



Early life

Roald Dahl was born in **1916** in Llandaff, Cardiff, Wales to Norwegian parents, Harald and Sofie Dahl. Dahl's family moved from Norway and settled in Cardiff in the 1880s. He spoke Norwegian at home with his parents and sisters.

Roald Dahl's seven year old sister, Astri, died of appendicitis in **1920** when he was 3 years old. About a month later, his father died of pneumonia aged 57. Roald and his family did not return to Norway, as his father had wanted them to be educated in British schools.

Roald Dahl attended the Cathedral School in Llandaff in **1923**. Aged eight, Roald and four of his friends were caned by the headmaster after putting a dead mouse in a jar of sweets at the local sweet shop, which was owned by a 'mean and loathsome' old woman called Mrs Pratchett. This was known amongst the five boys as the 'Great Mouse Plot of 1923'.

School life

Roald went to St Peter's School in Weston-super-Mare in **1925** and then Repton public school in **1929**. He was very homesick and wrote to his mother almost every day, but never revealed to her his homesickness.

During his years at Repton, the chocolate company Cadbury would send boxes of new chocolates to the school to be tested by the pupils. Roald Dahl used to dream of inventing a new chocolate bar that would win the praise of Mr Cadbury himself, and this provided the inspiration for him to write his third book for children, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*.

Roald was very tall, reaching 6'6" in adult life, and he was good at sports. He also had an interest in photography. In childhood and adolescence, he spent his summer holidays in Norway.

Work and war

After finishing his schooling, he joined the Shell Petroleum Company in **July 1934**. Following two years of training at Shell he was transferred to Dar-es-Salaam, in Tanganyika (now Tanzania) to sell oil.

When World War II started, Roald joined the Royal Air Force in November 1939. He was accepted for flight training and following six months' training, Dahl was made a Pilot Officer.

However, Roald would be put out of action after a crash landing. On the final leg of a flight from Egypt, he could not find the airstrip and, running low on fuel with night approaching, he was forced to attempt a landing in the desert. Unfortunately, the undercarriage hit a boulder and the plane crashed, fracturing his skull, smashing his nose and blinding him. He managed to drag himself away from the blazing wreckage and passed out.

Roald was rescued and taken to a first-aid post in Mersa Matruh. Doctors said he had no chance of flying again, but in **February 1941**, five months after he was admitted to the hospital, he was discharged as fully fit for flying duties.

On **20 April 1941** Roald took part in the Battle of Athens and he flew missions every day for a period of four weeks. It was at this time, when Roald was Flight Lieutenant, that he started to get severe headaches that caused him to black out. He could no longer fly and was invalided home to Britain.

Writing

In **1942** Roald was transferred to Washington as Assistant Air Attaché and he began writing. His first published work was in the 1 August 1942 issue of the *Saturday Evening Post*. The author C. S. Forester had asked him to write down some RAF anecdotes so that he could shape them into a story. After Forester sat down to read what Roald Dahl had given him, he decided to publish it exactly as it was.

Family life

Roald married Academy Award (Oscar) winning American actress Patricia Neal on 2 July 1953 at Trinity Church in New York. They were married for 30 years and had five children: Olivia (who died of measles encephalitis aged seven), Tessa, Theo, Ophelia and Lucy. When Theo was 4 months old, he was hit by a New York taxi when in his pram and was severely injured, suffering from hydrocephalus. As a result of this, Roald became involved in developing a device called the Wade-Dahl-Till valve or WDT to alleviate the condition. **1965** saw Patricia Neal suffer a series of strokes while pregnant with fifth child Lucy. Roald took charge of her rehabilitation, helping her re-learn how to walk and talk. In **1983** they divorced and Roald subsequently married Felicity (Liccy) Crosland, now chairman of the trustees and the driving force behind the museum.

Roald Dahl died on November **1990**, aged 74 of a rare blood disease, myelodysplastic anaemia.

The Roald Dahl Museum and Story Centre

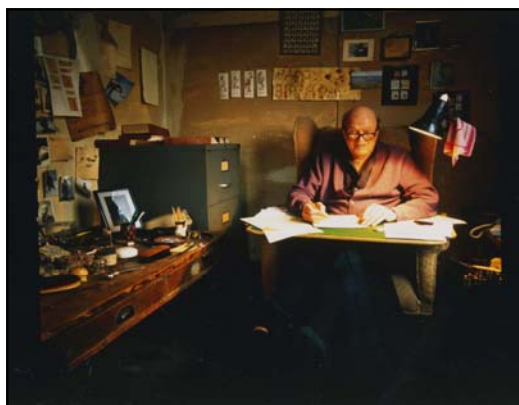
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Roald Dahl's writing

Roald Dahl had a writing hut built in his garden so that he could write in peace and quiet, away from the bustle of his house. It was from this little hut that *Matilda*, *The BFG* and *the Twits* first emerged into the world.

Every day Roald Dahl would spend four hours in the hut; two hours in the morning and two in the afternoon. Once settled into his comfy but worn old armchair, surrounded by drawings, photographs and personal mementoes, he would sharpen six Dixon Ticonderoga pencils (imported specially from the USA) and start to write on yellow legal paper.

To make himself more comfortable, he made a roll of corrugated paper to prop up his writing board, itself covered with green baize because it was 'soft on the eyes'. He also cut a hole into the back of his chair to stop it pressing on his spine, injured when his plane crashed during the Second World War. After an operation to remove an abscess from his spine, he had to put a cushion in front of the hole to make the chair comfortable again.



Children's books by Roald Dahl in order of publication

- The Gremlins* (1943)
- James and the Giant Peach* (1961)
- Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (1964)
- The Magic Finger* (1966)
- Fantastic Mr Fox* (1970)
- Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator* (1972)
- Danny, the Champion of the World* (1975)
- The Wonderful Story of Henry Sugar and Six More* (for older readers) (1977)
- The Enormous Crocodile* (1978)
- The Twits* (1980)
- George's Marvellous Medicine* (1981)
- Roald Dahl's Revolting Rhymes* (1981)
- The BFG* (1982)
- Dirty Beasts* (1983)
- The Witches* (1983)
- Boy* (1984)
- The Giraffe and the Pelly and Me* (1985)
- Going Solo* (for older readers) (1986)
- Matilda* (1988)
- Rhyme Stew* (for teenagers and beyond) (1989)
- Esio Trot* (1990)
- The Vicar of Nibbleswicke* (1991)
- The Minpins* (1991)
- My Year* (1991)

