

SECRET HISTORY
OF THE
WIZARDING
PHENOMENON

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OF THE
WIZARDING
PHENOMENON

HOW THE HARRY POTTER BOOKS,
MOVIES, FANDOM AND MORE
CAME TO LIFE

PATRICIO TARANTINO



TRL Books
www.trlbooks.com

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First edition: September 2021

Second edition: June 2022

ISBN 979-8-64261-129-6

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*To my mom,
who gave me my first “Harry”
and built my first bookcase.*



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Foreword

When Patricio asked me to write the foreword to this book, it was just the latest surprise in a long list of exciting Harry Potter-related incidents that have been occurring to me in regular intervals since 1997.

Back in the mid-90s, working in publishing was something I found my way into accidentally, and I was still developing my secretarial/office management skills alongside learning all I could about working for a literary agency; I was inexperienced and had no idea of how my life or career would go. What I did know very well already though, was how to use the power of children's books to entertain, educate and delight. As a child, I had no TV until I was ten; my parents introduced me to books at a very young age and read to me daily. I was soon escaping into fiction on my own, reading under the covers after lights out, and absorbing the power of a good tale without it being any effort whatsoever. It was a natural part of my life. It has not been the same for many other children since; TV and, more recently, computer games and the internet have taken up large parts of the time which I would have used for reading, and

teachers (especially with the UK's new stringent curriculums) don't seem to have as much time to introduce the pleasure of reading great stories to their classes.

So, I was delighted to find a book I recognized spoke to me as the tales of my childhood had. A book that I couldn't put down, where the world was fully realized and the story had many satisfying elements, was all mine. When I was selling the manuscript, I had no way of knowing at the time that it would give the world the same great entertainment than it had given me; I just wanted it out there to see what it could do. The fact that a book could expand its audience and start to become a phenomenon by word of mouth through children was incredible. I left the agency before it was published, but I kept going into bookshops to make sure they had copies on display, and listening out for mentions of it in the papers.

I started to hear more about Harry in the press during the first year of publication, including spotting an article in *the London Evening Standard* in August 1998 about a lawyer who had gone by mistake to a court in Dudley for a case, instead of to Dursley, two hours away. I wrote a letter to the paper pointing out the Harry Potter connection and it was published a couple of days later. The first of my special Harry treats came a couple of months later when my aunt invited me to hear J.K. Rowling speak at the Cheltenham Literary Festival, and I was able to give her a copy of that letter at the signing afterwards.

Other treats over the next few years included being interviewed and photographed for *the Times*, *The Scotsman* and *People magazine*, amongst others; being invited to appear on *The Oprah Winfrey Show* in 2005 (which included filming with the excellent Barry Cunningham ahead of the show); being invited to speak at Chicago Ideas Week in 2013 on the same bill as Buzz Aldrin (who said my dress looked like galaxies!); being taken to

see the Cursed Child as a birthday present; and being filmed for a Japanese documentary to commemorate the 20th anniversary of publication. It was also great to be on a BBC radio panel with Christopher Little in 2017, talking about the books 20 years on—I think it was evident how proud we both were of the creation we'd helped to bring to the world.

Some of my more thrilling pleasures have been much simpler, but in many ways more profound: noticing people reading the books on the tube or bus in the early days; finding a pile of Chamber of Secrets all labelled up in a classroom as part of a school reading scheme; ubiquitous references to Harry Potter in films, books and across popular culture; and seeing my 6-year-old niece's letter to Santa this Christmas ("some Gryffindor Quidditch robes, a Nimbus 2000 and a real wizard's wand"). Meeting fans who've grown up with the books and are totally immersed in Harry's world is amazing. I mentioned to two young American women at *The Casual Vacancy* launch event that the first time I'd met Jo at a book signing, she was a redhead, and they were excited: "You were there at the beginning!" They were such devoted fans they'd even studied the author's sartorial details over the years. I'm a huge fan of the band Duran Duran, so I recognize that sort of obsessive behavior. It's totally normal, of course! It was also a privilege to meet Geoff and Vicki of "All the Stations" in summer 2017. They were engaged in a project to visit every railway station in the UK and had built up a worldwide following on YouTube; Vicki, being a dedicated Harry Potter fan, was looking for related adventures as part of her epic journey, and I went to join them for a chat when they came along my local railway line, which was very exciting as I also love train journeys.

I've been approached for interviews by writers from fan websites over the years, which is how I was first in touch with

Patricio, and it's always an honor to help them out with their research. I feel that if they've taken the time to track me down, I want to give them a good experience in return. My story is only a small part of Harry's journey, but it's one which I've had great pride and pleasure in over the years, and respecting that achievement is something I do for myself. I've talked to fans for various online Potter communities and their breadth of knowledge and dedication always impresses me greatly.

I've been lucky enough to meet Jo Rowling on a few occasions and she always remembers me; she remembered Patricio too, when he fixed it for me to meet her at *The Casual Vacancy* signing in his absence. My tremendous aunt arranged again for me to see her speaking at the Harrogate Crime Writing Festival around the time of the third Robert Galbraith book and the organizers were kind enough to let me ask 'Robert' a question in the session; I was able to thank her for her secret references to me in *The Cuckoo's Calling*, only two of which I'd spotted. The third she had to point out to me. I consider this a mark of thanks from the author to me for my small part in her story and am still in awe that she did it!

There are many Harry Potter-related experiences which I have not yet had, for example visiting the studio tour in England, or the theme park in America, or the Pottermore online community, and I still haven't read some of the spin-off books e.g., *Fantastic Beasts* or *Beedle the Bard*. Some readers may be surprised to hear this, but I have my own special experience of the Harry Potter phenomenon to sustain me, just as the novels have done for millions of young people across the world. Patricio's research for this book has been extensive and wide-ranging and he's been dedicated in searching out all the details about the novels and what they mean to everyone whose

lives they touch. I hope you recognize some of your own special experience with the Wizarding World captured in these pages.

*Bryony Evens,
“the enormously important
Harry-Potter-champion”
according to J.K. Rowling.*

CHAPTER ONE



Before Harry

*"I have no nostalgia, whatsoever... Childhood...
I mean, I wouldn't go back if you paid me. Ever."*

J.K. Rowling (Stahl, 2002)

It's impossible to talk about the Harry Potter story without knowing the story of its author. Different events and circumstances occurred that have made her life an obvious comparison to a fairy tale. In fact, this comparison is as old as the publication of her first book, the one that introduced the Harry Potter series —which has revolutionized the literary world more than any other series has done in history. It turned its author into the first female multi-millionaire writer, broke both sales and printing records across the different launches; and has not only changed the book industry, but also the film industry, influencing the market and the treatment of other series. The phenomenon has generated countless merchandise, theme parks on different continents, museums, tours, and auctions of valuable items associated with the brand. The Harry

Potter series also took the world of theater by storm with a new story taking place after the Harry Potter book series.

The main character begins his journey to Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry by way of the Hogwarts Express, a scarlet train which takes him from London into the Wizarding World. This train, stationed at King's Cross station in London, England, is where the adventure begins, and it takes Harry to the place where he finally feels comfortable with those who appreciate and love him. Just like the adventures of Harry, the story of Peter Rowling and Anne Volant also starts at King's Cross station.

It was 1963 when eighteen-year-old Peter Rowling and Anne Volant served their country. Peter was part of the British Royal Navy and Anne served with the Women's Royal Naval Service, a group of women who provided administrative support to the British Royal Navy. They saw each other for the first time at the station in London, on one trip that was headed 800 km to the north towards Arbroath, Scotland. The nine-hour journey was enough time for them to get to know each other.

The meetings between Peter and Anne continued throughout the following months. The couple continued to grow together, and Anne became pregnant. Expecting a child made them realize that they didn't want to return to the city, but to a rural area where their future children could grow close to nature. Peter got a job as an apprentice at the Bristol Siddeley factory near Bristol, the largest city in the English West Country. However, before moving and starting a new family life, the couple had to follow the social norms of the time and get married since they were expecting a child.

The wedding took place on March 14, 1965 at All Saints Parish Church, a temple in North London near the home of Anne's family. The Victorian building is no longer available as a

religious temple, but it has been converted into eight luxurious apartments (one of them with 4 rooms went on sale for £1,750,000). Anne, who was only twenty years old at the time, was five months pregnant and her current state didn't go unnoticed.

Opportunities for a young couple with a baby on the way were not as favorable in the 1960s as they are now. However, the Rowlings worked hard. They moved, when the pregnancy reached its ninth month, into a one-story house located at 109 Sundridge Park, Yate, England, a city 15 km from Bristol. The area wasn't fully developed yet. The closest place to shop was Yate Town Shopping Centre which had opened the previous year and was 300 meters away. Today, Yate is a city that hasn't stopped growing and has hundreds of shops in the center of the city.

The Cottage Hospital, where J.K. Rowling was born, operated at 240 Station Road, less than 500 meters from their new home. Originally a private house called Melrose House in 1920, it had been transformed into a health center in honor of those killed in the First World War. In 1951, it ceased to function as a hospital and its medical units were transferred to the city of Bristol, after which The Cottage Hospital became exclusively a maternity ward. Anne Rowling was admitted to The Cottage Hospital at the end of July and took her place in one of the twelve beds there. She was cared for by Irene Norton, the head of nursing. On July 31, 1965, Anne gave birth to a 'fat and blonde' baby, as J.K. would describe herself years later. The baby was registered under number B006725 in the Sodbury district, and her parents, Peter and Anne, decided to give her only one name: Joanne.

Despite being born in Yate, and having lived her early years there, whenever Joanne Rowling was asked about where she

was born years later, she would say Chipping Sodbury. The town is less than a kilometer away, is known as Yate's "wealthy neighbor", and noted for its picturesque architecture and antique shops.

The Rowlings' only daughter did not remain as such for very long. Before Joanne was two years old, the Rowlings had their second daughter, Dianne. The birth this time was at home. The reasons are unknown, although it was probably because The Cottage Hospital did not allow visits by minors, not even the siblings of newborns. Dianne was born on June 28, 1967, and that was the day of little Jo's first memory. Joanne remembers that her father gave her modelling clay in order to entertain her, and she admits that she was so entertained that she didn't see her sister that day.

The two sisters were known by the abbreviation of their names, Jo and Di. They did not live long in Yate, as Peter was promoted at the Bristol factory that would soon be merged with the Rolls-Royce factory in 1971. Despite bearing the name of the automaker, Rolls-Royce also worked on aircraft engines. Peter Rowling was in-charge of them at the company.

Six kilometers from Yate was Winterbourne, a community larger than a town, but not as big as a city. The population in Yate was growing, becoming the city the Rowling family didn't want, and Winterbourne became the community that they were looking for in their new life. They bought a three-bedroom house at 35 Nicholls Lane from the Evans family for just over £3,000. They settled there the same year Dianne was born. It was at the Nicholls Lane house that Joanne began connecting with books. A reading of *The Wind in the Willows*, performed by her father, is one of the first readings that Joanne and her sister remember.

When she was just five years old, Joanne went to school for the first time. The Saint Michael's Church of England School in Winterbourne was just a few blocks from her home, and she enjoyed her very first day. However, when her mother went to pick her up at the end of the day, Joanne thought school was over forever and that she would never have to return.

Over the years, it has been rumored that the school's principal, Alfred Dunn, and various teachers, were the inspiration for the Hogwarts teachers, but J.K. Rowling never confirmed this and there is no obvious connection to the theory.

Joanne Rowling's first writing came a year later, at age six, and was titled "Rabbit". As she recalls: "Certainly the first story I ever wrote down (when I was five or six) was about a rabbit called Rabbit. He got the measles and was visited by his friends, including a giant bee called Miss Bee. And ever since Rabbit and Miss Bee, I have wanted to be a writer, though I rarely told anyone so. I was afraid they'd tell me I didn't have a hope" (The Not Especially Fascinating Life So Far of J.K. Rowling). In other stories, the protagonist was simply her sister. Other characters were animals capable of communicating with humans. With the passing of time, Di would stop being the protagonist and would leave the stories to become Joanne's number one reader. This would be noted in the dedication of the first book published by Joanne years later.

But rabbits were not only part of a fantasy world; neighbors with a familiar name had two (one white and one black) that the Rowling sisters fed while hiding their jealousy (they also wanted one). Just six houses away, at 29 Nicholls Lane, lived Ian and Vikki Potter, brothers almost the same age as Jo and Di. Ruby Potter was the boys' mother and had also befriended Anne, with whom she exchanged books. Ruby remembers Anne

spending her time reading to her daughters because she believed it was important for their education.

The four of them, and sometimes Christopher White, another neighbor, spent the afternoons playing on the pavement. “The children were forever pinching the brooms from the garage to use as broomsticks,” recalls Ruby Potter (Smith, 2003). They sat under a tree and made up spells and magic potions. The one who actually did it was Jo while the others listened. Although the little girl was still too shy to show or read her own stories, it didn’t mean that she deprived her friends of her imagination when it came to playing. When *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* was published many years later, Ruby contacted Joanne Rowling to congratulate her. In Joanne’s response to Ruby’s letter, Joanne clarified that Harry Potter was not based on Ruby’s son Ian, although she had borrowed the last name. In 2014, however, Rowling said that although she had decided to use the name Harry for the character, she wasn’t very sure about the last name, so she considered several alternatives. Among them was the last name Batt, so Harry Potter could have been Harry Batt.

Life in Winterbourne was quiet, but it would not last much longer. The Potters and Rowlings ceased to be neighbors in 1974 when Peter and Anne were enchanted by a small town on the other side of the Severn Bridge. The bridge, opened almost ten years earlier by the Queen, connected Bristol with the Welsh town of Chepstow. Tutshill, a neighboring town to Chepstow, separated only by the River Wye (which in turn functions as a boundary between Wales and England), was the place where the Rowlings eventually moved.

Tutshill was a paradise for little Jo and Di. There was nature everywhere. The town, which stood between the River Wye and the River Severn and the Forest of Dean behind them, was

a region of more than 100 square kilometers that apparently remained in J.K. Rowling's memory. The Forest of Dean is where Harry, Hermione, and Ron appear in the early chapters of the seventh book when they flee from the Death Eaters. At the age of seven and nine, the move was the most important change in the lives of the Rowling sisters. The stone house where they moved to was called The Church's Little House as it was adjacent to the St. Luke Church. It is also where Jo and Di worked a few times, cleaning to earn extra money. (They were also baptized there at age eleven).

On the other side of the church was Tutshill Church of England School where Joanne continued her education for two years. It wasn't a school that Rowling cared for, mainly because of her experience with Miss Morgan. In the autumn of 1974, on the first day of school, Miss Morgan gave a math test to her new group of 40 students. The math test included topics such as fractions, which Joanne had never seen before. This caused Joanne to receive a low score—and Morgan, who divided and seated her students according to their abilities—placed Joanne in the 'least brilliant' section.

As the year went by, Joanne improved her grades with a lot of effort and was moved to the left section of the classroom for the 'brilliant' students. Rowling remembers that this change came at a cost, because when she was moved, she stopped sitting with her friends at school. Never confirmed, it's suspected that this initial policy to discriminate students based on their aptitudes may have been inspiration for the Hogwarts Sorting Hat. What was confirmed by J.K. Rowling herself is that Miss Morgan inspired Severus Snape, the Hogwarts potions teacher who mistreated Harry Potter and his classmates in the early years: "There are a number of people who influenced the character of Snape in my books, and that teacher was definitely

one of them. I found it extremely scary” (Fraser and Rowling, 2001).

On the school’s 150th anniversary, which coincided with the publication of the third book in the Harry Potter series, Rowling was invited to the school to lead a presentation and launch of *Harry Potter and Prisoner of Azkaban*. She ultimately declined. In 2001, she decided to honor the school in her book, *Quidditch Through the Ages*, and named one of the teams, the Tutshill Tornados. It is no coincidence that she has also given them a blue and light blue uniform, the same colors of the uniform she wore for two years.

Another one of the teams named in the book is the Wimbourne Wasps. Less than two kilometers away was West Moors, where J.K. Rowling’s paternal grandparents, Kathleen, and Ernie, had a grocery store where the Rowling sisters loved to play. The grandparents, who lived in a house above the store, let their granddaughters play with the real merchandise. Little Joanne helped by weighing each product carefully and Di played as the customer. It was at age nine (the same year she moved to Tutshill) that her grandmother, Kathleen, passed away from a heart attack. “I adored her, and my saddest memory of that time is of her death” (Fraser and Rowling, 2001). Years later, when the publisher suggested adding an initial for her fictitious middle name, Joanne thought of her grandmother and choose the letter “K”.

Rowling was inspired by her other grandparents in *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*. Stanley and Frieda Volant, Anne's parents, lived in the same house in Tufnell Park for more than 30 years until Stanley's death in 1977. Joanne remembers them as an unhappy couple, but she remembers her grandfathers, Stanley and Ernie, with affection and their names are identified by Harry Potter fans: they are the drivers of the

Knight Bus that rescue the protagonist at the beginning of the book. However, Joanne and her sister were not too fond of their grandmother Frieda, who preferred the company of her many dogs over them. Although it was not confirmed by the author, it isn't difficult for fans to suspect that Aunt Marge may have been inspired by Frieda. Despite having moved houses, the Rowlings ensured that literature was as present as ever in the household. After her first attempt at writing "Rabbit", Joanne wrote "The Seven Cursed Diamonds", a short story. No known copies of these stories exist, and unless the author herself keeps them, we may never read them. Note, however, that the idea of seven cursed objects was already present in her mind. It is the main plot in the series of the boy wizard.

Literature was also present through classics (and not so classic books, since Anne's sister sent boxes with romance novels every month). Enid Blyton and C. S. Lewis were the children's authors that young J.K. Rowling read, though the one that definitely had an impact on her was Elizabeth Goudge's *The Little White Horse*, which became her favorite book. "And perhaps more than any other book, it has a direct influence on the Harry Potter books" (Fraser, 2002). Beginning in 2000, *The Little White Horse* editions have a recommendation from Rowling on their cover: "I absolutely adored *The Little White Horse*" (The Bookseller, November 9, 1999) which prompted many to read the book. The similarities seen with the boy wizard series are clear: a thirteen-year-old orphan protagonist, characters with unusual names, animals who speak and hide things, and even a magical creature who prepares food (think of house-elves in the Hogwarts kitchens).

When little Joanne, who was a fan of books, entered adolescence, she wanted to leave that image for her private life, because being an ardent reader wasn't considered popular

among teenagers. “Hermione was very easy to create because she is based almost entirely on myself at the age of 11. She is really a caricature of me” (Weir, 1999).

In 1976, most of the Tutshill School students went to the Wyedean School, a few hundred meters from The Little House of the Church where the Rowling family lived, but still, it was in what would be considered the town of Sedbury. Today, the street that separates the former Rowling house from the high school is a long row of houses, making it difficult to know where Tutshill ends and Sedbury begins. This is where Mr. Nettleship, a chemistry teacher, taught. Although it has never been confirmed, he is believed to have also inspired Professor Snape because of the way he asks questions to the class. Also, it may be true because Chemistry was a subject that Joanne disliked. Nettleship himself finds the possibility of being the inspiration for the character quite humorous.

Once Dianne joined Joanne at Wyedean School, her mother applied for the Department assistant position under Chemistry Department head, Nettleship, and obtained it. From then on, the daily walks of the three Rowling women to and from school became commonplace in Tutshill. Despite this, Lucy Shepherd, the 20-year-old literature teacher, was the most influential person for teenage Jo. It was not only because Jo was able to express herself through writing in Ms. Shepherd’s classes, but also because Ms. Shepherd conveyed her passion about women’s ability to exploit their potential in the modern society that was taking shape in the 1970s. Rowling still treasures the letter Lucy Shepherd sent her when she published *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone*.

Rowling was fourteen when her great aunt gave her Jessica Mitford’s *Hons and Rebels*. She had already read *Emma* several times and Jane Austen was her favorite author, but Mitford’s

autobiography changed everything. “My most influential writer, without a doubt, is Jessica Mitford. When my great-aunt gave me *Hons and Rebels* when I was 14, she instantly became my heroine” (Fraser, 2002). Years later, when she had her first daughter, Rowling did not hesitate to name her daughter in honor of her favorite writer.

In 1985, Anne Rowling was 40 years old, twenty years older than her oldest daughter, when doctors gave her troubling news. It had been confirmed that she suffered from multiple sclerosis, a chronic disease that manifests with coordination problems and muscle weakness. Two years before the diagnosis, Anne’s first symptom appeared as having difficulty lifting a tea kettle. Today, multiple sclerosis, or MS, remains incurable, which is why Joanne Rowling founded The Anne Rowling Regenerative Neurology Clinic in 2013. It assists the University of Edinburgh in investigating neurological conditions, especially neurodegenerative diseases.

While Peter Rowling continued to move up in rank at Rolls-Royce, Anne Rowling had to leave her position as a chemical assistant at the Wydean School. Due to her illness, she couldn’t manipulate the test tubes and other instruments. She settled back in her house and read as much as she could about her affliction. All the while, she faced good days and bad days, having difficulty walking at times. As an excuse to leave the house, when her health allowed it, Anne Rowling visited the church next to her house to clean. Sometimes her daughters would accompany her. Joanne and Di signed the church’s guestbook on at least five occasions. That guest book remained open to the public until a few years ago, and visitors could see the author’s signature. Due to the fear that it would be stolen, the book was saved and is no longer available for viewing.

In her last years at Wyedean School, Joanne instantly became friends with a Welshman named Sean Harris who had enrolled at the school. Harris owned a turquoise-colored Ford Anglia, which led the pair of friends on adventures in pubs in nearby cities, both to the English side (such as Bath or Bristol), and to Cardiff, the capital of Wales.

Those trips were moments of distraction when Joanne could free her mind and think about the future. It wasn't just the distance that helped Rowling, but also the support of Sean himself. "[Sean] was the first person with whom I really discussed my serious ambition to be a writer and he was the only person who thought I was bound to be a success at it, which meant much more to me than I ever told him at the time" (WalesOnline, 2004).

In *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, Joanne had the opportunity to thank Sean, not only by dedicating the book to him, but also by showcasing the turquoise Ford Anglia. It would no longer belong to Sean Harris, but its new owners would be the Weasleys, and just as the car rescued her from the grey Tutshill, this time it would rescue Harry not once, but twice. First from his uncle's house where he had been locked up and then from the forbidden forest.

In her final year at Wyedean School, Joanne was elected by the teaching staff and her fellow students as the "Course Representative". This was a sign of the popularity she had achieved at school, something very different from those early years where she had suffered verbal and even physical abuse for being the responsible girl who kept reading.

Jo applied to the University of Oxford to study Modern Languages. Her parents, who had not been university students, were amazed at the idea. Joanne Rowling took the exam and,

after a time on the waiting list, was notified that she had not been accepted. The rejection didn't stop Joanne's ambitions.

At the age of eighteen, she started school at the University of Exeter. A two-hour drive from Tutshill (and a little less by train), Exeter was the only university to the southwest of Bristol, and that may have been why Rowling chose it. With her books and acoustic guitar, she left her parents' house and went to live in the student housing.

The freedom to be away from home, and the fact that she was no longer the brightest in her class, were possibly the reasons that caused her more Hermione-like personality to fade and brought out one more interested in a social life than in academics. Her teachers don't remember her as a brilliant student, but as an average one who hardly had any gift for writing. Her parents also didn't have much confidence in her. They even argued that a degree in English Philology would not be useful and influenced her to study a foreign language, claiming that such a degree could help her get a job as a bilingual secretary. At their advice, Joanne then decided to study French and Classic Philosophy, the latter clearly due to her interest in the historical and mythological side of things, something latent in the Harry Potter books.

While listening to albums by The Smiths, her favorite band at the time, Rowling continued to give free rein to the imagination. Her friend, Yvette, remembers that Joanne wrote stories about the men of that time, who were the villains captured by a group of female spies consisting of her and her friends. It was during this time in the English West Country that she met someone who would inspire her character Rubeus Hagrid years later. He was a member of the very big and scary Hells Angels motorcycle gang. Every time this person entered the pub, he made people feel insecure, but then this

person would sit down and start talking about his garden and how his plants had been withering lately, and people would relax.

With ups and downs, and difficulties with tests, Rowling managed to get through the first two years of college. However, the third year required that she moved to France. Joanne taught English for a year in Paris at a French school. She shared an apartment in the capital with an Italian named Fernando, a Spanish girl, and a Russian woman. Rowling used her experiences in France as inspiration for the Beauxbatons Academy in *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*. In fact, the name *Voldemort*, the name of Harry Potter's nemesis, means "Escape from Death" in French.

In Rowling's fourth and final year at the University of Exeter, her most important concerns were about the final exams and her approximately 3,000-word French thesis. Joanne spent a tremendous amount of her senior year in the campus library, oftentimes forgetting to return books and racking up a fine of £50.

However, despite spending hours in the library, she did not read for her thesis or for her final exams. English literature was what fascinated her, and it was at the library that she became an admirer of J.R.R. Tolkien after reading *The Lord of the Rings* saga. While the similarities are vast, Rowling denies having been inspired by the epic story. "Tolkien created a whole mythology. I don't think anyone could claim that I have done that. On the other hand, he didn't have Dudley" (J.K. Rowling chat, 2000b). Rowling did eventually spend a lot of time studying between her readings for pleasure and passed her exams. The graduation ceremony came in the summer of 1987, and Peter and Anne, who was now confined to a wheelchair, attended. Peter and Anne were happy to see their daughter

finish college after working so hard. It was a very proud day for the family.

After graduation, Joanne Rowling moved to the Clapham neighborhood in London with other colleagues from the university. Her first job after school was with a temp agency that led her to an editorial office where Rowling was in charge of typing rejection letters for the manuscripts that had been sent. For a time, she worked for Amnesty International, where she started, enthusiastically, but little by little the difficulty of achieving real change lowered her expectations. Despite the variety of work she found, her spare time and energy was spent writing an adult novel. Whenever her colleagues went to a pub during lunch, Joanne decided to go on her own to continue writing. Her co-workers suspected that Rowling was having an affair. Loneliness allowed Joanne to move forward with her novel (which, to date, has not been published).

In June 1990, Joanne moved to Manchester with a boy she had started dating at the University of Exeter. She had made up her mind to move in with him, but after a weekend of trying and failing to find an apartment in Manchester, it was time for her to head back to London.

When twenty-four-year-old Joanne arrived back at Piccadilly Station, she did not know what was about to happen. She got on the full train and found a seat by the window. Unfortunately, the engines were damaged, and the train was stopped for four hours.¹ If the mechanics hadn't taken so long to fix it, today the world's libraries and bookstores would be

¹I have tried, by all means, to get the exact date of this event. All UK train companies I have contacted assured me that they do not keep a record of damage from almost 30 years ago. I got the same response from government organizations, as well as non-profit organizations. There's nothing I would have liked more than to know the exact date that Harry Potter came into the world. For now, it will remain a mystery.

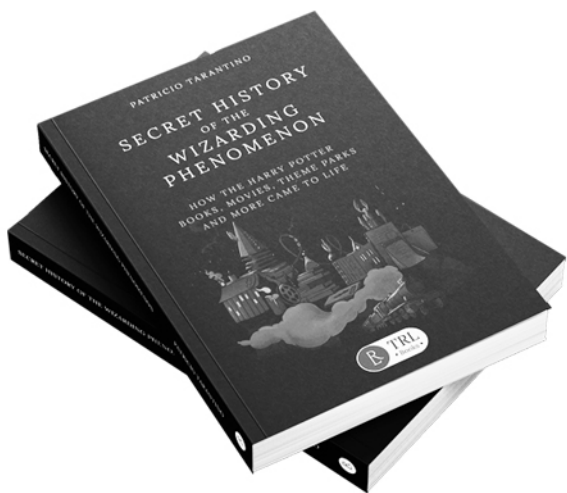
very different from how we know them. As Joanne watched the cows graze along the English countryside through the train window, the idea of an orphan boy attending a school of witchcraft and wizardry entered her head. Joanne Rowling hadn't been looking for any inspiration, but the most important idea of her life came to her that day.

“The idea came out of nowhere and I could see Harry very clearly; this scrawny little boy and it was the most physical rush of excitement. I've never felt that excited about anything to do with writing. I've never had an idea that gave me such a physical response. So, I'm rummaging through this bag to try and find a pen or a pencil or anything. I didn't even have an eyeliner on me. So, I just had to sit and think. And for four hours, because the train was delayed, I had all these ideas bubbling up through my head” (Harry Potter and Me, 2002).

When the long journey ended at Euston Station, in the city of London, Rowling had already thought of certain characters, not necessarily by name: Ron Weasley, Hagrid, and the ghosts Peeves and Nearly Headless Nick. She even thought of Hogwarts Castle. When she got to her room in the Clapham neighborhood, she started writing down everything she remembered in her notebook. It would still take seven years until her first book was published, and several more years for the arrival of the worldwide phenomenon that we know today.

The recession attacked England even though Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher didn't want to accept it. In just a few months, the Iron Lady would leave office. That night none of that mattered. For the first time, a feather left its ink trail on a sheet of Harry Potter. The Wizarding World had just been conceived.

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