



J.K. Rowling

THE LIFE OF J.K. ROWLING

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Early Years

Rowling was born in the town of Yate England, which is located about 12 miles from Bristol in Southern England. She was born to Peter James Rowling and the former Anne Volant on July 31, 1965 (Harry Potter's birth date). They met before both entered the British navy. At the age of 19, they were married. They welcomed Joanne and one year later and her sister Di, who's less than two years younger.

During her childhood, the family moved a couple of times. The Rowling's moved to the village of Winterbourne when she was four years-old. She met a family with the last name Potter and attended St. Michael's. The headmaster of the school was Alfred Dunn, who is said to be inspiration for the character Dumbledore of the *Harry Potter* series.

Rowling moved again at the age of 10 to the nearby village of Tutshill on the river Wye that served as the border of Wales. Her move coincided with the death of her prized grandmother Kathleen. She based the character Severus Snape on teachers she had at primary school and later at Wyedean School. She studied tirelessly and didn't like sports.

A watershed moment in Rowling's life happened when she was 15 years-old. Her mother Anne was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis (MS). It's a degenerative disease of the nervous system. Anne Rowling never fully went into remission and endured increasingly poor health. She was reliant on a wheelchair by the time she died in 1990. J.K. Rowling wasn't able to introduce her mother to *Harry Potter*, which remains one of her greatest regrets.

She finished studies at Wyedean with typical grades. She was not outstanding. She was described as friendly and bookish, not unlike the character Hermione of her novels. She has never denied that Hermione is a caricature of herself. Her mother was ill and Joanne did not get along well with her father. She presently doesn't speak to him. She began writing stories of fantasy at the age of five. The simple stories were based on her younger sister and read aloud to her. Her first story was titled *Rabbit*.

Rowling Experiences College Years and Beyond

Rowling took the entrance exams to Oxford in 1982. She did not get in. She was interested in English literature but was convinced to read for Exeter University in the French classics. Her parents thought this would set her up for a career as a bilingual secretary. This never happened due to her lack of organization skills. She gained entry to Exeter and was satisfied because it came with the added benefit of studying one year in Paris. She was among students with elite backgrounds. She was slightly more progressive than most and was happy she was refused entry to Oxford. She felt she would have been a horrible fit.

Harry Potter's home was rumored to be based on the nearby residences of Exeter. As in secondary school, Rowling was a competent student. She graduated in 1986. She moved to London, working for Amnesty International until she met a boyfriend and moved to Manchester England. She began sketching out ideas for Harry Potter and a seven book series.

She was deemed redundant at an office job in Manchester, her relationship with her boyfriend ended and her mother died. She moved to Portugal and started teaching. Here she met her first husband journalist Jorge Arantes. She spent her days writing and taught at night. She soon became pregnant and gave birth to daughter Jessica in 1993. The marriage ended and she left with Jessica to be near her sister in Edinburgh. Arantes came to resuscitate the marriage but Rowling refused him. They officially divorced in 1994.

She found herself a single mother living in Edinburgh, Scotland with no job. She sought welfare benefits and continued working on Harry Potter. She desperately spent her time writing in cafes. She was diagnosed with depression and considered suicide. There has been a great deal rumored about Rowling's life during this period. She denies that she was homeless. Her heat in her apartment was never turned off, as many have said. She was able to live in expensive London with Jessica very frugally.

Change Begins for Rowling

Rowling was going to begin a year of study to qualify for a teaching position at Edinburgh University. She delayed the start of her courses to continue writing which she performed on a decrepit manual typewriter. *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (released as...*the Sorcerer's Stone* in the US) about a wizard boy was finished in 1995. She submitted her work to more than ten publishing outfits, before it was accepted by Bloomsbury Publishing

in London. The chairman of Bloomsbury gave Chapter one to his young daughter to read. She immediately wanted more and this sealed the deal. Barry Cunningham paid Rowling an advance of ~ \$2500 USD. He advised her that her future did not lay in children's books. That she should seek additional employment.

She received a grant amounting to nearly 12,500 USD from the Arts Council in Scotland to continue writing.

Bloomsbury published the first book in the *Harry Potter* series in June 1997. 1,000 copies were run, with 500 of those earmarked for libraries. Those copies can garner up to \$40,000 USD on market today. Rowling's book received numerous book awards in the Britain and the United States. Scholastic won the rights to publish *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* for over \$100,000. Rowling regrets the change in title but she was not positioned to disagree.

Rowling used the money to move into a flat on Hazelbank Terrace in Edinburgh. It was a significant improvement over her first dwelling. Rowling was unchanged in that she remained a reserved woman. Her new neighbors did not realize that she was the author of the *Harry Potter* books.

J.K. Rowling keeps Successfully Publishing Books

Rowling's books began appearing in rapid succession with the first sequel, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* in 1998. It won the Smarties Prize, as did her first book, which is coveted as it's awarded by young readers. She would become the first individual to win the award three time with the publishing of the *Prisoner of Azkaban*. She withdrew consideration after that, as Oprah Winfrey did with Emmy contention, to give others a shot.

Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire was released in 2000, concurrently in the United States and Great Britain. It was the first time this was done and the release broke sales records in both countries. Close to three million copies were sold in 48 hours within the US. Rowling admits to having difficulties while writing her fourth installment of the series. She has described having dark moments and there was a problem with the plot as she had laid it out. *Order of the Phoenix* was published five years later. This was a considerable gap when compared to the others and sparked rumors that Rowling was overcome by writer's block. She was merely lacking in energy after years of constant writing.

The sixth installment of the Harry Potter series, *the Half-Blood Prince* was published in 2005. It sold close to nine million copies within the first day of release. It received the 2006 British Book awards Book of the Year prize. By now, Rowling's prize tally of awards was plentiful.

The seventh and final Harry Potter book was *the Deathly Hallows*, released in July 2007 to record setting sales. The title of the book was released before publication in February.

J.K. Rowling's Adjusts to Fame and Battles the Media

Like any wildly successful and wealthy person, blankets of people protect Rowling. She would feel unsafe without them. Her friend Minna Fry (formerly with Bloomsbury) noticed to what extent these people existed. Rowling was dismayed at the attention given to her at the release of *Goblet of Fire*. She was astonished at the crowds and somewhat confused. She escaped the throngs of fans out a back entrance.

Fry noticed Rowling pull back after the event. She got her own press people and handlers. Rowling is still amicable, but she's less available. J.K. Rowling has been tagged as paranoid, rude or taken with fame. Those who know her well contend that she's shy, reserved and unchanged from the person she was prior to becoming an icon.

Rowling seems to be at ease in a room full of children but she feels out of place in a gathering of adults. It's common for writers to show a distaste for situations they can't control as they can in worlds they create.

Rowling Isn't an ascetic. After coaxing, she read at the opening of the Olympics in London. She has spoken at Harvard University during commencement in 2008. British society isn't where she's most comfortable so she chooses her appearances selectively.

She pushes her husband aside when she's stressed or inundated by work demands. She's known to have faith in herself above all others.

Rowling was at the Leveson Inquiry regarding the press in Britain. It was organized by the government to investigate accusations that reporters had been breaking into the voice-mail boxes of celebrities. Well-known actors, journalists and politicians joined her. She recounted many instances involving her husband and particularly her children. Her daughter Jessica and young son David had been involved in many instances. At one point, a

reporter was able to get in a letter in the schoolbag of Jessica, written to Rowling. There were photographs published of both children violating a law to keep paparazzi away from children.

She especially dislikes the *Daily Mail*, an omnipresent member of the British tabloids. They have written about a non-existent stalker of Rowling and threatened to write about her first husband. The latter is a private matter, which she doesn't comment on publicly.

J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter Books are Adapted to Screen

Due to the worldwide success, it was no surprise that the *Harry Potter* series was translated to screen. The film rights to the first two novels were purchased in late 1998. The sum was in seven figures and directed by Chris Columbus.

A stipulation of vital importance to Rowling was that the film be shot in Britain with an all-English cast. She was mostly accommodated as the *Harry Potter* films gave notice to young actors as Daniel Radcliffe and Emma Watson. It also featured established stars Maggie Smith, Alan Rickman and Richard Harris.

Coca Cola won the bidding war to tie their products into the movie. By accepting the deal, they were required to make a donation of \$18 million to an American reading charity and several smaller donations.

Rowling reviewed the film scripts and retained some creative control. She produced the final two installments of the *Deathly Hallows*. She had planned a cameo role in the first film but decided acting was not where her talents laid.

A Television Movie is Produced

A made for television movie about Rowling was aired on the Lifetime network in 2011. *Magic Beyond Words: The J.K. Rowling Story* starred actor Poppy Montgomery in the title role. She tinted her eyes blue with lenses to appear as Rowling. The film was shot and released in British Columbia, Canada.

Rowling had no input on the project, which was criticized for being uninspired. It went into issues Rowling herself chose not to detail in her personal life. It delved into her relationship with her first husband. He was characterized as abusive which Rowling has neither accepted nor denied. It

also detailed her mother's death that is a highly protected matter by Rowling.

J.K. Rowling Writes a Non-Harry Potter Novel

Little, Brown & Company released *The Casual Vacancy*. The Blair Partnership, Rowling's new agency, announced it in 2012. It was targeted towards adults. A departure from the *Harry Potter* series.

It delves into the subjects of politics, class and social issues as prostitution rape and drugs. It's set in Pagford, which is similar to Yates (her birthplace). The novel sold quickly within the United Kingdom. Its opening week had the best sales behind *The Lost Symbol* by Dan Brown.

Rowling dedicated *The Casual Vacancy* to husband Dr. Neil Murray. It was her third such honor to her husband.

As Rowling came up with the idea of a young boy wizard on a train, Rowling came up with the idea of writing *The Casual Vacancy* on an airplane. She knows she has come up with a concept immediately. She feels a rush of energy throughout her body when the moment occurs. When considering the target audience as adults, she's said she was ready for the change. It was feared that young people might be gravitated towards writing that was not appropriate. Rowling is unconcerned, as these decisions should be left to the guardians.

The BBC optioned the book with plans to adapt it to television. The drama is due for a 2014 release.

J.K. Rowling Amasses Wealth

Rowling was among the first to become a billionaire through writing. The Harry Potter movies positioned her among the elite but her financial status has dipped below one billion. She will only comment that she's nowhere near to being a billionaire but she has an ample amount. She's estimated to be currently worth close to 15 million USD. She has made charitable contributions over 150 million USD combined with British tax laws, which have reduced her net worth.

J.K. Rowling Grows her Family

After Christmas in 2001, J.K. Rowling married Dr. Neil Michael Murray in Perthshire, Scotland. She wed the anesthetist in a ceremony with about 15 guests. She wore a simple off-white outfit. The ceremony was originally planned to take place in the Galapagos Islands but it was cancelled when the

media was alerted. Her bridesmaids were her daughter Jessica, Sister Diane and Neil's Sister Lorna. They met through mutual friends. He resembles the character Harry Potter in that he wears spectacle glasses.

Along with Jessica from Rowling's first marriage, they welcomed son David and daughter Mackenzie. The family live in Edinburgh Scotland.

J.K. Rowling Writes Under a Pseudonym

Writing a crime novel had been on Rowling's radar for years. She was rumored to be seen in Edinburgh writing a crime novel. The spotting was by author Ian Rankin's wife. She later recanted saying it was mentioned as a joke.

She had said that she would someday write her next adult novel under a pseudonym, but doubted she would be able to slip it under the glare of the media. In 2012, she mentioned that she had already completed an outline of her next novel but gave no further hints.

In the spring of 2013, *The Cuckoos Calling* by new novelist Robert Galbraith was published. He was said to be a retired police investigator who left to write and work in civilian security. The plot centered on the suicide of a prostitute. The reviews by other crime novelists were good. It was assumed that a promising new crime novelist had entered the scene. The book sales were above average although not on the scale with the *Harry Potter* books.

A columnist for the *Sunday Times* was alerted through social media that Rowling was the author. She began investigating with another journalist and found Rowling and Galbraith had the same editor and agent. The book was sent in for analysis and discovered to be J.K. Rowling's writing. Within days of the reveal, sales of the book rose nearly 4,000 percent.

Rowling was pleased that *The Cuckoos Calling* had won high praise under a divergent name. It was a welcome break from the expectation and fanfare she was accustomed to receiving. She plans *The Cuckoos Calling* to continue as the first installment in a series.

Some claim the use of a pseudonym was a publicity stunt to increase overall sales. Rowling has vehemently denied the accusation.

Rowling Considers Future Writing and the Possibility of More Harry Potter

Rowling continues to write in cafes throughout Edinburgh. It's her preferred venue and she enjoys finding a suitable spot where she won't stand out. She has completed several short stories and she's working on a book. It will be targeted towards a slightly younger audience than the *Harry Potter* series. It's a fairy tale based on politics.

She doesn't say she will never revisit *Harry Potter* but it's unlikely. Rowling is said to be finished with writing about fantasy and wizardry. She doesn't want any new work to compete with the books she has already written.

Rowling Gives Generously to Charitable Causes

J.K Rowling believes it's her moral responsibility to give back to others, given her fortunate financial state. She has established a trust in her mother name called the Volant Charitable Trust. It has a budget close to eight million USD annually.

Rowling began as a single parent, and honors her past through the Gingerbread House. She became the charity's first ambassador in 2000. Collaborating with former Prime Minister Gordon Brown's wife Sarah Brown, she wrote a book for the charity with proceeds going towards single parent families.

She has also joined Comic Relief with other authors to create original works to auction off. Her contributions made nearly \$30 million USD for the organization towards youths in crisis. Throughout the world, Rowling has written collections of short stories and booklets to be auctioned off or sold. Proceeds going directly to charities she has chosen.

Rowling has never forgotten the progressive illness that took her mother Anne. She has given support and money for the treatment and research of multiple sclerosis (MS). In 2006, she gave substantial financial support to the creation of the Anne Rowling Regenerative Neurology Clinic in Edinburgh. She followed with a contribution of over \$15.6 million USD to the clinic. Rowling withdrew her support to the countrywide MS Society in Scotland. She noticed a division within the society, which was reducing morale and losing qualified personnel. It's mystery as to why, but Scotland has the highest MS rate in the world. Rowling is dedicated to finding the answers.

Overall, Rowling's charitable gifts are unprecedented. She has most recently donated her royalties from *The Cuckoos Calling* to the Soldier's Fund. She seems unfazed that she's no longer on the Forbes list of billionaires. The title

given by Forbes is worth giving up for causes she's dedicated to.

Rowling Credits Many with Her Success

Rowling names civil rights activist and Communist powerhouse Jessica Mitford as her most cherished writer. She was brave and adventurous according to Rowling. She honored her first daughter with her name. Among her other favorite authors are Jane Austin, C.S. Lewis, Elizabeth Goudge and Paul Gallico.

Her main inspiration remains her mother Anne.

Rowling's Religious Views are Interpreted

Many have accused the *Harry Potter* series as being too associated with witchcraft. Others have said it hints close towards Christianity. It seems to be following a resurrection like that of Christ. Rowling was born into and baptized in the Church of England. When Jessica was young, they attended church services together.

She doesn't deny that her writing contains religious themes. Her faith is a part of her that may without specific intent comes out in her work. She's currently involved with the Scottish Episcopal Church.

J.K. Rowling is Recognized for Her Accomplishments

Numerous honorary degrees have been bestowed upon Rowling. They include such prestigious institutions as St. Andrews University, Harvard University and the University of Edinburgh. From 1997 when she won her first Smarties Book Prize to the present, she has won over 20 major awards.

J.K. Rowling Enjoys Today

Rowling is frequently asked about her hobbies and interests. Since she was five-years-old, she has been writing and that still dominates her life. She enjoys playing soccer with her children and watching the game. She doesn't have the worry of financial stability so her public appearances are only charity related. She enjoys spending time with her family in one of her three homes. Her main residence is an opulent 19th century dwelling on the River Tay in Scotland. Scotland isn't her country of origin but is where she considers home and the Scots have welcomed her as their own.