

Shel Silverstein

Shel Silverstein was born on September 25, 1930, in Chicago.

In the fall of 1948, Shel Silverstein entered the University of Illinois, studying there till June 1949, after which he was expelled from the college. Next, he entered Chicago Academy of Fine Arts. Working alone, he had by then developed his own style. Ideas came to him fully developed and he steadfastly refused teachers' help. Therefore, he had to leave within one year.

In 1950, after leaving the Art School, Silverstein entered Roosevelt University to study English. It was during this period that he had his initial works, both cartoons and writings, published in a student newspaper called Roosevelt Torch. While studying at Roosevelt University, Shel Silverstein was influenced by his English teacher, who on recognizing Shel's talent, tried to develop it. But, Silverstein could not finish his course here, as he was drafted in the United States Army in 1953.

He served for the Army in the Korean War. While serving, he became a cartoonist for the *Pacific Stars & Stripes* military newspaper.

After his stint in the Army was up, he soon began drawing cartoons for magazines such as *Look* and *Sports Illustrated*.

Silverstein also began exploring other areas of creativity, such as playing the guitar and writing songs. He also contributed poems to a popular magazine.

He also began publishing his own books of his military cartoons, beginning with *Take Ten* (1955) and *Grab Your Socks* (1956).

Around this time, he also studied music and established himself as a musician and composer. Shel recorded his first album, *Hairy Jazz* (1959), a record containing several standards and a couple of original songs. Silverstein would go on to produce more than a dozen albums over the course of his diverse career.

In 1963, Silverstein met Ursula Nordstrom, a book editor, and she convinced him to begin writing material for children, which he did on short notice. *Lafcadio: The Lion Who Shot Back* would be the first, appearing that same year. The next year, he wrote three more books: *A Giraffe and a Half*, *Who wants a Cheap Rhinoceros?* and *The Giving Tree*, the latter of which would go on to become Silverstein's most popular book.

Shel combined his unique imagination and bold brand of humor for his first poetry collection—the only one he illustrated in full color. *Don't Bump The Glump! and Other Fantasies* was originally published in 1964, the same year as his famous picture book *The Giving Tree*.

While Silverstein was celebrated in certain musical circles for his music, it was always his work as an author of children's books that set him apart, and he produced two of his most memorable in the 1970s: *Where the Sidewalk Ends* (1974) is a masterful collection of poems and *The Missing Piece* (1976). When the 1970s came to an end, Silverstein would continue releasing memorable children's titles, among them *A Light in the Attic* (1981), a collection of poems and drawings, which went on to win several awards. This book was the first children's book to break onto the *New York Times* bestseller list, where it stayed for a record-breaking 182 weeks. *The Missing Piece Meets the Big O* (1981), is a sequel to *The Missing Piece*.

The next successful works came in the 1990s with *Falling Up* (1996) and a drawing book *Draw a Skinny Elephant* (1998). Shel Silverstein passed away on May 10, 1999, from a heart attack at his home in Key West, Florida.

Shel Silverstein's legacy continued posthumously with the release of a few more books. *Runny Babbit*, Shel's first posthumous publication, conceived and completed before his death, was released in March 2005. In 2011, *Every Thing On It* was released. *Runny Babbit Returns* was published in 2017.

Sources Used:

<http://www.shelsilverstein.com/about/>

<http://www.thefamouspeople.com/profiles/shel-silverstein-129.php>

<https://www.biography.com/people/shel-silverstein-9483912>