

# MEET THE AUTHOR

John Irving was born in Exeter, New Hampshire in 1942. He attended Philips Exeter Academy, where his stepfather taught Russian History, and where he began to wrestle competitively, a sport he credits with teaching him discipline and perseverance. A year into college, Irving went abroad, studied at the University of Vienna and roamed Europe on a motorcycle, absorbing many of the experiences that would later find their way into his novels.

After returning to the U.S., he enrolled in the University of New Hampshire, and graduated in 1965. He married and became a father at 23. Already set on a writing career, he earned an MFA from the distinguished Creative Writing program at the University of Iowa, where his instructors included Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. MFA in hand, Irving returned to New England with his growing family in 1967, and took a job as Assistant Professor of English at Windham College in Vermont.

His first novel, *Setting Free the Bears* (1968), drew on his European experiences—the darkly comic story was inspired by an actual incident from the last days of World War II. It introduced many of the themes and techniques he has explored throughout his career: the disasters of history and the capriciousness of fate, dramatized through interlocking stories within stories. His second novel, *The Water-Method Man* (1972), revisited the Austrian locale of *Setting Free the Bears*, while also satirizing academic life in America. That same year, Irving was appointed Writer-in-Residence at the University of Iowa; Irving's novel, *The 158-Pound Marriage* (1974), was written there. In 1975, he took a job as Assistant Professor of English at Mount Holyoke College, and even as he began to enjoy success as a writer, also served as Writer-in-Residence at the Bread Loaf Writers Conference and Brandeis University.

Many bestselling novels have followed: *The World According to Garp* (1978, National Book Award), *The Hotel New Hampshire* (1981)—both presented casts of vividly imagined eccentric characters, and both of which were made into films;

*Excerpted from the American Academy of Achievement's biography, retrieved on 5/28/10 from [www.achievement.org/autodoc/page/irv0bio-1](http://www.achievement.org/autodoc/page/irv0bio-1)*



Author John Irving  
Courtesy of Allen and Unwin

*The Cider House Rules* (1985) was a critical success and also picked up by Hollywood—he wrote the screenplay himself, and received the 2000 Oscar for Best Adapted Screenplay; *A Prayer for Owen Meany* (1989); a collection of short stories, *Trying To Save Piggy Sneed* (1996), that includes a “miniature autobiography,” *The Imaginary Girlfriend*, embodying his reflections on writing and wrestling; *A Widow for One Year* (1998); *A Son of the Circus* (1994); *The Fourth Hand* (2001); *Until I Find You* (2004); and the most recent bestseller, *Last Night in Twisted River* (2009).

Throughout his work, he has expressed a warm affection for humanity in all its astounding variety. His writing reflects a deep admiration for the courage and good humor of men, women, and children in confronting the cruelties and catastrophes of life—all for which his work draws frequent comparisons to the work of Charles Dickens.

He now splits his time between New England and Ontario.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

*Setting Free the Bears* (1968)

*The Water-Method Man* (1972)

*The World According to Garp* (1978)

*The Hotel New Hampshire* (1981)

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*A Prayer for Owen Meany* (1989)

*A Son of the Circus* (1994)

*The Imaginary Girlfriend* (non-fiction, 1995)

*Trying to Save Piggy Sneed* (collection, 1996)

*A Widow for One Year* (1998)

*My Movie Business* (non-fiction, 1999)

*The Cider House Rules: A Screenplay* (1999)

*The Fourth Hand* (2001)

*A Sound Like Someone Trying Not to Make a Sound* (2004)

*Until I Find You* (2005)

*Last Night in Twisted River* (2009)

*In One Person* (2012)