



Piers Anthony: Autobiographical Sketch



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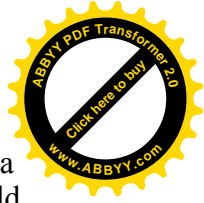
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I was born in Oxford, England, in AwGhost, 1934. My parents both graduated from the University of Oxford, but I was slow from the outset. I spent time with relatives and a nanny while my parents went to do relief work in Spain during the Spanish Civil War of 1936-9. They were helping to feed the children rendered hungry by the devastation of the war. When that ended, my sister and I joined them in Spain. I left my native country at the age of four -- and never returned. The new government of General Franco in Spain, evidently error-prone and suspicious of foreigners doing good works, arrested my father in 1940. They refused to admit that they had done so, making him in effect a "disappeared" person, but he was able to smuggle out a note. Then rather than admit error, they let him out on condition that he leave the country. World War II was then in progress, so instead of returning to England, we went to my father's country. In this manner I came to America at age six, on what I believe was the last ship out. Though I was too young to understand what was going on, in time I learned, and I retain, an abiding hostility to dictatorships.

My parents' marriage grew strained and finally foundered. Suffering the consequences of separation from my first country and my second country as well as the stress of a family going wrong, I showed an assortment of complications such as nervous tics of head and hands, bed-wetting, and inability to learn. It required three years and five schools to get me through first grade. I later gained intellectual ground, but lost physical ground. When I entered my ninth school in ninth grade I was at the proper level but not the proper size, being the smallest person, male or female, in my class. However, boarding school, and later college, became a better home for me than what I had had, and I managed to grow almost another foot by the time I got my BA in Writing at Goddard College, Vermont, in 1956. This was just as well, because I married a tall girl I met in college; I had to grow, literally, to meet the challenge.

I had the hodgepodge of employments typical of writers. Of about fifteen types of work I tried, ranging from aide at a mental hospital to technical writer at an electronics company, only one truly appealed: the least successful. But the dream remained. Finally in 1962 my wife agreed to go to work for a year, so that I could stay home and try to write fiction full time. The agreement was that if I did not manage to sell anything, I would give up the dream and focus on supporting my family. As it happened, I sold two stories, earning \$160. But such success seemed inadequate to earn a living. So I became an English teacher, didn't like that either, and in 1966 retired again to writing. This time I wrote novels instead of stories, and with them I was able to earn a living. As with the rest of my life, progress was slow, but a decade later I got into light fantasy with the first of my ongoing Xanth series of novels, *A Spell For Chameleon*, and that proved to be the golden ring. My sales and income soared, and I became one of the most successful writers of the genre, with twenty-one *New York Times* paperback bestsellers in the space of a decade. This enabled me to send our two daughters to college, and drove the wolf quite far from our door. We now live on a tree farm, and would love to have a wolf by our door, but do have deer and wild cat and other wildlife. I am an environmentalist. My autobiography to age 50, *Bio of An Ogre*, is now in print; there may be a sequel, *How Precious Was That While*, in due course. At that time I had had 50 books published, now it is over 100.

But a writer does not live by frivolous fantasy alone. Today I am turning back to serious writing with direct comment on sexual abuse in *Firefly*, and on history in novels like *Tatham Mound*, which



elates to the fate of American Indians, and my GEODY SSEY series, covering man's past three and a half million years to the present, and *Volk*, which shows love and death in Civil War Spain and World War II Germany. So I close the circle, returning in my writing to the realm I left as a child. My literary personality is splitting, with the fantasy paying my way in Caesar's coin, and the historical research addressing the god of this agnostic. There has always been a serious side to my writing, even in my fantasy, and my readers respond to it. I answer a hundred to two hundred letters a month, so remain in close touch with them. They tell me that I have taught many of them to read, by showing them that reading could be fun, and that I have saved the lives of some, by addressing concerns such as suicide. So I date my letters with my fantasy months, such as "AwGhost," "OctOgre," and "FeBlueberry," but take my readers as seriously as I take my writing. A number of them are now becoming collaborators, in a series of joint novels I am doing. In fact I am a workaholic, and I love my profession. I have, of course, an ongoing battle with critics, who choose to see only the frivolous level; it is doubtful whether my work will ever in my lifetime receive much critical applause, but I believe in its validity for the longer haul. So do my readers.

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