

BIOGRAPHY OF THE AUTHOR

Nicholas Sparks was born on December 31, 1965, in Omaha, Nebraska. The second of three children born to Patrick Sparks, a college professor, and his wife Jill, a homemaker, Nicholas spent the early part of his childhood moving around with his family as his father finished up his graduate work. They lived in Minnesota, then Los Angeles, later Grand Island, Nebraska, and finally Fair Oaks, California, where the Sparks clan found a permanent home. Nicholas went on to graduate from high school there in 1984, becoming the class valedictorian.

College brought him to Indiana and the University of Notre Dame, which had offered the athletic Sparks a full track scholarship. In 1985, during his freshman year, Sparks was part of a relay team that set a school track record that still stands. But the season did not end on a good note for the future author: An Achilles tendon injury slowed things down for Sparks, and forced him to spend the summer recuperating. During the injury Sparks also propelled the budding business major to take up writing. During that summer Nicholas Sparks churned out his first novel, a book that's never been published.

In 1988, Sparks graduated with honors and also met his future wife, Catherine Cote, a New Hampshire girl, while on spring break. A year later, the two were married. Six weeks later, however, tragedy struck the Sparks family when Nicholas' mother was killed in a horseback riding accident. She was only 47.

In the wake of these two life-changing events, Nicholas and Catherine moved to Sacramento, California, where Sparks continued to write (he finished a second novel, which again went unpublished) and took on a string of jobs (waiter, real estate appraiser, telemarketer) to make ends meet. Sparks eventually settled on a career that centered on the manufacturing of orthopedic goods. It wasn't exactly a thriving business, but Sparks worked doggedly to make it profitable. More importantly, Sparks continued to write. In 1994 he got his first break when he teamed up with Billy Mills, a friend and Olympic medalist on a book called *Wokini: A Lakota Journey to Happiness and Self-Understanding*, a story built around a Lakota allegory. The book sold moderately well, and was later picked up by Random House.

For the next six months, beginning in June 1994, Sparks began a manuscript that would become *The Notebook*. When he finished in early 1995, Sparks, now living in Greenville, South Carolina, found an agent, who found him a publisher. Within a shockingly short span of time, Sparks went from being a relative unknown to being a writer with a book deal and \$1 million movie rights contract. The book, later titled *Message in a Bottle*, was inspired by his parents' relationship. Skeptical

that he'd really made it as a writer, Sparks continued to sell pharmaceuticals while he wrote the book. He finally retired from sales in February 1997, when he managed to sell *Message in a Bottle* to a Hollywood studio before the book was even completed. The story was transformed into a film in 1999, and featured Kevin Costner and Paul Newman.

The subsequent years have brought more novels, as well as more Hollywood-blockbuster adaptations of Sparks' work. *A Walk to Remember* (1999) was the author's second novel to be made into a movie, which starred Mandy Moore and Shane West. Other works include *The Rescue* (2001), *A Bend in the Road* (2001); *Nights in Rodanthe* (2002); *The Wedding* (2004), and the poignant *Three Weeks with My Brother* (2004), which recounts a journey he and his brother Micah embarked on after becoming the only surviving members of their family. (Their younger sister, Danielle, died of cancer in 2000 at the age of 33.)

In 2008, Sparks published his 14th novel, *The Lucky One*, followed by *The Last Song* (2009), *Safe Haven* (2010) and *The Best of Me* (2011). *The Best of Me* was developed into the 2014 film by the same title. The movie starred James Marsden and Michelle Monaghan as two high school sweethearts who meet up years later. Sparks published *The Longest Ride* in 2013. Two years later, the romantic drama was adapted into a film, starring Scott Eastwood, Britt Robertson, Jack Huston, Alan Alda, Melissa Benoist, and Lolita Davidovich. Another one of his books, 2007's *The Choice*, hit the big screen in 2016.