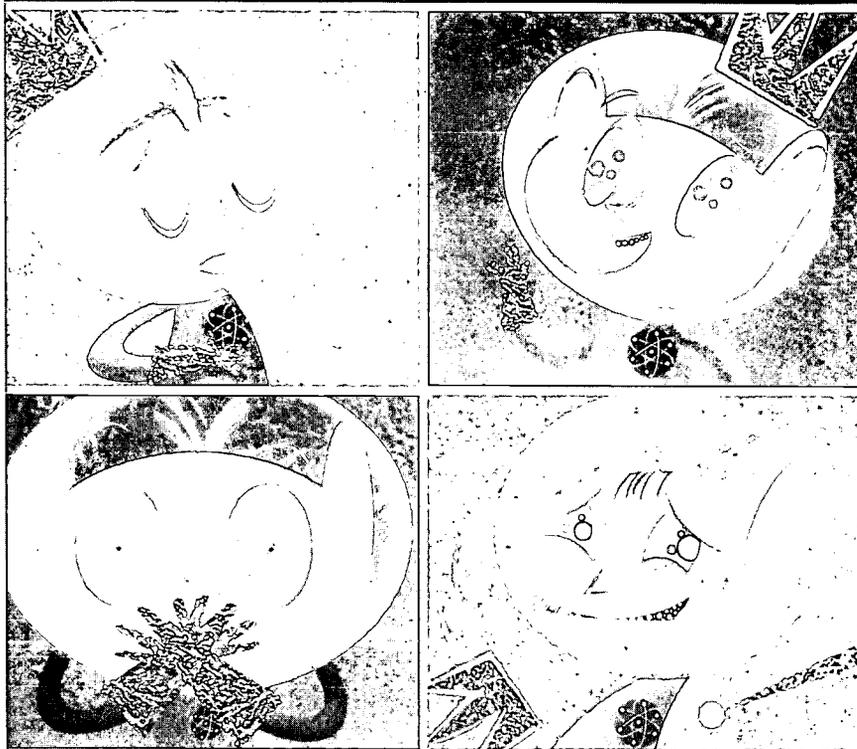
According to Scieszka, writing “is kind of like digging ditches. I think kids need to know that.” He advises anyone who wants to be a writer simply to write. “I know that sounds stupid, but that’s really it,” he said. “It’s good practice to imitate your favorite writers. . . . Eventually, if you keep writing, you find your own voice.” Scieszka adds the practical tip to always carry something to write with—because paper is easy to find, but not a pencil.

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*“My working motto and guiding principle in writing is ‘Never underestimate the intelligence of your audience.’ And I like to think that my audience includes babies, toddlers, kids of all ages, parents, grandparents, teachers, truck drivers, rocket scientists, and anyone who can read or be read to. Another motto I like is ‘Have Fun and Tell Lots of Bad Jokes as Often as Possible,’ but that doesn’t sound quite as noble as the first motto.”*

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**BUT I FORGOT THE ASTROSUS WORD FOR "THANK YOU"**



**AND ACCIDENTALLY USED THE WORD FOR "DOOFBRAIN."**

*An illustration from Baloney (Henry P.), 2001.*

## INSPIRATION AND INFLUENCES

Sieczka said: "I think a lot of my inspiration is a weird combination of what I'm reading, music I'm listening to, and wondering, 'What would happen if . . .?' Like what if the wolf got to tell his side of the story? What if the old lady ran out of gingerbread? What if you started a fairy tale at the end? What if you wrote fables about kids you know? What if three third- and fourth-grade guys could travel anywhere in time? But my biggest inspiration is all of the kids I ever knew—my own two kids, kids I taught, kids who write me letters. Kids are the perfect audience—much more willing to be goofy and wonder 'What if . . .?'"

"My working motto and guiding principle in writing is 'Never underestimate the intelligence of your audience.' And I like to think that my audience includes babies, toddlers, kids of all ages, parents, grandparents, teachers, truck drivers, rocket scientists, and anyone who can read or be read to. Another motto I like is 'Have Fun and Tell Lots of Bad Jokes as Often as Possible,' but that doesn't sound quite as noble as the first motto."

## MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

Scieszka is married to Jerilyn Hansen, an art director. She introduced him to Lane Smith when she became good friends at work with Smith's wife, Molly Leach. Scieszka and his wife have a daughter, Casey, and a son, Jake. They live in the Park Slope section of Brooklyn in New York City.

## HOBBIES AND OTHER INTERESTS

Scieszka likes to swim, bicycle, and play basketball and golf. He also likes to watch television (especially cartoons), listen to music, play with his kids, and look at art. "Eating lunch is big on my list of things to do," he says.

Scieszka also likes to read—and he'll read just about anything. "My favorite things to read are fairytales of course, myths, legends, comic books, graphic novels, history, poems, novels, science books, picture books, short stories, newspapers, funny bits, codes, hieroglyphics, encyclopedias, dictionaries, subway ads, sides of cereal boxes, matchbook covers, mattress tags, and any little scraps of paper with writing on them."

## WRITINGS

*The True Story of the Three Little Pigs*, 1989  
*The Frog Prince, Continued*, 1991  
*The Stinky Cheese Man and Other Fairly Stupid Tales*, 1992  
*The Book That Jack Wrote*, 1994  
*Math Curse*, 1995  
*Squids Will Be Squids: Fresh Morals, Beastly Fables*, 1998  
*Baloney (Henry P.)*, 2001

### "Time Warp Trio" Series

*Knights of the Kitchen Table*, 1991  
*The Not-So-Jolly Roger*, 1991  
*The Good, the Bad, and the Goofy*, 1992  
*Your Mother Was a Neanderthal*, 1993

2095, 1995

*Tut, Tut*, 1996

*Summer Reading Is Killing Me!* 1998

*It's All Greek to Me*, 1999

*See You Later, Gladiator*, 2000

## HONORS AND AWARDS

Best Books of the Year (*New York Times*): 1989, for *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs*

Notable Children's Books (American Library Association): 1989, for *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs*; 1992, for *The Stinky Cheese Man and Other Fairly Stupid Tales*; 1995, for *Math Curse*

Reading Magic Award (*Parenting Magazine*): 1989, for *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs*; 1998, for *Squids Will Be Squids*

Best Books of the Year (*School Library Journal*): 1992, for *The Stinky Cheese Man and Other Fairly Stupid Tales*; 1995, for *Math Curse*

Notable Books (*New York Times*): 1992, for *The Stinky Cheese Man and Other Fairly Stupid Tales*

Editors' Choice Award (*Booklist*): 1992, for *The Stinky Cheese Man and Other Fairly Stupid Tales*; 1995, for *Math Curse*

Best Children's Books (*Publishers Weekly*): 1995, for *Math Curse*; 1998, for *Squids Will Be Squids*

Best Books for Young Adults (American Library Association): 1996, for *Math Curse*; 1998, for *Squids Will Be Squids*

Best Books of the Year (*Child Magazine*): 1995, for *Math Curse*

A Few Good Books (*Book Links*): 1995, for *Math Curse*

Fanfare Award (*Horn Book*): 1995, for *Math Curse*; 1998, for *Squids Will Be Squids*

Editor's Choice Award (*San Francisco Chronicle*): 1995, for *Math Curse*

Children's Choices Award (International Reading Association/Children's Book Council): 1995, for *Math Curse*

Books for the Teen Age (New York Public Library): 1995, for *Math Curse*

Bulletin Blue Ribbon Award (*Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*): 1998, for *Squids Will Be Squids*

## FURTHER READING

### Books

*Author Talk*, 2000

*Biography for Beginners*, Fall, 1995

*Contemporary Authors*, Vol. 153, 1992

Holtze, Sally Holmes, ed. *Seventh Book of Junior Authors and Illustrators*, 1996  
*Something about the Author*, Vol. 68, 1992  
*Who's Who in America*, 1996

### **Periodicals**

*Booklist*, Sep. 1, 1992, p.57  
*Horn Book*, Mar.-Apr. 1998, p.196; Nov. 1, 2000, p.662  
*Teaching K-8*, May 1992, p.23

### **ADDRESS**

Viking Children's Books  
375 Hudson Street  
New York, NY 10014

### **WORLD WIDE WEB SITES**

<http://www.chucklebait.com>  
<http://www.penguinputnam.com>  
<http://www.baloneyhenryp.com>



**Amy Tan 1952-**  
American Writer  
Author of *The Joy Luck Club*

**BIRTH**

Amy Ruth Tan was born in Oakland, California, on February 19, 1952. Her Chinese name, An-Mei, means "blessing from America." She was one of three children born to John and Daisy Tan. Amy has one brother, John, Jr., who is two years younger. She also had an older brother, Peter, who died when Amy was 15.

Amy's father, John Tan, was born in China. He trained in Beijing as an electrical engineer, but he could also speak fluent

English because he had been educated by Christian missionaries. He worked for the U.S. Information Service during World War II, which made it easier for him to leave China after the war. In 1947, he immigrated to the United States. Although John was offered a scholarship to study engineering in Boston, he decided to become a minister instead—his way of thanking God for getting his future wife, Daisy, out of China safely.

Amy's mother, Daisy Tan, whose maiden name was Tu Ching, was the daughter of a scholar who had died when she was very young. She grew up on an island off the coast of Shanghai, where her widowed mother was forced to become the concubine (secondary wife) of a very wealthy man. After her mother committed suicide by swallowing opium, Daisy was forced into an arranged marriage to an abusive man with whom she had three daughters. She tried for many years to leave him, and spent three months in prison as punishment. She managed to get a divorce and escape to the U.S. in 1949 to join John Tan, whom she planned to wed. But she was forced to leave her three daughters behind as the price of escaping from her miserable abusive marriage. After Amy and her brothers were born in California, Daisy worked nights as a licensed practical nurse. Daisy Tan didn't reveal much about her early life to her daughter until years later.

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*The Tan family moved often while Amy was growing up. "I was constantly having to make new friends, to prove myself. It made me a more introspective child, a more solitary child."*

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## YOUTH

The Tan family moved often while Amy was growing up. Every time John Tan found a better position as a minister, the family would have to move, something they did almost every year while the children were young. The Tans lived in several cities in northern California—Oakland, Fresno, Hayward, Palo Alto, Santa Rosa, and Sunnyvale—before settling down in Santa Clara. "I was constantly having to make new friends, to prove myself," Amy remembers. "It made me a more introspective child, a more solitary child."

The Tans set high standards for their children, especially Amy. They decided that she would be a brain surgeon when she grew up, because the brain was the most important part of the body. They thought she should be a concert pianist on the side, so they bought her a piano and signed her up

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*Tan remembers feeling “ashamed when people came over and saw my mother preparing food. She didn’t make TV dinners or use canned foods. She served fresh vegetables and served fish with the heads still on.”*

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for lessons when she was only five. When Amy won an essay contest at age eight and started thinking about becoming a writer, she knew that her parents would never consider this to be an acceptable ambition, so she kept her dreams to herself.

Storytelling, however, was very much a part of the Tan household. John Tan would often read his sermons, which were stories designed to teach a particular lesson, to his children and then ask them for their opinions. Daisy Tan was a natural storyteller who frequently

exchanged news and gossip about local events with her women friends as they prepared meals. Although she may have been embarrassed by her mother’s broken English and Shanghai accent, Amy learned more about the art of telling a story from Daisy than she did from any of her teachers in school.

## EARLY MEMORIES

When Amy was three years old, she remembers coming down the stairs on the verge of tears. Her mother asked her what was wrong, and she said that she couldn’t go in the bathroom because there was a ghost in there. Recalling this incident more than 30 years later, Daisy Tan said to her daughter, “You must have seen a ghost, because I never taught you this word before.”

Amy’s ghostly vision was the first indication that she had an extraordinarily vivid imagination. “I used to imagine things to the point where I actually saw them,” she recalls.

## DEALING WITH HER CHINESE HERITAGE

Tan spent her entire youth trying to deny her Chinese heritage and fit in with her American friends. She even slept with a clothespin on her nose in the hope of changing her Asian appearance. It embarrassed her when her mother spoke to her in Mandarin (the language spoken by most Chinese), and she insisted on responding in English. She remembers feeling “ashamed when people came over and saw my mother preparing food.

She didn't make TV dinners or use canned foods. She served fresh vegetables and served fish with the heads still on." "Somehow I'd been born into the wrong family," Tan remembers thinking. "I went down the wrong chute and ended up with a Chinese family."

When Tan was 14 years old, she was very interested in a boy named Robert, who was not Chinese. Her parents invited Robert and his family to their house for dinner on Christmas Eve, an event that Tan remembers as disastrous. They served raw fish instead of turkey, used chopsticks, and reached across the table to help themselves to food instead of waiting for it to be passed. When her father ended the meal with a loud belch—a polite Chinese custom for showing appreciation—Tan thought she would die of embarrassment.

Afterward, Daisy Tan gave her daughter an early Christmas present—a miniskirt, which was very much in fashion at the time. Then she told her daughter, "You want to be the same as American girls on the outside. But inside you must always be Chinese. You must be proud you are different. Your only shame is to have shame."

## EDUCATION

Because she had to change schools so often and she was frequently the only Chinese-American girl in her class, Tan never really had a chance to fit in as a student. "I remember trying to belong and feeling isolated," Tan says. "I felt ashamed of being different and ashamed of feeling that way." She worried constantly about her mother showing up at her school and embarrassing her.

Tan did fairly well in English, getting B's and B-pluses, but both her parents and her teachers felt that she should pursue math and science, subjects on which she excelled on standardized tests. Tan now believes that these tests were culturally biased, since Asian-American students traditionally did better in these areas. She also believes that the broken English she grew up hearing her mother speak affected her test results, since standardized tests do not recognize anything but standard English.

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shame is to have shame."*

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Life changed completely for the Tans in 1967, when Amy was 15. Her older brother, Peter, and her father both developed brain tumors and died within a few months of each other. Daisy Tan, who had done her best to practice a Western, Christian lifestyle while her husband was alive, reverted to the customs and beliefs of her Chinese upbringing, deciding that her Santa Clara home was "diseased" and that she had to get her remaining two children out of there before it was too late. It was also around this time that Daisy first told her daughter she had been married before and forced to leave three daughters behind in China.

Wanting her two remaining children to see the world before something terrible happened to them, Daisy took Amy and John, Jr. to Europe. They settled in Mantras, Switzerland, where Tan and her brother enrolled in the Institut Monte Rosa Internationale, a school whose students came from many different countries. Instead of standing out because she was different, Tan was regarded by her classmates as exotic, and boys started asking her out for the first time.

Still recovering from the deaths of her brother and father, Tan became increasingly rebellious. She started smoking and wearing short skirts and makeup, and she dated a young German whom her mother suspected of being involved with drug dealers. Unwilling to stand by and watch while her daughter ruined her life, Daisy Tan hired a private detective to investigate the young man, which resulted in "the biggest drug bust in the history of Mantras." Daisy also found out that her daughter's boyfriend had escaped from a German mental hospital, and the relationship ended soon afterward. Tan took extra courses in Switzerland and managed to graduate from high school at the end of her junior year.

### College Years

The family returned to San Francisco, and in the fall of 1969, Tan left for Linfield College in Oregon, a small, conservative Baptist school that her mother had chosen for her. She enrolled in the pre-med program, but at the end of her freshman year she left Linfield and followed her college boyfriend to San Jose State University, where he was attending law school. Tan transferred to San Jose City College and changed her major from pre-med to English and linguistics, which is the study of the history, structure, and use of language. This change in direction was very hard for her mother to accept, and the two did not speak to each other for six months afterward.

After two semesters at San Jose City College, Tan transferred to San Jose State University, where she received a B.A. in English and linguistics in

1973. She went on to earn an M.A. in linguistics there the following year, and then began studying for a doctorate in linguistics at the University of California at Berkeley. The murder of a close friend and the realization that she had spent her whole life as a student prompted Tan to leave Berkeley in 1976.

## FIRST JOBS

Tan's first real job after leaving Berkeley was with the Alameda County Association for Retarded Citizens, where she worked as a language consultant for disabled children. Then she accepted a position with the state education department in California, where she was the only minority project director in the country for the Bureau of Handicapped Children. Tan didn't like administrative work, and it bothered her that she was representing not only Asian-Americans but Hispanic-Americans, African-Americans, and Native Americans whose cultures and needs were very different from one another.

She resigned in 1981 and began working for the publisher of an educational newsletter for doctors called *Emergency Room Reports*. After being promoted to managing editor and then associate publisher, she left to start her own business as a freelance technical writer. Soon she was putting in 90-hour weeks turning out sales manuals and business proposals for such large corporations as Apple Computer, IBM, and AT&T. Her friends called her a workaholic, and Tan finally admitted to herself how unhappy she was. She consulted a therapist, but when he fell asleep three times during their sessions together, she realized that she would have to help herself. She started studying jazz piano and trying to write short stories.

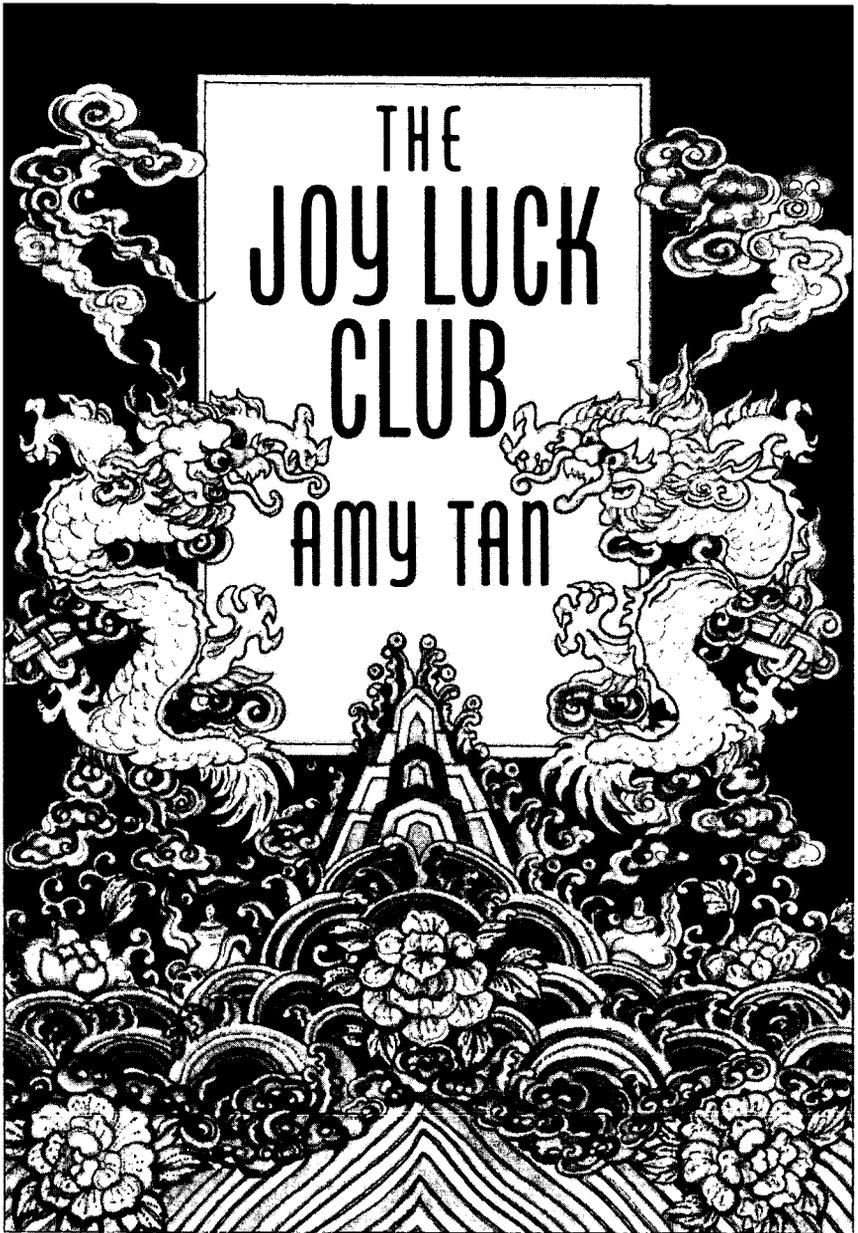
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*“I remember trying to belong and feeling isolated. I felt ashamed of being different and ashamed of feeling that way.”*

”

## BECOMING A WRITER

“I never dreamed of being a published author,” Tan says. “I was Chinese; I was a girl. It was as preposterous as a Chinese girl dreaming of becoming President of the United States.” With the idea of pursuing writing as a hobby, she cut back on her freelance work and started reading the works of the best women writers she could find, including Flannery O’Connor, Eudora Welty, Alice Munro, Louise Erdrich, and Amy Hempel.



Tan's first short story was about a young Chinese-American girl who is an expert chess player but who has a difficult relationship with her strong-willed and overbearing mother. Tan sent the story to the Squaw Valley fiction writers' workshop, and it was good enough to get her admitted there.

It was at Squaw Valley that she met the award-winning fiction writer Molly Giles, who said to her, "You don't have a story here; you have a dozen stories." Tan later revised the story, and it was published in a small literary magazine called *FM Five*.

After that, things started snowballing. An editor at *Seventeen* magazine saw the story and asked Tan if they could re-print it. After it appeared in the November 1986 issue under the title "Rules of the Game," a literary agent named Sandra Dijkstra contacted her to see what else she had written. After reading several of her short stories, Dijkstra asked Tan to put together a formal proposal for a book of linked short stories.

That same year, Tan's mother was hospitalized with what appeared to be a heart attack. Tan promised herself that when her mother recovered, she would take her to China to find the daughters she had left behind so many years before. Shortly after sending Dijkstra her book proposal, Amy and Daisy Tan left for China to meet two of these now-grown women (the third had already immigrated to the U.S. with her husband in 1982). "There was an instant bond," Tan recalls.

"The way they smiled, the way they held their hands, all those things connected me. I had family in China. I belonged."

The trip to China gave Tan a deeper understanding of the Chinese culture and helped her see her mother from an entirely different perspective. She also saw how difficult life in China had been for her sisters, which made her appreciate her own life in the U.S. She knew she wanted to write a book about her experience, but she still wasn't sure what form it would take.

## CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

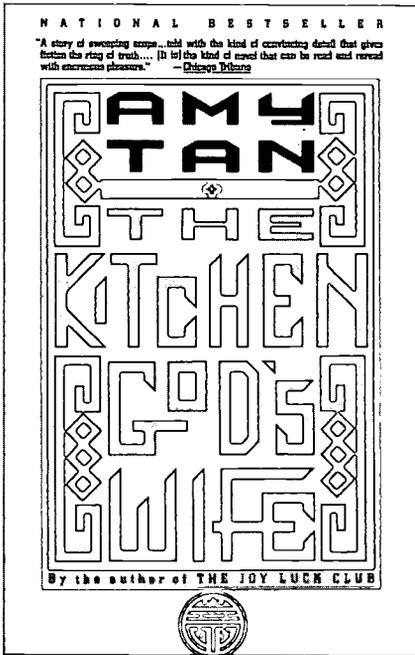
### *The Joy Luck Club*

Soon after returning from China, Tan received a call from her agent informing her that her book proposal had been accepted by a major publisher for a \$50,000 advance. "I was completely stunned," she says. "Then I became depressed. It was such a wonderful thing, yet it seemed my life was no longer under my control." The idea for the book had been sold, but she hadn't yet written it.

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*"I never dreamed of being a published author. I was Chinese; I was a girl. It was as preposterous as a Chinese girl dreaming of becoming President of the United States."*

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Tan shut down her freelance business immediately. It took her four months to write *The Joy Luck Club*, working nine hours a day, five days a week. Although her early drafts were filled with what she calls "clever phrases" and hard-to-pronounce words that most people would not understand, she finally decided to write the book with a specific audience in mind: her mother. She not only adopted her mother's manner of speaking, but she also managed to work in many of the stories her mother had told her over the years.

*The Joy Luck Club* takes its name from a group of four Chinese immigrant mothers in the San Francisco Bay area—or "aunties" as their American-born daughters call them.

They get together every week to play mah jong (a Chinese game similar to dominoes), eat Chinese delicacies, and share stories about their families. They fill a bowl with spare change at the start of the game, and since the hope of winning it is their only joy, they call their gatherings Joy Luck. When one of the mothers dies, the members of the club ask her daughter, June, to take her place at the mah jong table. They reveal that her mother was forced to leave two other daughters behind in China when she escaped from the Japanese, and since she died before getting a chance to see them again, the club members decide that June should make the trip on her behalf.

This journey becomes a unifying theme in the series of 16 short stories. All of them deal with some aspect of the love and conflict between the mothers and their daughters: the mothers want their daughters to embrace their Chinese heritage, and the daughters want to be like other American girls and are torn between respecting and resenting their old-fashioned mothers. Despite the fact that she used real events and stories her mother had told her as the basis for much of what happens in the book, Tan insists that *The Joy Luck Club* is not autobiographical. For one thing, Suyuan Woo, the mother who is forced to abandon her twin babies as she flees from the advancing Japanese troops, is not modeled on Daisy Tan, whose situation

was quite different. Tan also claims that her own mother was much funnier and more interesting than the aunts in the book.

When *The Joy Luck Club* was published in 1989, the critical and popular response was overwhelming. It sold over four million copies and was nominated for both the National Book Award and the National Book Critics' Circle Award. It remained on the *New York Times* Best Sellers list longer than any other book of fiction in 1989 and was adapted for the stage and performed at theaters in the U.S. as well as in China. Eventually *The Joy Luck Club* was translated into 17 languages, including Chinese. But fame did not come easily to Tan. The stress of her public appearances and worry about how her next book would be received kept her awake at night, and she started grinding her teeth while she slept. She and her husband had to move from their San Francisco duplex because it was becoming a tourist attraction for her fans. She even had to change her phone number.

### *The Kitchen God's Wife*

Tan started and then abandoned six different books before finally coming up with an idea for her second novel. Again the inspiration came from her mother, who was tired of explaining to people that she was not any of the mothers in *The Joy Luck Club*. "Next book, tell my true story," she said to her daughter. So Tan decided to write a novel based on her mother's life.

*The Kitchen God's Wife* came out of a series of videotaped conversations Tan had with her mother beginning in 1989, when Daisy Tan found out that her former husband in China had died. His death freed her to share more of the secrets she had kept to herself for so many years, and it gave Tan new insight into what life in the male-dominated Chinese culture was really like. "I could never understand why she lived with such a horrible man for 12 years of her life," Tan said. "If she hated him that much, why didn't she leave him?"

The new book told the story of Winnie, whose mother commits suicide and who is raised by unloving relatives in China in the early 20th century, before the Communist Revolution. She ends up in an arranged marriage

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*"I find that much of my imagination still resides in my childhood. In writing a children's book, I can deal with the wild side of my imagination. And I find that enormously satisfying."*

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to a brutal man and goes to prison for trying to leave him. She eventually escapes by marrying another man and immigrating to the U.S., where she keeps her past history a secret from her American-born daughter, Pearl. The story comes out many years later, when Pearl, now a grown woman, also has a secret that she is unable to share with her mother: She has multiple sclerosis, a disease of the central nervous system. It is Pearl's Aunt Helen who finally convinces the two women to confide in each other. As Winnie reveals her previous marriage, the deaths of her first three children, and her journey to America in 1949, Pearl is able to see her mother in a new light and to find the courage to reveal her own secret.

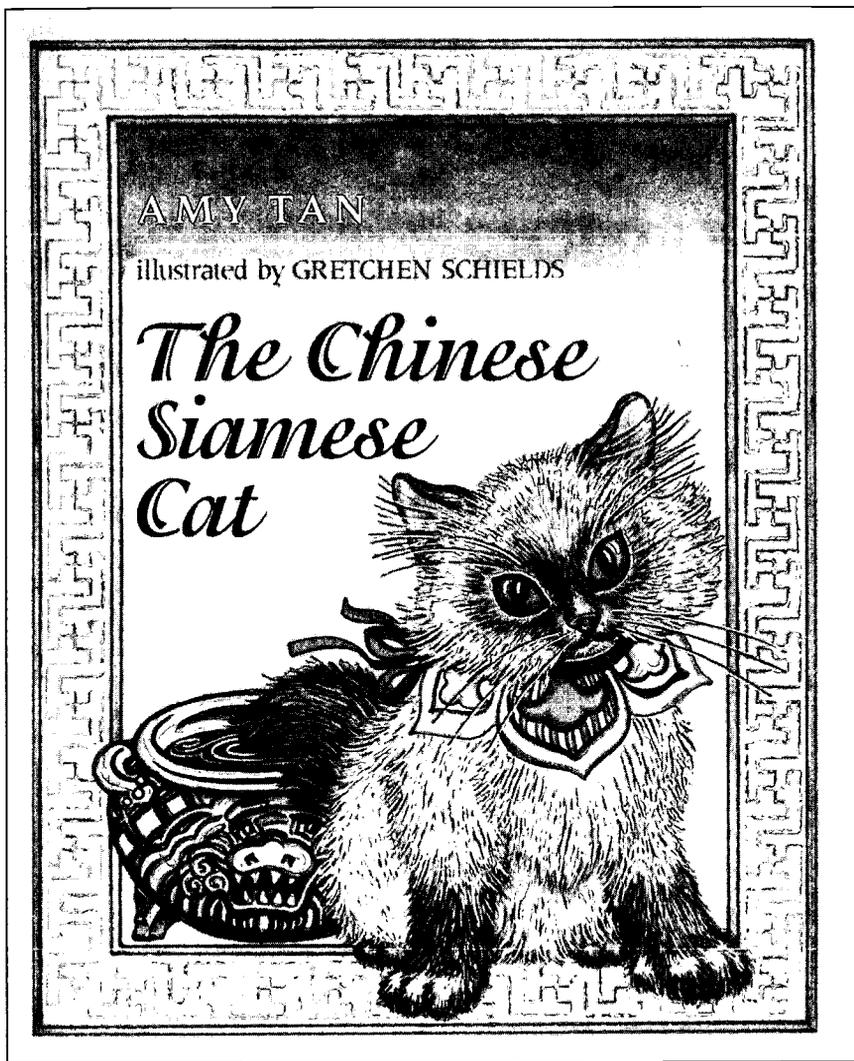
The book's title comes from an old Chinese folk tale about a man named Zhang who treats his wife badly and is transformed into the kitchen god—the god who decides every year who will be lucky and who will be unlucky. Referring to her disastrous first marriage in China, Winnie says to her daughter, "I was like the wife of that Kitchen God. Nobody worshiped her, either. He got all the excuses. He got all the credit. She was forgotten."

Despite Tan's worries about whether her new book would match the success of *The Joy Luck Club*, *The Kitchen God's Wife* was number one on the *New York Times* hardcover best seller list when it was published in 1991. But the book's success was also a personal matter, since Tan's goal in writing it had been to understand her own mother. While many of the events in the book came straight out of her mother's life, Tan left some things out that her mother said were "too painful to put in." "I had no idea what she had been through," Tan told one interviewer.

### **Making the Movie**

Tan's next challenge after writing *The Kitchen God's Wife* was to work on the screenplay for *The Joy Luck Club*, which was being made into a movie, to be directed by Wayne Wang. Tan felt comfortable about Wang not only because he was Chinese-American but also because he had directed other movies about the Chinese (*Dim Sum*, for example) that Tan felt were accurate and not condescending.

Tan co-wrote the screenplay with Ron Bass, who had won an Oscar for the screenplay for *Rain Man* and had also written *Sleeping with the Enemy*. Their biggest challenge was telling the stories of eight women without confusing the audience. Tan and Bass worked well together, completing the first draft between August and November 1991. Their partnership was so successful, in fact, that they immediately began planning how they would adapt *The Kitchen God's Wife* for the big screen. Although the 1993 movie version of *The Joy Luck Club* received mixed reviews, both critics and



fans agreed that it had tremendous genuine emotional appeal. Tan herself says that every time she sees it, she ends up crying.

### Children's Books

Amy Tan's first book for young children, *The Moon Lady*, was published in the spring of 1992. The story was adapted from one that had already appeared in *The Joy Luck Club*, where Ying-Ying St. Clair, one of the mothers, recalls her earliest memory. As a seven-year-old girl getting ready for the

celebration of the autumn moon festival with her family, she falls off the boat that her family has rented for the occasion. Fishermen pull her from the river and take her ashore, but she wonders whether she will ever see her family again. Since the autumn moon festival is the one day of the year in China when anyone can ask the Moon Lady to grant a secret wish, Ying-Ying wishes to be reunited with her parents.

A second children's picture book by Tan, *The Chinese Siamese Cat*, was published in 1994. She started writing it when her own cat, a Siamese named Sagwa, was very ill. Tan had a dream about Sagwa one night and wrote it down in the form of a children's story. In it, a mother cat tells her five kittens about their ancestors, who are not Siamese but Chinese. Both *The Moon Lady* and *The Chinese Siamese Cat* were illustrated by Tan's friend Gretchen Shields.

Tan says that as an adult, "I find that much of my imagination still resides in my childhood. In writing a children's book, I can deal with the wild side of my imagination. And I find that enormously satisfying."

### ***The Hundred Secret Senses***

Tan's next attempt at a novel, *The Year of No Flood*, was never published. It was about a young Chinese boy and a missionary from Ohio during the Chinese Boxer Rebellion in 1900. Tan was unable to finish it because she had talked about it too much in advance. "It was like opening Christmas presents early and then having to go back later and act surprised," she says. "You try to re-wrap it, but it's not the same." Another problem was that she took too much time away from her fiction writing to work on the screenplay for *The Joy Luck Club*.

*The Hundred Secret Senses*, which appeared in 1995, is about a Chinese-American named Olivia and her Chinese half-sister, Kwan, who is 12 years older. Olivia is six and Kwan is 18 when the latter arrives in the U.S. The novel follows them from youth to adulthood. Clumsy and barely able to speak English, Kwan is a source of embarrassment for Olivia. For one thing, Kwan claims she has "yin eyes" that enable her to make contact with the spirit world. She tells Olivia that the two of them lived another life together in an earlier century, and eventually the two half-sisters end up traveling to China to visit the remote mountain village where Kwan once lived. The book also explores Olivia's difficult marriage to a man named Simon, who goes to China with them. Kwan knows that their spirits belong together and works constantly to help them realize it.

During the writing of *The Hundred Secret Senses*, Tan had many strange experiences, making her believe that she had “yin people” or ghosts helping her put the book together. For example, while writing one scene, she had repeated visual images of huge rocks piled one on top of another. She tried to write about the stone piles, but couldn’t come up with a good way to bring the scene to a close. To clear her head, she and a friend took a walk on the beach, where she saw an elderly Chinese man balancing stones in a way that defied gravity. When she returned to her desk, she discovered that she was suddenly able to write her way out of the troublesome scene.

Many critics found her third published novel disappointing and its story melodramatic and unconvincing. But Tan’s fans might disagree: it was popular with readers and spent three months on *The New York Times* best seller list.

### *The Bonesetter’s Daughter*

Tan has just recently published a new novel, *The Bonesetter’s Daughter* (2001), that stemmed from a very difficult time in her life. In 1995, her mother was diagnosed with Alzheimer’s disease. Then a very dear friend was diagnosed with mesothelioma, a fatal form of cancer. For several years Tan was taking care of her mother in San Francisco and flying as often as possible to New York to spend

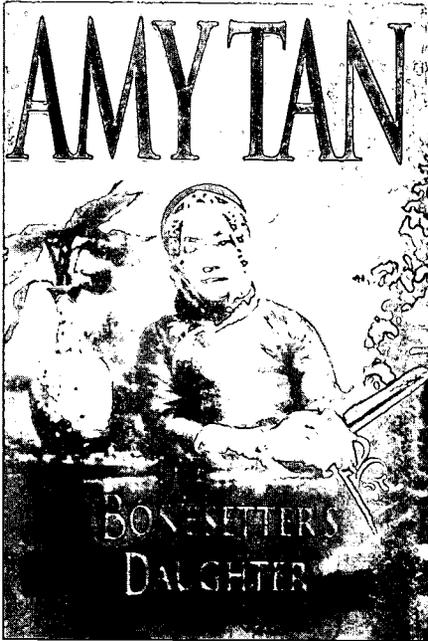
time with her friend. Both women died within a span of two weeks in 1999. At that point Tan had just been finishing her next novel. Rather than being overwhelmed by grief, she decided to rewrite the novel from scratch.

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*“The same fascination with mother-daughter relationships that made Tan’s debut novel, The Joy Luck Club, so captivating drives her newest [The Bonesetter’s Daughter], an even more polished and provocative work.*

*Compulsively readable and beautifully structured around three richly metaphorical themes — bones, ghosts, and ink — this novel tells the stories of three generations of women, beginning at the turn of the 20th century in a small Chinese village. . . . Tan tells the spellbinding stories of these three strong, self-sacrificing women in this lucent novel of deep feelings and gentle humor.” — Donna Seaman, Booklist*

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"It was as though the whole essence of the book changed when they died," she says. "And I needed closure, which is why I threw myself back into writing."

*The Bonesetter's Daughter*, like *The Joy Luck Club*, ranges between present and past, the U.S. and China. The subject once again is the powerful bond between mothers and daughters, but this time Tan focuses not on a group of characters, as in *The Joy Luck Club*, but instead on the story of three related women. In this compelling tale, Tan focuses on issues of family estrangement, history, remembrance, and reconciliation.

The novel begins with the story of Ruth Young, a modern Chinese-American woman in San Francisco who works as a ghostwriter of self-help books. She finds two packets of papers written in Chinese calligraphy. One packet is titled "Things I Know Are True" and the other, "Things I Must Not Forget." The author is her mother, LuLing, who has been diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. In these documents the elderly woman has set down a record of her family history, determined to keep the facts from vanishing as her mind deteriorates. For the two women, Alzheimer's acts like a "truth serum" that erases a lifetime of lies. "For obvious reasons," Tan says, "I became fascinated with memory in the last few years, so I wanted to write about memory, layers of it."

The book is framed at either end with chapters devoted to Ruth. But the central portion of *The Bonesetter's Daughter* takes place in China in the remote, mountainous region where superstition and tradition rule. LuLing's mother was from the village of Xian Xin, where the Peking Man was discovered and excavated. There she was cared for by the woman she calls Precious Auntie, who becomes a central figure in the novel.

"The same fascination with mother-daughter relationships that made Tan's debut novel, *The Joy Luck Club*, so captivating drives her newest [*The Bonesetter's Daughter*], an even more polished and provocative work," Donna Seaman wrote in *Booklist*. "Compulsively readable and beautifully

structured around three richly metaphorical themes—bones, ghosts, and ink—this novel tells the stories of three generations of women, beginning at the turn of the 20th century in a small Chinese village. . . . As Tan tells the spellbinding stories of these three strong, self-sacrificing women in this lucent novel of deep feelings and gentle humor, she weaves in stripes of vivid Chinese history, including the discovery of Peking Man, ponders what's bred in the bone, and celebrates the preservation of family history as an act of love and a conduit for forgiveness."

### **An American Writer**

Amy Tan's books are now assigned reading in many high school and college literature courses, and she has been credited with opening the door to other Chinese-American authors, including Gish Jen, Gus Lee, and David Wong Louie. But she prefers not to be called an "Asian-American writer" because she thinks of herself as an American writer. The wide popularity of Tan's novels is proof that people of different backgrounds and generations can respond to certain universal emotions and experiences.

### **Coping with Depression**

In 2001, Tan revealed that she has long suffered from depression. She remembers her mother also suffering from depression when Tan herself was a child. "In many ways, I consider depression my legacy," she wrote in *People* magazine. "There's a photograph of my grandmother in China in 1921. She's with three other women in her family. Every woman in the picture committed suicide." Indeed, many scientists today would agree with her description of depression as a legacy. In recent studies, evidence has mounted that depression is often an inherited condition with a physical cause that manifests itself in emotional symptoms.

In interviews and in her essay for *People*, Tan has started to talk about her mother's ordeal with depression, and she also shared some of her own experiences of depression, her thoughts about suicide, her attempts to get counseling, and her coping strategies. She points to the gala premier of the movie *The Joy Luck Club* as the moment when she accepted that something was wrong. "My mother was there; she was proud. Everything should have been the formula for somebody being extremely happy. But I cried all day. I felt suicidal. I wanted to jump off the roof. And I said, "This is not normal. Logically, this does not make sense. Why would I feel this way?" She has since seen a doctor who has helped her deal with this disease. Tan's willingness to confide such intimate details demonstrates phenomenal personal strength and courage and serves as an inspiration for all those who



*Tan and author Stephen King perform as part of the Rock Bottom Remainers rock group in Bangor, Maine, 1998.*

are struggling with depression. Now, she says, "I know I will always have some degree of depression. I still have to wrestle with it, but I see where it fits in with my mother's life, my grandmother's life, my own life. For a long time, I think I didn't know how to be happy, and I didn't trust happiness—I felt that if I had it, I would lose it. But today, I am basically a happy person."

## **MARRIAGE AND FAMILY**

Tan has been married to Lou DeMattei, whom she met when they were students together at Linfield College, since 1974. Even though Lou is Italian-American, Tan's mother accepted their marriage because she realized how few opportunities her daughter had to meet Chinese men. A successful tax attorney, Lou has taken his wife's fame in stride. When he travels with her on book tours, he often introduces himself as "Mr. Amy Tan." They have lived in the Presidio Heights area of San Francisco for many years.

Because she had already experienced the pain of losing her brother and would worry constantly if she had children of her own, Tan and her husband decided not to have a family. But she has a Yorkshire terrier and a close relationship with her brother John's two daughters.

Daisy Tan was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease and died in November 1999 at the age of 83. "People think it's a terrible tragedy when somebody has Alzheimer's," Tan says. But in her mother's case, she feels it was actually a blessing because for the first time in her life, Daisy Tan could not remember her own tragic experiences.

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### FAVORITE BOOKS

Tan prefers to read the works of women authors, who she believes are more able to convey a "sense of intimacy" in their writing. Louise Erdrich, a Native American author, has been a major influence on Tan since she read *Love Medicine* in 1985. Much like *The Joy Luck Club*, it consists of a group of interrelated short stories told by different generations of a Native American family. Tan remembers being amazed by Erdrich's distinct and original voice. "It was different and yet it seemed I could identify with the powerful images, the beautiful language, and such moving stories."

*"I know I will always have some degree of depression. I still have to wrestle with it, but I see where it fits in with my mother's life, my grandmother's life, my own life. For a long time, I think I didn't know how to be happy, and I didn't trust happiness — I felt that if I had it, I would lose it. But today, I am basically a happy person."*

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### HOBBIES AND OTHER INTERESTS

When she's not writing, Tan's favorite pastime is shooting pool. She points out, however, that both activities involve focusing your attention. "If you're thinking about what somebody expects, or what someone's thinking as they're watching you, or what you're going to look like, you're in trouble." Tan's specialty is nine ball, a game that sharpens both her mental and her motor skills.

Since 1992, Tan has also been part of the Rock Bottom Remainers, a band whose members include newspaper columnist Dave Barry, novelists Stephen King and Scott Turow, and other well-known writers. The band travels in a tour bus and performs at publishing conventions to raise

money for such causes as literacy, First Amendment rights, and aid to the homeless. Although none of its members are professional musicians, their performances are meant to be fun and to serve a good cause. Tan is the group's lead vocalist when they perform such rock 'n roll classics as "Leader of the Pack" and "These Boots are Made for Walkin."

When she is at home in San Francisco, Tan likes to get together with a group of friends who have formed their own version of the Joy Luck Club. It's called Fool and His Money, and they meet regularly to exchange stories and investment tips:

## WRITINGS

### Fiction

*The Joy Luck Club*, 1989  
*The Kitchen God's Wife*, 1991  
*The Hundred Secret Senses*, 1996  
*The Bonesetter's Daughter*, 2001

### For Children

*The Moon Lady*, 1992  
*The Chinese Siamese Cat*, 1994

### Screenplays

*The Joy Luck Club*, 1993 (with Ron Bass)

## HONORS AND AWARDS

Best Book for Young Adults (American Library Association): 1989, for *The Joy Luck Club*  
Gold Medal for Fiction (Commonwealth Club, San Francisco): 1990, for *The Joy Luck Club*  
Editor's Choice (*Booklist*): 1991, for *The Kitchen God's Wife*

## FURTHER READING

### Books

*Concise Dictionary of American Literary Biography Supplement: Modern Writers, 1900-1998*, 1998  
*Encyclopedia of World Biography*, 1998

Huntley, E. D. *Amy Tan: A Critical Companion*, 1998  
Kramer, Barbara. *Amy Tan: Author of "The Joy Luck Club,"* 1996  
*Something About the Author*, Vol. 75, 1994  
*St. James Guide to Young Adult Writers*, 1999  
*Who's Who in America*, 2001

### Periodicals

*Book*, Jan. 2001, p.40  
*Christian Science Monitor*, Feb. 15, 2001, p.20  
*Current Biography*, 1992  
*Daily News of Los Angeles*, June 6, 1992, p.L5  
*New York Times*, Dec.28, 1995, p.C1  
*New York Times Book Review*, Feb. 18, 2001, p.9  
*Newsday*, July 15, 1991, p.42  
*People*, Apr. 10, 1989, p.149; May 7, 2001, p.85  
*Philadelphia Inquirer*, Aug. 16, 1992, p.9; Sep. 15, 1994, p.F1  
*Time*, Feb. 19, 2001, p.72  
*USA Today*, Feb. 19, 2001, p.D1

### ADDRESS

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New York, NY 10014

### WORLD WIDE WEB SITES

<http://voices.cla.umn.edu/authors/AmyTam.html>  
<http://www.penguinputnam.com/static/packages/us/amytan/author.html>



## **Joss Whedon 1965-**

American Movie and Television Writer, Director, and Producer

Creator of the Hit Television Series "Buffy the Vampire Slayer" and "Angel"

### **BIRTH**

Joss Whedon was born in 1965. When he was born, his given name was John. But he changed his name to "Joss" when he was in college. The name "Joss" comes from a Chinese word that means "Luck." His father is Tom Whedon, who was a writer for television. His father wrote for such shows as "The Golden Girls," "Benson," and "Alice." Joss's grandfather, John

Ogden Whedon, was also a television writer. He wrote for "The Andy Griffith Show," "Leave It to Beaver," and "The Dick Van Dyke Show." Unfortunately, additional information on Whedon's early life is unavailable.

## YOUTH

Whedon spent much of his childhood in Manhattan, in New York City. He liked to read comic books as a kid, especially horror stories and those with superhero characters. He would read comics instead of playing outside with the other kids. As Whedon once said, "While they were outside playing, I was indoors, fascinated by a large stack of comic books."

When he was a kid, he liked to watch the English comedy show called "Monty Python's Flying Circus." He thought the English would be fun people like the actors in the television show. However, when he actually lived in England for a year he found the people to be very different from TV. "I spent my childhood watching Monty Python and wanting to be British. Then when I got there and realized what the British really think of Americans, it made me very sad."

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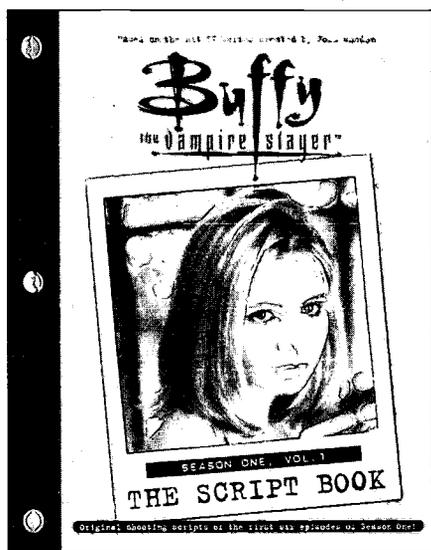
*When Whedon was a kid, he would read comics instead of playing outside with the other kids. As he once said, "While they were outside playing, I was indoors, fascinated by a large stack of comic books."*

## EDUCATION

While in high school, Whedon attended Riverdale School, an expensive private school in New York. For his senior year, though, he went to England and attended Winchester Public School. High school was a very awkward time for him. "For me," he said, "high school was a horror movie. Girls wouldn't so much as poke me with a stick." Whedon attended college at Wesleyan University in Connecticut, where he graduated in 1987 with a degree in film.

## BECOMING A WRITER

"I always loved movies," Whedon has said, "always wanted to make movies. When I got to college, I ended up studying movies — to no one's great surprise — majoring in film and not really having a clue about how it was I was going to enter the world of film, because I didn't really think about being a writer until necessity forced me to. And once I started writ-



ing, I started writing . . . TV scripts and realized that . . . writing was my favorite thing in the world."

## FIRST JOBS

When Whedon finished college in 1987, he was broke. He needed to find a job quickly, and he wanted to work in television. He moved to Los Angeles to be closer to the studios. He wrote down a lot of ideas for television shows and submitted them to the networks, but they were all rejected. Finally, in 1989 he got a job as a staff writer for the television

comedy series "Roseanne," a popular show about a lower-middle class married couple and their three children. The star of the show, Roseanne Barr (who now just calls herself Roseanne), wanted to do shows that addressed serious issues. Whedon wrote a script in which her sister got an abortion without telling anyone. He was excited to write a script on such a serious and controversial topic, but his excitement soon turned to disappointment. "And then," he recalled, "the executive producer says, 'Oh, Joss, by the way, that abortion, make it a miscarriage.' By the time the show got out of my hands and rewritten, she hadn't even had a miscarriage."

After working on the "Roseanne" show for a year, Whedon was frustrated and ready to quit. It was not only the producers but also the star of the show that made the job difficult. "[Roseanne] was like two people," he said. "One was perfectly intelligent and good to be around. One was very cranky. You never knew which would show up." So, when he sold his movie script idea for *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, he left the show.

## CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

### Creating the Movie *Buffy*

The idea for *Buffy* came from all the horror movies Whedon had seen. In these movies, the pretty girl almost always gets killed by the monster. He wanted to turn this around. "I thought, I'd love to see a movie where [the girl] kills the monster." This was how *Buffy* was born. The movie *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* came out in 1992 and starred Kristy Swanson in the title

role. It's about a high school student who meets a mysterious man named Merrick (played by Donald Sutherland). Merrick tells Buffy that she has been chosen to be "the Slayer," the one person born each generation who possesses the ability to kill vampires. Buffy must face Lothos, a powerful vampire played by Rutger Hauer, and defeat him in a battle to the death.

The final movie, however, was very different from Whedon's original concept. He wanted something that was both fun and serious. He wanted Buffy to be a realistic high school student with the same concerns as other girls her age. Instead, the final version of the movie was very campy and silly. The movie Buffy spoke like a Valley Girl and was more concerned about her hair and clothes than about anything serious. Unfortunately, Whedon didn't have enough control over the script to prevent these changes. Although *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* received poor reviews from critics, it was popular with many teenagers and sold well as a video.

### Writing Other Movies Scripts

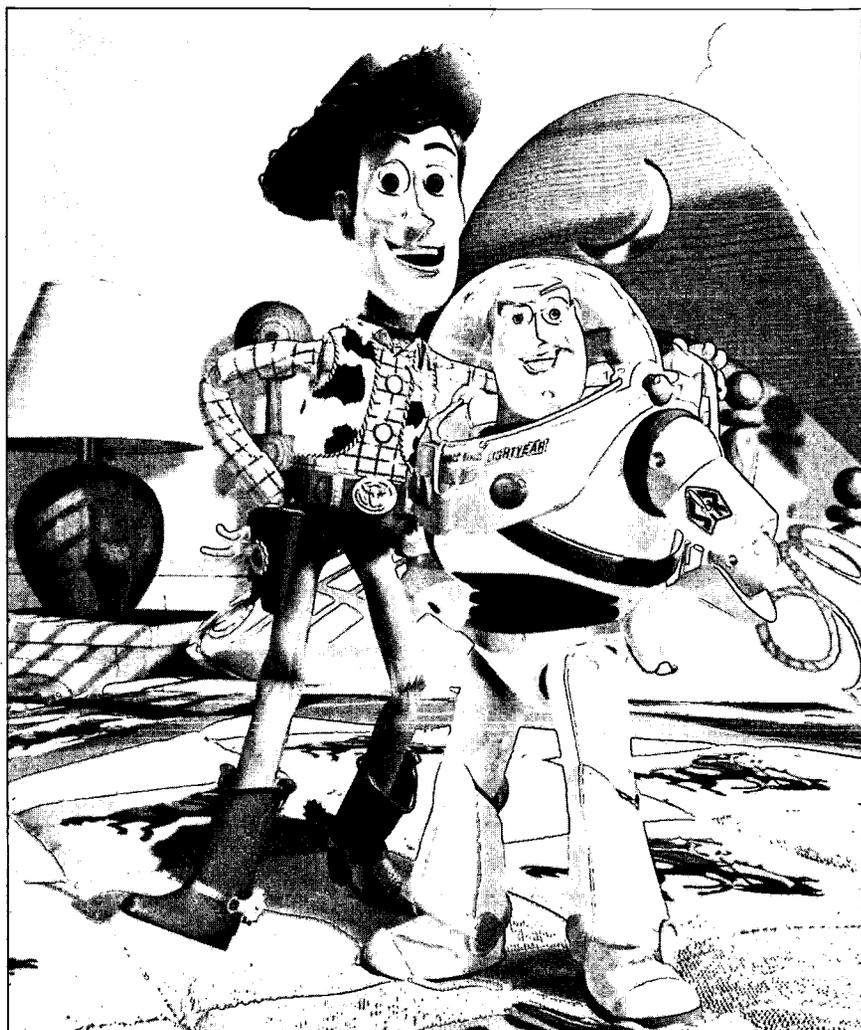
Disappointed by his first film, Whedon nevertheless went on to work on other movies. He quickly developed a reputation as a script doctor for such movies as *Speed*, *Waterworld*, and *Twister*. A script doctor is a professional writer who

is called on by film producers to help fix problems with a movie script. A lot of Whedon's work can be seen in these films, even though he didn't get any screen credit for them. For *Speed*, for example, Whedon felt that the premise of the film was strong, but it needed "a gussying up of the plot and a total overhaul of characters and motivation." He added new characters on the bus that is about to explode if it runs under 50 miles an hour, and he added subtleties to the characters of the villains and top cop Jack Traven, played by Keanu Reeves. He also rewrote a lot of the dialogue. For *Twister*, a movie about scientists who study tornados, he worked on rewrites right up until his wedding day. "I turned in my last pages on June 24th, I believe. That's the date I got married. I had to say, 'I hope you like this, because I am leaving the country now for a honeymoon.'"

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From *Toy Story*, 1995.

In addition to this uncredited work, Whedon was also working on other projects during the mid-1990s. He sold a script for a movie entitled *Suspension*, which is about terrorists taking over the George Washington Bridge in New York. The movie has not yet been produced. A movie that did get produced and won him considerable recognition is *Toy Story*, the computer-animated adventure about toys who come to life. Along with several other co-writers on the film, Whedon received an Academy Award nomination for best screenplay for the film. More recently, he has worked as a

co-writer on several science fiction films, including the fourth film in the *Alien* series called *Alien Resurrection* and the animated feature *Titan A.E.*

### Creating the TV Series “Buffy”

Although he has been well paid for his work on movies, Whedon said, “I have always looked at my movie career as an abysmal failure.” So when television producer Gail Berman asked if he wanted to turn *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* into a television series, Whedon agreed. He wrote down his ideas and then approached the Fox network. Fox turned him down, and so did NBC. But the new Warner Brothers network (the WB) liked the proposal and agreed to do the series. This time, things were different. The new network gave him creative control over the series. As executive producer, writer, and sometimes even director, he was allowed to tell the stories he wanted to tell and make the characters more interesting.

The series premiered on the WB network in March 1997, starring the then-unknown actress Sarah Michelle Gellar as Buffy [for further information on Gellar, see *Biography Today*, 1999]. In addition, the series also featured Anthony Stewart Head as the librarian named Giles who is Buffy’s guide in the vampire world, Alyson Hannigan

as Willow, Nicholas Brendon as Xander, and David Boreanaz as Angel. “Buffy the Vampire Slayer” was not an immediate hit when it first debuted in 1997. But it soon built up a loyal and devoted following among teen viewers as well as TV critics. And its devoted fans have also enjoyed the Buffy stories that have been created in novel and comic book form.

“Buffy the Vampire Slayer” follows the adventures of Buffy Summers, who is alternately emotionally vulnerable and physically powerful as she tries to combine her normal daytime life with her role as a slayer, a martial-arts expert who spends each night fighting evil. Unlike the movie, the TV version of Buffy isn’t part of the “in crowd.” She sees the shallow, popular kids

——— “ ———

*“What I wanted was to create a fantasy that was, emotionally, completely realistic. That’s what really interests me about anything. I love genre, I love horror, I love . . . action, I love musicals. I love any kind of genre, and ‘Buffy’ sort of embraces them all. But, ultimately, the thing that interests me the most is people and what they’re going through.”*

——— ” ———

for what they are—a bunch of phonies. Instead, she hangs out with computer geek Willow and Xander, the sometimes funny, sometimes angry guy who doesn't seem to fit into any crowd. She also becomes involved with Angel, a vampire who is tortured by the horrible deeds he has done and wants to change his ways.

### **“Buffy” as Metaphor**

“Buffy the Vampire Slayer” has plenty of fiendish vampires, werewolves, demons, and other monsters in it, but it is about more than that, too. “What I wanted was to create a fantasy that was, emotionally, completely realistic,” Whedon commented. “That’s what really interests me about anything. I love

———— “ ————

*“The show makes a myth out of people’s teen years, which is a very potent time,” he once explained. “This is everything you wished your high school had been like, and it’s everything you went through, made to seem epic.”*

———— ” ————

genre, I love horror, I love . . . action, I love musicals. I love any kind of genre, and ‘Buffy’ sort of embraces them all. But, ultimately, the thing that interests me the most is people and what they’re going through.” For Whedon, horror stories are a metaphor of teen life. In his twisted world, the school hallway bullies really are monsters, and the adults are often demons, too. When the series debuted, Whedon said that the episodes “reflect a grotesque parody of high school experiences,” using metaphors of the supernatural to depict all the pain and turmoil that are so common during these

years. In effect, the scenes in “Buffy” can be seen as metaphors for the overwhelming experiences and feelings that teens face daily. “The show makes a myth out of people’s teen years, which is a very potent time,” he once explained. “This is everything you wished your high school had been like, and it’s everything you went through, made to seem epic.”

Despite the unlikely premise of the show and the sometimes low-budget special effects, “Buffy the Vampire Slayer” has been widely praised by critics. They recognize that Whedon respects the characters he has created as real human beings who suffer and grow as people. In the course of the series, disturbing things happen to good people. For example, Willow turns into a witch, Buffy’s mother kicks her out of the house when she discovers her daughter’s secret activities, and Angel and Buffy go through a traumatic break up. The characters age, too. Unlike some characters on teen shows,



*The cast of "Buffy the Vampire Slayer."*

Buffy and her friends don't stay in high school forever. They eventually graduate and go on to college or to find jobs. Whedon also enjoys introducing likeable characters only to kill them off later. In this way, he hopes to get his audience attached to the characters to show them how tragic death really is.

Violence is a part of the reality Whedon portrays in his show. But this caused him some trouble with the 1999 season finale. In this show in which Buffy and her classmates are graduating from high school, there was a violent confrontation with the town's mayor. But in April 1999, just a

month before the "Buffy" finale was going to air, the tragedy at Columbine High School occurred, in which two students killed their classmates and then themselves. Out of respect for the murdered students' families, the WB delayed showing the season's conclusion until July. Although Whedon didn't fight the decision, he didn't believe the violence in the show should have kept it off the air. In fact, he has said that the violence seen on news programs is far worse. "They don't even warn you before they show dead bodies," he complained. "They'll show you a line of dead bodies in Yugoslavia or someone getting shot in a convenience store, and that affects kids. That's certainly worse than any 10 o'clock drama."

“

*“[Angel’s] definitely going to lighten up. He’s going to be saving people and discover a good life and be happy to be alive. He’s not going to be sit-and-brood guy 24-7. Who would want to watch that?”*

”

### Creating the TV Series "Angel"

After the 1999 season finale, Buffy graduated and went on to college. Her former vampire boyfriend, Angel, moved away to Los Angeles to become the hero of Whedon's first spinoff series, "Angel." The series combines supernatural adventure with dark humor as it chronicles his path to redemption. Angel is a vampire with a soul, which was restored by a Gypsy curse, to haunt him with all his past misdeeds. There is a prophecy that if he fulfills his destiny, he will become human again. But to do so, he has

to survive the coming apocalypse. But Whedon has talked about changing his brooding character. "[Angel's] definitely going to lighten up," he said. "He's going to be saving people and discover a good life and be happy to be alive. He's not going to be sit-and-brood guy 24-7. Who would want to watch that?"

Handling two ongoing series has been tough for Whedon, but he has managed to stay involved in both. He has no intention of leaving "Buffy" any time soon. "I had not intended to stay with Buffy as long as I did," he once stated. "I fell in love with it. I never worked with better actors, never had more of my vision realized." In addition to handling these shows, Whedon runs Mutant Enemy, Inc., a film production company he started in 1997.

Whedon's two vampire series have become bona-fide hits over the last few years. They've been acclaimed by viewers for their "smart-mouthed writing and dark, anything-goes story lines," according to reporter Jancee



*From Titan A.E., 2000.*

Dunn in *Rolling Stone* magazine. The shows have built up a huge following of fans, who tune in each week for the ironic humor, smart writing, appealing lead characters, emotional honesty, and mythological handling of the coming-of-age parable. "Buffy," in particular, became the most-watched show on the WB network, watched by 4.4 million viewers each week. But in spring 2001, when the contract was up for renewal, there was a bidding war among several stations for the show. Ultimately the UPN network offered the best deal—they're paying \$2.3 million per episode for 44 episodes over two years—so "Buffy the Vampire Slayer" is moving to UPN in fall 2001. Currently, there is conjecture in the TV industry that "Angel" may follow "Buffy" to UPN.

In the future, Whedon plans to continue his television work, but he also would like to produce a movie musical. "I love dancing. I don't think it's that far a cry from a great dance sequence to a great action sequence. I think they're the same thing. I think Fred Astaire has been replaced by the man flying through the plate-glass window. They both give you the same kind of rush."

### **Creating the Comic Book *Fray***

Recently, Whedon has ventured off in a new direction. He already had a relationship with a comic book publisher, Dark Horse, which publishes the

Buffy comic books. In 2001, he worked with them to create the comic strip *Fray*. Whedon writes the story, while the art work is completed by Karl Moline and Andy Owens. *Fray* is an eight-issue miniseries filled with supernatural suspense, in which Whedon again uses horror as a storytelling

——— “ ———

*According to Whedon, his new comic book, Fray, "is more of an adventure story than a horror story, I think, in the way that it is told and the way it pencils in a few horror elements along with the excitement and the action and the genuine creepy stuff that I so love. And because I don't want to give away all the best parts of the story . . . I will just say that [Maleka's] personal demons are all a result of a greater purpose she will eventually be called to serve. She's just had no idea throughout her whole life that anything like what she is going to experience could exist."*

——— ” ———

"And because I don't want to give away all the best parts of the story . . . I will just say that [Maleka's] personal demons are all a result of a greater purpose she will eventually be called to serve. She's just had no idea throughout her whole life that anything like what she is going to experience could exist."

vehicle. It depicts a future world that is a living hell, filled with radiation, human mutation, disease, demons, vampires, and other supernatural threats. One young girl named Melaka Fray rises up to fight the powers of darkness and become society's only savior.

*Fray* is the logical outcome of Whedon's lifetime interest in comic books, coupled with his fascination with horror and the supernatural. "I wasn't comfortable with launching some completely new thing and starting something that I wasn't sure where it would go," he explains. "So when I was talking to [Scott Allie, the editor of *Fray*], I explained that I wanted to do something on the mythology of the Slayer. That way I would have some grounding for the story, and I wouldn't be driven insane by looking at a page and drawing a complete blank."

"*Fray* is more of an adventure story than a horror story, I think, in the way that it is told and the way it pencils in a few horror elements along with the excitement and the action and the genuine creepy stuff that I so love," says Whedon.

## MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

Whedon married Kai Cole on June 24, 1995. His wife is a textile and interior designer. They live in the Los Angeles area.

## CREDITS

### Television Series Creator, Executive Producer, and Writer

"Buffy the Vampire Slayer," 1997-  
"Angel," 1999 -

### Television Series Producer and Writer

"Parenthood," 1990

### Television Series Writer

"Roseanne," 1989-90

### Film Writer

*Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, 1992  
*Toy Story*, 1995  
*Alien: Resurrection*, 1997  
*Titan A.E.*, 2000

### Comic Book Creator

*Fray*, 2001

## HONORS AND AWARDS

Annie Awards (International Animated Film Society: ASIFA-Hollywood):  
1996, for *Toy Story*, for best individual achievement — writing (with  
Andrew Stanton, Joel Cohen, and Alec Sokolow)

## FURTHER READING

### Periodicals

*Entertainment Weekly*, Aug. 11, 1995, p.8; Apr. 25, 1997, p.23; Oct. 1, 1999,  
p.44  
*Los Angeles Times*, Mar. 9, 1997, p.5  
*Ms.*, Aug./Sep. 1999, p.79

*New York Times*, Apr. 27, 1997, section 12, p.3; Oct. 1, 2000, p.AR42

*People*, Aug. 17, 1992, p.13

*TV Guide*, July 10, 1999, p.12

*USA Today*, July 20, 1999, p.D4

*Variety*, June 27, 1994, p.11

*Washington Post*, July 31, 1992, p.N36; Oct. 5, 1999, p.C1

## ADDRESS

20th Television

P.O. Box 900

Beverly Hills, CA 90213

## WORLD WIDE WEB SITES

<http://www.buffyslayer.com>

(This site is operated by the WB network and will probably cease to exist when the show leaves the WB.)

<http://www.upn.com>

(This site is operated by the UPN network; check it after "Buffy" moves to UPN in the fall of 2001.)

[http://www.darkhorse.com/news/features/pg\\_fevview/sku\\_00018/item\\_00018a/index.html](http://www.darkhorse.com/news/features/pg_fevview/sku_00018/item_00018a/index.html)

(This site features Whedon's comic book *Fray*.)

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Our indexes have a new look. In an effort to make our indexes easier to use, we've combined the Name and General Index into a new, cumulative General Index. This single ready-reference resource covers all the volumes in *Biography Today*, both the general series and the special subject series. The new General Index contains complete listings of all individuals who have appeared in *Biography Today* since the series began. Their names appear in bold-faced type, followed by the issue in which they appear. The General Index also includes references for the occupations, nationalities, and ethnic and minority origins of individuals profiled in *Biography Today*.

We have also made some changes to our specialty indexes, the Places of Birth Index and the Birthday Index. To consolidate and to save space, the Places of Birth Index and the Birthday Index will no longer appear in the January and April issues of the softbound subscription series. But these indexes can still be found in the September issue of the softbound subscription series, in the hardbound Annual Cumulation at the end of each year, and in each volume of the special subject series.

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The General Series of *Biography Today* is denoted in the index with the month and year of the issue in which the individual appeared. Each individual also appears in the Annual Cumulation for that year.

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## Special Subject Series

The Special Subject Series of *Biography Today* are each denoted in the index with an abbreviated form of the series name, plus the number of the volume in which the individual appears. They are listed as follows.

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## Updates

Updated information on selected individuals appears in the Appendix at the end of the *Biography Today* Annual Cumulation. In the index, the original entry is listed first, followed by any updates.

<b>Arafat, Yasir</b> ..	Sep 94; Update 94; Update 95; Update 96; Update 97; Update 98; Update 00
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2	Asimov, Isaac	1920		Gilbert, Sara	1975
4	Naylor, Phyllis Reynolds	1933		Hasek, Dominik	1965
	Shula, Don	1930		Peet, Bill	1915
7	Hurston, Zora Neale	?1891		Winfrey, Oprah	1954
	Rodriguez, Eloy	1947	30	Alexander, Lloyd	1924
8	Hawking, Stephen W.	1942		Engelbart, Douglas	1925
9	McLean, A.J.	1978	31	Flannery, Sarah	1982
	Menchu, Rigoberta	1959		Robinson, Jackie	1919
	Nixon, Richard	1913		Ryan, Nolan	1947
11	Leopold, Aldo	1887		Timberlake, Justin	1981
12	Amanpour, Christiane	1958			
	Bezos, Jeff	1964	<b>February</b>		<b>Year</b>
	Lasseter, John	?1957	1	Hughes, Langston	1902
	Limbaugh, Rush	1951		Spinelli, Jerry	1941
14	Lucid, Shannon	1943		Yeltsin, Boris	1931
15	Werbach, Adam	1973	3	Nixon, Joan Lowery	1927
16	Fossey, Dian	1932		Rockwell, Norman	1894
17	Carrey, Jim	1962	4	Parks, Rosa	1913
	Cormier, Robert	1925	5	Aaron, Hank	1934
	Jones, James Earl	1931	6	Leakey, Mary	1913
	Lewis, Shari	?1934		Rosa, Emily	1987
18	Ali, Muhammad	1942		Zmeskal, Kim	1976
	Messier, Mark	1961	7	Brooks, Garth	1962
19	Askins, Renee	1959		Wang, An	1920
	Johnson, John	1918		Wilder, Laura Ingalls	1867
21	Domingo, Placido	1941	8	Grisham, John	1955
	Nicklaus, Jack	1940	9	Love, Susan	1948
	Olajuwon, Hakeem	1963	10	Konigsburg, E.L.	1930
22	Chavis, Benjamin	1948		Norman, Greg	1955
	Ward, Lloyd D.	1949	11	Aniston, Jennifer	1969
23	Thiessen, Tiffani-Amber	1974		Brandy	1979
24	Haddock, Doris (Granny D)	1910		Rowland, Kelly	1981
25	Alley, Kirstie	1955		Yolen, Jane	1939
26	Carter, Vince	1977	12	Blume, Judy	1938
	Morita, Akio	1921		Kurzweil, Raymond	1948
	Siskel, Gene	1946		Woodson, Jacqueline	?1964
27	Lester, Julius	1939	13	Moss, Randy	1977
28	Carter, Nick	1980	15	Groening, Matt	1954
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	Jordan, Michael	1963	14	Dayne, Ron	1977
18	Morrison, Toni	1931		Hanson, Taylor	1983
19	Tan, Amy	1952		Williamson, Kevin	1965
20	Adams, Ansel	1902	15	Ginsburg, Ruth Bader	1933
	Barkley, Charles	1963	16	O'Neal, Shaquille	1972
	Cobain, Kurt	1967	17	Hamm, Mia	1972
	Crawford, Cindy	1966		Nureyev, Rudolf	1938
	Hernandez, Livan	1975	18	Blair, Bonnie	1964
	Littrell, Brian	1975		de Klerk, F.W.	1936
21	Carpenter, Mary Chapin	1958		Queen Latifah	1970
	Hewitt, Jennifer Love	1979	19	Blanchard, Rachel	1976
	Jordan, Barbara	1936	20	Lee, Spike	1957
	Mugabe, Robert	1924		Lowry, Lois	1937
22	Barrymore, Drew	1975		Sachar, Louis	1954
	Fernandez, Lisa	1971	21	Gilbert, Walter	1932
24	Jobs, Steven	1955		O'Donnell, Rosie	1962
	Vernon, Mike	1963	22	Shatner, William	1931
	Whitestone, Heather	1973	24	Manning, Peyton	1976
25	Voigt, Cynthia	1942	25	Franklin, Aretha	1942
26	Thompson, Jenny	1973		Lovell, Jim	1928
27	Clinton, Chelsea	1980		Steinem, Gloria	1934
	Hunter-Gault, Charlayne	1942		Swoopes, Sheryl	1971
28	Andretti, Mario	1940	26	Allen, Marcus	1960
	Pauling, Linus	1901		Erdős, Paul	1913
				O'Connor, Sandra Day	1930
				Stockton, John	1962
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2	Gorbachev, Mikhail	1931	30	Dion, Celine	1968
	Satcher, David	1941		Hammer	1933
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3	Hooper, Geoff	1979		Gore, Al	1948
	Joyner-Kersee, Jackie	1962		Howe, Gordie	1928
	MacLachlan, Patricia	1938	<b>April</b>		<b>Year</b>
4	Armstrong, Robb	1962	1	Maathai, Wangari	1940
	Morgan, Garrett	1877	2	Carvey, Dana	1955
5	Margulis, Lynn	1938	3	Garth, Jennie	1972
6	Ashley, Maurice	1966		Goodall, Jane	1934
7	McCarty, Oseola	1908		Street, Picabo	1971
8	Prinze, Freddie Jr.	1976	4	Angelou, Maya	1928
10	Guy, Jasmine	1964	5	Powell, Colin	1937
	Miller, Shannon	1977	6	Watson, James D.	1928
	Wolf, Hazel	1898	7	Dougals, Marjory Stoneman	1890

<b>April (continued)</b>		<b>Year</b>			<b>Year</b>
8	Annan, Kofi	1938	10	Cooney, Caroline B.	1947
10	Madden, John	1936		Curtis, Christopher Paul	1953
12	Cleary, Beverly	1916		Galdikas, Birutė	1946
	Danes, Claire	1979		Jamison, Judith	1944
	Doherty, Shannen	1971		Ochoa, Ellen	1958
	Hawk, Tony	1968	11	Farrakhan, Louis	1933
	Letterman, David	1947	12	Mowat, Farley	1921
	Soto, Gary	1952	13	Pascal, Francine	1938
13	Brandis, Jonathan	1976		Rodman, Dennis	1961
	Henry, Marguerite	1902	14	Lucas, George	1944
14	Gellar, Sarah Michelle	1977		Smith, Emmitt	1969
	Maddux, Greg	1966	15	Albright, Madeleine	1937
	Rose, Pete	1941		Johns, Jasper	1930
15	Martin, Bernard	1954		Zindel, Paul	1936
16	Abdul-Jabbar, Kareem	1947	16	Coville, Bruce	1950
	Atwater-Rhodes, Amelia	1984	17	Paulsen, Gary	1939
	Selena	1971	18	John Paul II	1920
	Williams, Garth	1912	19	Brody, Jane	1941
17	Champagne, Larry III	1985		Hansberry, Lorraine	1930
18	Hart, Melissa Joan	1976	21	Robinson, Mary	1944
20	Brundtland, Gro Harlem	1939	23	Bardeen, John	1908
21	Muir, John	1838		Jewel	1974
22	Levi-Montalcini, Rita	1909		O'Dell, Scott	1898
	Oppenheimer, J. Robert	1904	24	Dumars, Joe	1963
25	Fitzgerald, Ella	1917	26	Hill, Lauryn	1975
26	Giff, Patricia Reilly	1935		Ride, Sally	1951
	Pei, I.M.	1917	27	Carson, Rachel	1907
27	Wilson, August	1945		Kerr, M.E.	1927
28	Baker, James	1930	28	Johnston, Lynn	1947
	Duncan, Lois	1934		Shabazz, Betty	1936
	Hussein, Saddam	1937	30	Cohen, Adam Ezra	1979
	Kaunda, Kenneth	1924			
	Lee, Harper	1926	<b>June</b>		
	Leno, Jay	1950			
29	Agassi, Andre	1970	1	Lalas, Alexi	1970
	Earnhardt, Dale	1951		Morissette, Alanis	1974
	Seinfeld, Jerry	1954	4	Kistler, Darci	1964
				Nelson, Gaylord	1916
<b>May</b>			5	Scarry, Richard	1919
			6	Rylant, Cynthia	1954
2	Spock, Benjamin	1903	7	Brooks, Gwendolyn	1917
4	Bass, Lance	1979		Oleynik, Larisa	1981
5	Lionni, Leo	1910	8	Bush, Barbara	1925
	Maxwell, Jody-Anne	1986		Davenport, Lindsay	1976
	Opdyke, Irene Gut	1922		Edelman, Marian Wright	1939
	Strasser, Todd	1950		Wayans, Keenen Ivory	1958
7	Land, Edwin	1909		Wright, Frank Lloyd	1869
8	Attenborough, David	1926	9	Portman, Natalie	1981
9	Bergen, Candice	1946	10	Frank, Anne	1929
	Yzerman, Steve	1965		Lipinski, Tara	1982
				Sendak, Maurice	1928

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## June (continued)

	Year		Year		
11	Cousteau, Jacques . . . . .	1910	2	Bethe, Hans A. . . . .	1906
	Montana, Joe . . . . .	1956		George, Jean Craighead . . . . .	1919
12	Bush, George . . . . .	1924		Marshall, Thurgood . . . . .	1908
13	Allen, Tim . . . . .	1953		Petty, Richard . . . . .	1937
	Alvarez, Luis W. . . . .	1911		Thomas, Dave . . . . .	1932
	Christo . . . . .	1935	5	Watterson, Bill . . . . .	1958
14	Bourke-White, Margaret . . . . .	1904	6	Bush, George W. . . . .	1946
	Graf, Steffi . . . . .	1969		Dalai Lama . . . . .	1935
	Summitt, Pat . . . . .	1952		Dumitriu, Ioana . . . . .	1976
	Yep, Laurence . . . . .	1948	7	Chagall, Marc . . . . .	1887
15	Horner, Jack . . . . .	1946		Heinlein, Robert . . . . .	1907
	Jacques, Brian . . . . .	1939		Kwan, Michelle . . . . .	1980
16	McClintock, Barbara . . . . .	1902		Stachowski, Richie . . . . .	1985
	Shakur, Tupac . . . . .	1971	8	Hardaway, Anfernee "Penny" . . . . .	1971
17	Gingrich, Newt . . . . .	1943		Sealfon, Rebecca . . . . .	1983
	Jansen, Dan . . . . .	1965	9	Farmer, Nancy . . . . .	1941
	Williams, Venus . . . . .	1980		Hanks, Tom . . . . .	1956
18	Johnson, Angela . . . . .	1961		Hassan II . . . . .	1929
	Morris, Nathan . . . . .	1971		Krim, Mathilde . . . . .	1926
	Van Allsburg, Chris . . . . .	1949		Sacks, Oliver . . . . .	1933
19	Abdul, Paula . . . . .	1962	10	Ashe, Arthur . . . . .	1943
	Aung San Suu Kyi . . . . .	1945		Boulmerka, Hassiba . . . . .	1969
20	Goodman, John . . . . .	1952	11	Cisneros, Henry . . . . .	1947
21	Bhutto, Benazir . . . . .	1953		White, E.B. . . . .	1899
	Breathed, Berke . . . . .	1957	12	Cosby, Bill . . . . .	1937
22	Bradley, Ed . . . . .	1941		Johnson, Johanna . . . . .	1983
	Daly, Carson . . . . .	1973		Yamaguchi, Kristi . . . . .	1972
	Warner, Kurt . . . . .	1971	13	Ford, Harrison . . . . .	1942
23	Rudolph, Wilma . . . . .	1940		Stewart, Patrick . . . . .	1940
	Thomas, Clarence . . . . .	1948	15	Aristide, Jean-Bertrand . . . . .	1953
25	Carle, Eric . . . . .	1929		Ventura, Jesse . . . . .	1951
	Gibbs, Lois . . . . .	1951	16	Johnson, Jimmy . . . . .	1943
26	Harris, Bernard . . . . .	1956		Sanders, Barry . . . . .	1968
	Jeter, Derek . . . . .	1974	18	Glenn, John . . . . .	1921
	LeMond, Greg . . . . .	1961		Lemelson, Jerome . . . . .	1923
27	Babbitt, Bruce . . . . .	1938		Mandela, Nelson . . . . .	1918
	Dunbar, Paul Laurence . . . . .	1872	19	Tarvin, Herbert . . . . .	1985
	Perot, H. Ross . . . . .	1930	20	Hillary, Sir Edmund . . . . .	1919
28	Elway, John . . . . .	1960	21	Chastain, Brandi . . . . .	1968
30	Ballard, Robert . . . . .	1942		Reno, Janet . . . . .	1938
				Riley, Dawn . . . . .	1964
				Williams, Robin . . . . .	1952
			22	Calder, Alexander . . . . .	1898
				Dole, Bob . . . . .	1923
				Hinton, S.E. . . . .	1948

## July

	Year		Year		
1	Brower, David . . . . .	1912	23	Haile Selassie . . . . .	1892
	Calderone, Mary S. . . . .	1904		Williams, Michelle . . . . .	1980
	Diana, Princess of Wales . . . . .	1961	24	Abzug, Bella . . . . .	1920
	Duke, David . . . . .	1950		Krone, Julie . . . . .	1963
	Lewis, Carl . . . . .	1961		Moss, Cynthia . . . . .	1940
	McCully, Emily Arnold . . . . .	1939		Wilson, Mara . . . . .	1987

**July (continued) . . . . . Year**

- 25 Payton, Walter . . . . . 1954
- 26 Berenstain, Jan . . . . . 1923
- 28 Davis, Jim. . . . . 1945
- Pottter, Beatrix . . . . . 1866
- 29 Burns, Ken . . . . . 1953
- Creech, Sharon . . . . . 1945
- Dole, Elizabeth Hanford. . . . . 1936
- Jennings, Peter . . . . . 1938
- Morris, Wanya. . . . . 1973
- 30 Hill, Anita . . . . . 1956
- Moore, Henry . . . . . 1898
- Schroeder, Pat. . . . . 1940
- 31 Cronin, John . . . . . 1950
- Reid Banks, Lynne . . . . . 1929
- Rowling, J. K. . . . . 1965
- Weinke, Chris . . . . . 1972

**August . . . . . Year**

- 1 Brown, Ron . . . . . 1941
- Coolio. . . . . 1963
- Garcia, Jerry. . . . . 1942
- 2 Baldwin, James . . . . . 1924
- Healy, Bernadine . . . . . 1944
- 3 Roper, Dee Dee
- Savimbi, Jonas. . . . . 1934
- 4 Gordon, Jeff . . . . . 1971
- 5 Ewing, Patrick . . . . . 1962
- Jackson, Shirley Ann . . . . . 1946
- 6 Cooney, Barbara . . . . . 1917
- Robinson, David . . . . . 1965
- Warhol, Andy . . . . . ?1928
- 7 Byars, Betsy . . . . . 1928
- Duchovny, David . . . . . 1960
- Leakey, Louis . . . . . 1903
- 8 Boyd, Candy Dawson. . . . . 1946
- Chasez, JC. . . . . 1976
- 9 Anderson, Gillian . . . . . 1968
- Holdsclaw, Chamique. . . . . 1977
- Houston, Whitney . . . . . 1963
- McKissack, Patricia C. . . . . 1944
- Sanders, Deion . . . . . 1967
- Travers, P.L. . . . . ?1899
- 11 Haley, Alex . . . . . 1921
- Hogan, Hulk . . . . . 1953
- Wozniak, Steve . . . . . 1950
- 12 Martin, Ann M. . . . . 1955
- McKissack, Fredrick L. . . . . 1939
- Myers, Walter Dean . . . . . 1937
- Sampras, Pete . . . . . 1971

- 13 Battle, Kathleen. . . . . 1948
- Castro, Fidel . . . . . 1927
- 14 Berry, Halle . . . . . ?1967
- Johnson, Magic . . . . . 1959
- Larson, Gary . . . . . 1950
- 15 Affleck, Benjamin. . . . . 1972
- Ellerbe, Linda . . . . . 1944
- 16 Fu Mingxia. . . . . 1978
- Thampy, George. . . . . 1987
- 18 Danziger, Paula. . . . . 1944
- Murie, Margaret . . . . . 1902
- 19 Clinton, Bill . . . . . 1946
- Soren, Tabitha . . . . . 1967
- 20 Chung, Connie . . . . . 1946
- Milosevic, Slobodan . . . . . 1941
- 21 Chamberlain, Wilt. . . . . 1936
- Draper, Sharon . . . . . 1952
- Toro, Natalia . . . . . 1984
- 22 Bradbury, Ray . . . . . 1920
- Dorough, Howie. . . . . 1973
- Schwarzkopf, H. Norman . . . . . 1934
- 23 Bryant, Kobe. . . . . 1978
- Novello, Antonia. . . . . 1944
- Phoenix, River . . . . . 1970
- 24 Arafat, Yasir. . . . . 1929
- Dai Qing . . . . . 1941
- Ripken, Cal, Jr. . . . . 1960
- 25 Case, Steve . . . . . 1958
- 26 Burke, Christopher . . . . . 1965
- Culkin, Macaulay . . . . . 1980
- Sabin, Albert . . . . . 1906
- Teresa, Mother . . . . . 1910
- Tuttle, Merlin . . . . . 1941
- 27 Nechita, Alexandra . . . . . 1985
- Rinaldi, Ann . . . . . 1934
- 28 Dove, Rita . . . . . 1952
- Evans, Janet. . . . . 1971
- Peterson, Roger Tory . . . . . 1908
- Priestley, Jason . . . . . 1969
- Rimes, LeAnn. . . . . 1982
- Twain, Shania . . . . . 1965
- 29 Grandin, Temple . . . . . 1947
- Hesse, Karen . . . . . 1952
- McCain, John. . . . . 1936
- 30 Earle, Sylvia . . . . . 1935
- 31 Perlman, Itzhak. . . . . 1945

**September . . . . . Year**

- 1 Estefan, Gloria. . . . . 1958
- Guy, Rosa . . . . . 1925
- Smyers, Karen. . . . . 1961

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<b>September (continued)</b>		<b>Year</b>		<b>Year</b>	
2	Bearden, Romare	?1912	29	Berenstain, Stan	1923
	Galeczka, Chris	1981		Guey, Wendy	1983
3	Delany, Bessie	1891		Gumbel, Bryant	1948
4	Knowles, Beyoncé	1981	30	Hingis, Martina	1980
	Wright, Richard	1908		Moceanu, Dominique	1981
5	Guisewite, Cathy	1950	<b>October</b>		
7	Lawrence, Jacob	1917	1	Carter, Jimmy	1924
	Moses, Grandma	1860		McGwire, Mark	1963
	Pippig, Uta	1965	2	Leibovitz, Annie	1949
	Scurry, Briana	1971	3	Campbell, Neve	1973
8	Prelutsky, Jack	1940		Herriot, James	1916
	Scieszka, Jon	1954		Richardson, Kevin	1972
	Thomas, Jonathan Taylor	1982		Winfield, Dave	1951
10	Gould, Stephen Jay	1941	4	Cushman, Karen	1941
13	Johnson, Michael	1967		Rice, Anne	1941
	Monroe, Bill	1911	5	Fitzhugh, Louise	1928
	Taylor, Mildred D.	1943		Hill, Grant	1972
14	Armstrong, William H.	1914		Lemieux, Mario	1965
	Stanford, John	1938		Lin, Maya	1959
15	dePaola, Tomie	1934		Winslet, Kate	1975
	Marino, Dan	1961	6	Bennett, Cherie	1960
16	Dahl, Roald	1916		Lobo, Rebecca	1973
	Gates, Henry Louis, Jr.	1950	7	Ma, Yo-Yo	1955
17	Burger, Warren	1907	8	Jackson, Jesse	1941
18	Armstrong, Lance	1971		Ringgold, Faith	1930
	Carson, Ben	1951		Stine, R.L.	1943
	de Mille, Agnes	1905		Winans, CeCe	1964
	Fields, Debbi	1956	9	Bryan, Zachery Ty	1981
19	Delany, Sadie	1889		Senghor, Léopold Sédar	1906
21	Fielder, Cecil	1963	10	Favre, Brett	1969
	King, Stephen	1947		Saro-Wiwa, Ken	1941
	Nkrumah, Kwame	1909	11	Perry, Luke	?1964
22	Richardson, Dot	1961		Young, Steve	1961
23	Nevelson, Louise	1899	12	Childress, Alice	?1920
24	Ochoa, Severo	1905		Jones, Marion	1975
25	Gwaltney, John Langston	1928		Ward, Charlie	1970
	Locklear, Heather	1961	13	Carter, Chris	1956
	Lopez, Charlotte	1976		Kerrigan, Nancy	1969
	Pippen, Scottie	1965		Rice, Jerry	1962
	Reeve, Christopher	1952	14	Daniel, Beth	1956
	Smith, Will	1968		Mobutu Sese Seko	1930
	Walters, Barbara	1931	15	Iacocca, Lee A.	1924
26	Mandela, Winnie	1934	16	Stewart, Kordell	1972
	Stockman, Shawn	1972	17	Jemison, Mae	1956
	Williams, Serena	1981		Kirkpatrick, Chris	1971
27	Handford, Martin	1956	18	Foreman, Dave	1946
28	Cray, Seymour	1925		Marsalis, Wynton	1961
	Pak, Se Ri	1977		Navratilova, Martina	1956
				Suzuki, Shinichi	1898
			19	Pullman, Philip	1946

<b>October (continued)</b>		<b>Year</b>
20	Kenyatta, Jomo .....	?1891
	Mantle, Mickey .....	1931
	Pinsky, Robert .....	1940
21	Gillespie, Dizzy .....	1956
	Le Guin, Ursula K. ....	1929
22	Hanson, Zac .....	1985
23	Crichton, Michael .....	1942
	Pelé. ....	1940
25	Martinez, Pedro .....	1971
26	Clinton, Hillary Rodham .....	1947
27	Anderson, Terry .....	1947
28	Gates, Bill .....	1955
	Salk, Jonas .....	1914
29	Ryder, Winona .....	1971
31	Candy, John .....	1950
	Paterson, Katherine. ....	1932
	Pauley, Jane .....	1950
	Tucker, Chris .....	1973

<b>November</b>		<b>Year</b>
2	lang, k.d. ....	1961
3	Arnold, Roseanne .....	1952
	Kiraly, Karch .....	1960
4	Combs, Sean (Puff Daddy) .....	1969
	Handler, Ruth .....	1916
8	Mittermeier, Russell A. ....	1949
9	Denton, Sandi .....	
	Sagan, Carl .....	1934
10	Bates, Daisy .....	?1914
11	DiCaprio, Leonardo .....	1974
	Vonnegut, Kurt .....	1922
12	Andrews, Ned .....	1980
	Blackmun, Harry .....	1908
	Harding, Tonya .....	1970
	Sosa, Sammy .....	1968
13	Goldberg, Whoopi .....	1949
14	Boutros-Ghali, Boutros .....	1922
	Hussein, King .....	1935
15	O'Keeffe, Georgia .....	1887
	Pinkwater, Daniel .....	1941
16	Baiul, Oksana .....	1977
	Miyamoto, Shigeru .....	1952
17	Fuentes, Daisy .....	1966
	Hanson, Ike .....	1980
18	Driscoll, Jean .....	1966
	Mankiller, Wilma .....	1945
19	Collins, Eileen .....	1956
	Devers, Gail .....	1966
	Glover, Savion .....	1973
	Strug, Kerri .....	1977

21	Aikman, Troy. ....	1966
	Griffey, Ken, Jr. ....	1969
	Speare, Elizabeth George .....	1908
24	Ndetti, Cosmas .....	1971
25	Grant, Amy .....	1960
	Thomas, Lewis .....	1913
26	Patrick, Ruth .....	1907
	Pine, Elizabeth Michele .....	1975
	Schulz, Charles .....	1922
27	Nye, Bill .....	1955
	White, Jaleel .....	1977
29	L'Engle, Madeleine .....	1918
	Lewis, C. S. ....	1898
	Tubman, William V. S. ....	1895
30	Jackson, Bo .....	1962
	Parks, Gordon .....	1912

<b>December</b>		<b>Year</b>
2	Macaulay, David .....	1946
	Seles, Monica .....	1973
	Spears, Britney .....	1981
	Watson, Paul .....	1950
3	Filipovic, Zlata .....	1980
5	Muniz, Frankie .....	1985
6	Risca, Viviana .....	1982
7	Bird, Larry .....	1956
8	Rivera, Diego .....	1886
9	Hopper, Grace Murray .....	1906
12	Bialik, Mayim .....	1975
	Frankenthaler, Helen .....	1928
	Sinatra, Frank .....	1915
13	Fedorov, Sergei .....	1969
14	Jackson, Shirley .....	1916
15	Aidid, Mohammed Farah .....	1934
	Mendes, Chico .....	1944
16	Bailey, Donovan .....	1967
	McCary, Michael .....	1971
	Mead, Margaret .....	1901
17	Kielburger, Craig .....	1982
18	Aguilera, Christina .....	1980
	Holmes, Katie .....	1978
	Pitt, Brad .....	1964
	Sanchez Vicario, Arantxa .....	1971
	Spielberg, Steven .....	1947
19	Morrison, Sam .....	1936
	Sapp, Warren .....	1972
	White, Reggie .....	1961
20	Uchida, Mitsuko .....	1948
21	Evert, Chris .....	1954
	Griffith Joyner, Florence .....	1959
	Webb, Karrie .....	1974

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22 Pinkney, Jerry .....	1939
23 Avi .....	1937
Harbaugh, Jim .....	1963
Lowman, Meg .....	1953
24 Lowe, Alex. ....	1958
Martin, Ricky. ....	1971
25 Sadat, Anwar. ....	1918
26 Butcher, Susan .....	1954
27 Roberts, Cokie. ....	1943
28 Lee, Stan .....	1922
Washington, Denzel. ....	1954
30 Woods, Tiger. ....	1975

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 Sergei Fedorov  
 Zlata Filipovic  
 Daisy Fuentes  
 Ruth Bader Ginsburg  
 Whoopi Goldberg  
 Tonya Harding  
 Melissa Joan Hart  
 Geoff Hooper  
 Whitney Houston  
 Dan Jansen  
 Nancy Kerrigan  
 Alexi Lalas  
 Charlotte Lopez  
 Wilma Mankiller  
 Shannon Miller  
 Toni Morrison  
 Richard Nixon  
 Greg Norman  
 Severo Ochoa  
 River Phoenix  
 Elizabeth Pine  
 Jonas Salk  
 Richard Scarry  
 Emmitt Smith

Will Smith  
 Steven Spielberg  
 Patrick Stewart  
 R.L. Stine  
 Lewis Thomas  
 Barbara Walters  
 Charlie Ward  
 Steve Young  
 Kim Zmeskal

## 1995

Troy Aikman  
 Jean-Bertrand Aristide  
 Oksana Baiul  
 Halle Berry  
 Benazir Bhutto  
 Jonathan Brandis  
 Warren E. Burger  
 Ken Burns  
 Candace Cameron  
 Jimmy Carter  
 Agnes de Mille  
 Placido Domingo  
 Janet Evans  
 Patrick Ewing  
 Newt Gingrich  
 John Goodman  
 Amy Grant  
 Jesse Jackson  
 James Earl Jones  
 Julie Krone  
 David Letterman  
 Rush Limbaugh  
 Heather Locklear  
 Reba McEntire  
 Joe Montana  
 Cosmas Ndeti  
 Hakeem Olajuwon  
 Ashley Olsen  
 Mary-Kate Olsen  
 Jennifer Parkinson  
 Linus Pauling  
 Itzhak Perlman  
 Cokie Roberts  
 Wilma Rudolph  
 Salt 'N' Pepa  
 Barry Sanders  
 William Shatner  
 Elizabeth George  
 Speare  
 Dr. Benjamin Spock  
 Jonathan Taylor  
 Thomas  
 Vicki Van Meter  
 Heather Whitestone  
 Pedro Zamora

**1996**

Aung San Suu Kyi  
 Boyz II Men  
 Brandy  
 Ron Brown  
 Mariah Carey  
 Jim Carrey  
 Larry Champagne III  
 Christo  
 Chelsea Clinton  
 Coolio  
 Bob Dole  
 David Duchovny  
 Debbi Fields  
 Chris Goleczka  
 Jerry Garcia  
 Jennie Garth  
 Wendy Guey  
 Tom Hanks  
 Alison Hargreaves  
 Sir Edmund Hillary  
 Judith Jamison  
 Barbara Jordan  
 Annie Leibovitz  
 Carl Lewis  
 Jim Lovell  
 Mickey Mantle  
 Lynn Margulis  
 Iqbal Masih  
 Mark Messier  
 Larisa Oleynik  
 Christopher Pike  
 David Robinson  
 Dennis Rodman  
 Selena  
 Monica Seles  
 Don Shula  
 Kerri Strug  
 Tiffani-Amber Thiessen  
 Dave Thomas  
 Jaleel White

**1997**

Madeleine Albright  
 Marcus Allen  
 Gillian Anderson  
 Rachel Blanchard  
 Zachery Ty Bryan  
 Adam Ezra Cohen  
 Claire Danes  
 Celine Dion  
 Jean Driscoll  
 Louis Farrakhan  
 Ella Fitzgerald

Harrison Ford  
 Bryant Gumbel  
 John Johnson  
 Michael Johnson  
 Maya Lin  
 George Lucas  
 John Madden  
 Bill Monroe  
 Alanis Morissette  
 Sam Morrison  
 Rosie O'Donnell  
 Muammar el-Qaddafi  
 Christopher Reeve  
 Pete Sampras  
 Pat Schroeder  
 Rebecca Sealfon  
 Tupac Shakur  
 Tabitha Soren  
 Herbert Tarvin  
 Merlin Tuttle  
 Mara Wilson

**1998**

Bella Abzug  
 Kofi Annan  
 Neve Campbell  
 Sean Combs (Puff  
 Daddy)  
 Dalai Lama (Tenzin  
 Gyatso)  
 Diana, Princess of Wales  
 Leonardo DiCaprio  
 Walter E. Diemer  
 Ruth Handler  
 Hanson  
 Livan Hernandez  
 Jewel  
 Jimmy Johnson  
 Tara Lipinski  
 Jody-Anne Maxwell  
 Dominique Moceanu  
 Alexandra Nechita  
 Brad Pitt  
 LeAnn Rimes  
 Emily Rosa  
 David Satcher  
 Betty Shabazz  
 Kordell Stewart  
 Shinichi Suzuki  
 Mother Teresa  
 Mike Vernon  
 Reggie White  
 Kate Winslet

**1999**

Ben Affleck  
 Jennifer Aniston  
 Maurice Ashley  
 Kobe Bryant  
 Bessie Delany  
 Sadie Delany  
 Sharon Draper  
 Sarah Michelle Gellar  
 John Glenn  
 Savion Glover  
 Jeff Gordon  
 David Hampton  
 Lauryn Hill  
 King Hussein  
 Lynn Johnston  
 Shari Lewis  
 Oseola McCarty  
 Mark McGwire  
 Slobodan Milosevic  
 Natalie Portman  
 J. K. Rowling  
 Frank Sinatra  
 Gene Siskel  
 Sammy Sosa  
 John Stanford  
 Natalia Toro  
 Shania Twain  
 Mitsuko Uchida  
 Jesse Ventura  
 Venus Williams

**2000**

Christina Aguilera  
 K.A. Applegate  
 Lance Armstrong  
 Backstreet Boys  
 Daisy Bates  
 Harry Blackmun  
 George W. Bush  
 Carson Daly  
 Ron Dayne  
 Henry Louis Gates, Jr.  
 Doris Haddock  
 (Granny D)  
 Jennifer Love Hewitt  
 Chamique Holdsclaw  
 Katie Holmes  
 Charlayne Hunter-Gault  
 Johanna Johnson  
 Craig Kielburger  
 John Lasseter  
 Peyton Manning  
 Ricky Martin

John McCain  
 Walter Payton  
 Freddie Prinze, Jr.  
 Viviana Risca  
 Briana Scurry  
 George Thampy  
 CeCe Winans

**2001**

Christiane Amanpour  
 Drew Barrymore  
 Jeff Bezos  
 Destiny's Child  
 Dale Earnhardt,  
 Aretha Franklin  
 Cathy Freeman  
 Tony Hawk  
 Madeleine L'Engle  
 Frankie Muniz  
 \*N Sync  
 Ellen Ochoa  
 Jeff Probst  
 Britney Spears  
 Chris Tucker  
 Lloyd D. Ward  
 Chris Weinke

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Idi Amin  
Hastings Kamuzu Banda  
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Hassan II  
Kenneth Kaunda  
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Robert Mugabe  
Kwame Nkrumah  
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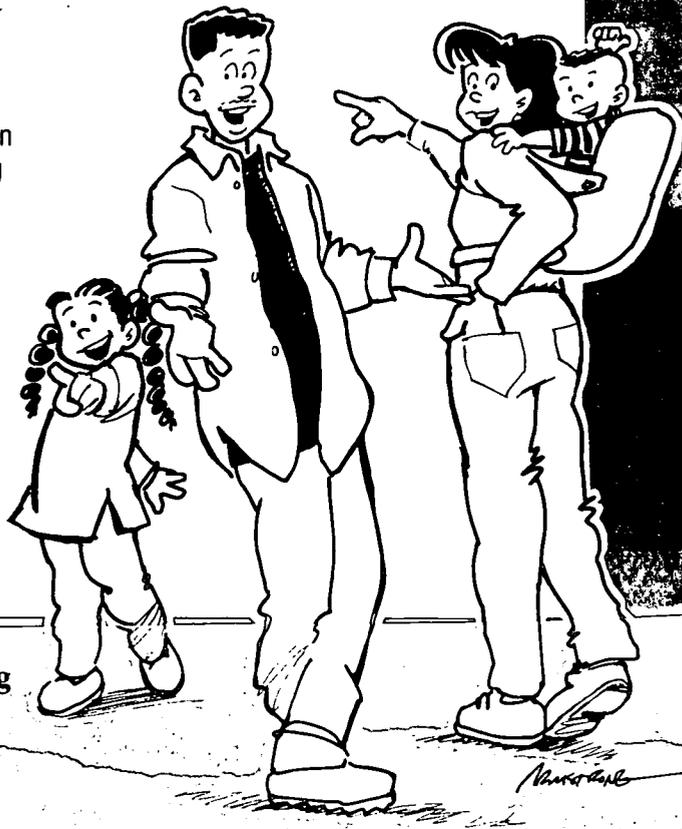
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