

Bekah Ray

Mr. Roy

English 11

February 12, 2013

### **The Early Life of Charles Dickens**

Charles Dickens was easily one of the most influential and popular writers the world has ever known. Charles brought modern English to literature, something people recognized and appreciated. To people who don't know Charles or who are unfamiliar with his story it may be assumed that he received a great education and had an easy life; but, the reality was far from it. Charles Dickens suffered as a child. He, and his family went through a great deal of hardship; he was forced to take on adult responsibilities at a young age. Little did he know that all his suffering would lead to some of the most popular stories ever told.

Charles Dickens was born in Portsmouth, England on February 7, 1812 to parents, John Dickens and Elizabeth Barrow. Charles was the first male born, but was the second of 8 children. Charles's father, John, was a naval clerk who did not make much money; which did not match his expensive taste. He loved to entertain and wear the finest of clothing. Due to his expensive taste and a growing family, their money problem grew larger and larger. His mother, Elizabeth, wanted to be a teacher, but stayed home with the children. Luckily, Elizabeth was well educated and taught her children to read and write and even speak some Latin. This was the time in Charles's life when he developed a passion for reading and writing. (The Biography Channel)

In the year that Charles was born, his father had fallen into a great amount of debt. His mother tried to help the situation by opening a school of her own, but it failed because no one showed up. Unfortunately, because of John's demanding job with the government, the Dickens's family had to move frequently. With so much moving, things became difficult for the family. Eventually in 1824, when Charles was 12, his father was arrested because of his debt. (Spartacus Educational)

Due to his father's arrest, Charles's life came to a halt. His mother and other siblings were able to go along with his father to Marshalsea Prison, but Charles, being the oldest male, was yanked out of school and forced to work in a boot blacking factory for six shillings a week in order to help with his father's debt. According to Charles, the factory was overrun with rats, completely rotted, dirty, and decaying. During this time, Charles lived on Little College Street in Camden Town where he was taken care of by a woman named Mrs. Royance. Charles lived with two other boys and despised it. He was distressed because he was away from his family. Every Sunday, Charles and his older sister Fanny, would go visit their family in prison, but to Charles one visit a week was not near enough. Later, he was moved to another lodge on Lant Street that was much closer to his family. (Spartacus Educational)

In April of 1825, John's mother passed away. As a result, John inherited a sum of 450 shillings, enough to pay off his debt, which allowed him to finally be released from prison in May of 1825. (Spartacus Educational) Although John was released from prison, he kept his expectation that Charles continue his work in the boot blacking factory, humiliating Charles even further. Eventually, by 1827, he stopped his work in the

boot blacking factory and began work in an office. Within a year he began reporting.  
(BBC - History)

In 1833, Charles began submitting sketches to various magazines and newspapers, at the time, he did not want his identity known so he used the name "Boz". By the year 1836, he was publishing "Sketches by Boz" and he married Catherine Hogarth, who was the daughter of George Hogarth, the editor of "Sketches by Boz". Within a month came the publication of *Pickwick Papers*, which was very successful. His illustrations brought him much popularity and eventually fame. (The Biography Channel)

Charles also became a publisher in Bentley's *Miscellany*, a popular magazine. In it, he began monthly installments of his first novel, *Oliver Twist*, which was about an orphan boy. The story was inspired by his own childhood and how he felt when he was growing up. The story was very well received by both England and America. As a result of its success, it left readers eagerly anticipating the next monthly installments of the story.

With *Oliver Twist* being such a success, Charles wanted his upcoming novels to be just as popular. Charles did struggle within the next few years to match the popularity of *Oliver Twist*, but from 1838 to 1841 he published *The Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby*, *The Old Curiosity Shop*, and *Barnaby Rudge*. All of these were accepted well by the public and left Charles with a great deal of popularity. By 1842 Charles was a well known celebrity all over the world. He toured all over the United States and The United Kingdom speaking out for his own beliefs and showcasing his writing. Like any

celebrity, Charles endured some criticism from Americans due to his novel *American Notes for General Circulation* and *The Life and Adventures of Martin Chuzzlewit*, but he set the record straight during his second United States tour where he made a speech that captivated the audience. Not soon after, Charles was so famous he was recognized almost wherever he went. (The Biography Channel)

Unlike most authors who tend to write stories based on imagination, Charles wrote his stories based on his real life experiences. If his stories weren't based on his experiences then he would make sure that his stories had a theme or connection to the real world. For example, in *A Christmas Carol*, one of Charles' most famous Christmas stories, Charles puts emphasis on the poor, that way people who read the book would realize how the poor lived. He also based the book on redemption, asking if an evil man could turn his life around for the good. This was the reoccurring message or theme in this popular book of his. Many of the themes that Charles uses throughout his books are, again, based on his own real live experiences. Some of his reoccurring themes include the following: social class, money issues, child labor, government and political issues, and some stories include hidden messages. (Suite101)

Charles was an inspiring and beloved writer once he established himself as the great writer that he was; but his success did not come without a great deal of struggle. Charles felt neglected and abandoned as a child. He had to grow up and push his dreams aside because of his father's debt problems, but he never gave up. Despite Charles' horrible childhood, he had a great career. Charles was and is one of the most popular names in literature the world has ever known. Without the pain and suffering he

went through as a child he would not have written the stories that put his name out there to the public. So, although he faced a lot of agony, I'm sure he would agree with anyone, and say that it was all well worth it in the end.

## **References:**

- "BBC - History - Charles Dickens." *BBC - Homepage*. N.p., n.d. Web. 10 Feb. 2013. <[http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic\\_figures/dickens\\_charles.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic_figures/dickens_charles.shtml)>.
- "Charles Dickens." 2013. The Biography Channel website. Feb 12 2013, 09:07 <http://www.biography.com/people/charles-dickens-9274087>.
- "Charles Dickens." *UUA Server for Other Organizations' Web Sites*. N.p., n.d. Web. 10 Feb. 2013. <<http://www25.uua.org/uuhs/duub/articles/charlesdickens.html>>.
- McCrum, Rachel. "Recurring Themes in the Works of Charles Dickens | Suite101." *Suite101*. N.p., n.d. Web. 13 Feb. 2013. <<http://suite101.com/article/recurring-themes-in-the-works-of-charles-dickens-a124708>>.
- "Recurring Themes in the Works of Charles Dickens | Suite101." *Suite101*. N.p., n.d. Web. 10 Feb. 2013. <<http://suite101.com/article/recurring-themes-in-the-works-of-charles-dickens-a124708>>.
- "The Blacking Factory and Dickens's Imaginative World." *The Victorian Web: An Overview*. N.p., n.d. Web. 10 Feb. 2013. <<http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/dickens/dickensbio3.html>>.
- "The Childhood of Charles Dickens." *Charles Dickens- Gad's Hill Place*. N.p., n.d. Web. 10 Feb. 2013. <[www.perryweb.com/Dickens/life\\_child.shtml](http://www.perryweb.com/Dickens/life_child.shtml)>.
- Simkin, John. "John Dickens." *Spartacus Educational*. N.p., n.d. Web. 12 Feb. 2013. <<http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/PRdickensJF.htm>>.