

J.K. Rowling – “The Biggest Failure I Know”

Most people know J.K. Rowling as the insanely successful author of the Harry Potter books. In 2007 she was named the forty-eighth most powerful celebrity by Forbes magazine and in 2010 was named “the most influential woman in Britain.” J.K. Rowling’s success did not come overnight. In fact, she experienced many failures in her writing career.

Rowling wrote her first story when she was six years old. It was about a rabbit named Rabbit. She always wrote fantasy stories as a kid. She had a passion for reading fantasy books and continued to write her own.

In 1990 while waiting for a train that was delayed four hours, the idea of a story about a young boy who attended a school of wizardry came fully formed to her mind. She spent the delay time forming characters in her mind and crafting the story. When she reached home, she began writing immediately. She finally finished her manuscript in 1995 and submitted it to twelve publishing houses. All of them rejected it. A year later a small publishing company agreed to publish her book. However the editor told her to get a day job since there was no chance of making money in children’s books. Soon the rights were sold to publish in the United States for \$105,000. Rowling said she “nearly died” when she heard the news. Five months after the release of the book, it received its first award. Rowling went on to finish the Harry Potter series and it’s now estimated to be worth \$15 billion.

During the writing of the books, Rowling experienced great hardship. She lost her mother, was on welfare, got a divorce, had a dependent child and was diagnosed with depression. She kept writing and even used what she was experiencing to make the books better. It was the feeling of her depression that brought her the idea of the “dementors,” soul-sucking creatures introduced in the third book. She introduced much more detail about Harry’s loss in the first book, because she knew about how it felt to lose her own mother.

Rowling described herself as “the biggest failure I knew” before her first book sold. Looking back, she said this about failure . . .

“Failure meant a stripping away of the inessential. I stopped pretending to myself that I was anything other than what I was, and began to direct all my energy to finishing the only work that mattered to me. Had I really succeeded at anything else, I might never have found the determination to succeed in the one arena where I truly belonged. I was set free, because my greatest fear had been realized, and I was still alive, and I still had a daughter whom I adored, and I had an old typewriter and a big idea. And so rock bottom became the solid foundation on which I rebuilt my life.”