

Biography

Read Dahl's autobiography, *Boy* and then use our biography to compare some of the aspects of his life.

Roald Dahl was born in Cardiff in 1916. His parents were Norwegian but were living in Britain because his father was a shipbroker. He had one brother and four sisters and when he was seven years old, he went to Llandaff Cathedral School. Two years later he became a boarder at St Peter's School in Weston-super-Mare - and then at 13 he moved to Repton School, in Derbyshire.

Roald Dahl was not interested in going to university. He wanted to travel and so joined the Shell Oil Company with the ambition of becoming part of their foreign staff. In 1938 he got his wish to go abroad - the company sent him to Mombasa, in Kenya, where he sold oil to the owners of diamond mines and sisal plantations.

In 1939, when World War II broke out, he joined the RAF in Nairobi and learned to fly aircraft. He was sent to Cairo, then ordered to go into the Libyan desert, ready for action.

It was here that his plane crashed, leaving him with spinal injuries from which he was to suffer all his life. After convalescence in an Alexandria hospital, he rejoined his squadron and saw action in Greece, Crete, Palestine and the Lebanon.

In 1942, after a short stay in England, he was posted to Washington as an assistant air attaché at the British Embassy.

There he met the author CS Forrester who was instrumental in getting Dahl's first short story, *The Gremlins*, published. The book attracted the attention of Walt Disney, who soon invited him to Hollywood to write the script for the film version.

In 1952, Dahl met actress Patricia Neal. They were married in the following year and returned to England to live at Gipsy House in the village of Great Missenden, Buckinghamshire. He lived there for the rest of his life.

Dahl and his wife had five children - Olivia, Tessa, Theo, Ophelia and Lucy. But between 1960-65 tragedy struck the Dahl family. Baby Theo was brain-damaged in a traffic accident, Olivia died from a complication of measles and then Patricia suffered a stroke. It was during these years that *James and the Giant Peach* (1961) and *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (1964) were published.

In the late 1970s Dahl met Quentin Blake, who was to illustrate his latest story, *The Enormous Crocodile*. This collaboration marked the beginning of a flourishing partnership.

In 1983 he won the Children's Book Award for *The BFG* and the Whitbread Award for *The Witches*. He won the Children's Book Award again in 1989 with *Matilda*. In 1983 Patricia Neal and Dahl divorced. Later that year, Dahl married Felicity D'Abreu, with whom he was to remain for the rest of his life.

Roald Dahl died in 1990 at the age of 74.



A young Roald Dahl with his mother.



Roald Dahl on the beach at Weston-super-Mare.



Dahl learned to fly aircraft in Nairobi.

As I grow old - by Roald Dahl
As I grow old and just a trifle frayed
It's nice to know that sometimes I have made
You children and occasionally the staff
stop work and have instead a little laugh.