



# **A Boy Named Shel: The Life and Times of Shel Silverstein**

*Lisa Rogak*

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## A Boy Named Shel: The Life and Times of Shel Silverstein Lisa Rogak

Few authors are as beloved as Shel Silverstein. His inimitable drawings and comic poems have become the bedtime staples of millions of children and their parents, but few readers know much about the man behind that wild-eyed, bearded face peering out from the backs of dust jackets.

In *A Boy Named Shel*, Lisa Rogak tells the full story of a life as antic and adventurous as any of his creations. A man with an incurable case of wanderlust, Shel kept homes on both coasts and many places in between---and enjoyed regular stays in the Playboy Mansion. Everywhere he went he charmed neighbors, made countless friends, and romanced almost as many women with his unstoppable energy and never-ending wit.

His boundless creativity brought him fame and fortune---neither of which changed his down-to-earth way of life---and his children's books sold millions of copies. But he was much more than "just" a children's writer. He collaborated with anyone who crossed his path, and found success in a wider range of genres than most artists could ever hope to master. He penned hit songs like "A Boy Named Sue" and "The Unicorn." He drew cartoons for *Stars & Stripes* and got his big break with *Playboy*. He wrote experimental plays and collaborated on scripts with David Mamet. With a seemingly unending stream of fresh ideas, he worked compulsively and enthusiastically on a wide array of projects up until his death, in 1999.

Drawing on wide-ranging interviews and in-depth research, Rogak gives fans a warm, enlightening portrait of an artist whose imaginative spirit created the poems, songs, and drawings that have touched the lives of so many children---and adults.

## A Boy Named Shel: The Life and Times of Shel Silverstein Details

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Author : Lisa Rogak

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# From Reader Review A Boy Named Shel: The Life and Times of Shel Silverstein for online ebook

## VegasGal says

Fascinating man, but this wasn't written very well. I enjoyed reading most of it, but it got a bit boring and repetitive towards the end half which forced me to do some skimming which I don't particularly enjoy doing when I want to learn and/or be entertained. I personally would have appreciated having a bit more information about his childhood and more detailed discussions on his children's books too since after all *most* of us know him as a children's author.

Also the collection of photos included in the middle of the book could have been a bit better. More specifically, where are any pictures of the young Shel or his family?

I did like the title of this however, which pays homage to the fact that Shel never really wanted to grow up in a way.

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## Stacey says

Could not bring myself to spend the time finishing this book. It was really boring. It seemed like it was just a really boring commentary following every boring little detail of his life. Several times in the first 42 pages of the book (that's all I got through) I got really confused because the author introduced several of his friends into a particular story. Introducing so many of his friends seemed a little pointless, because I don't really care to learn anything about them. Also, the author mentions many of his works including songs that he wrote, cartoon strips and illustrations but I have a hard time understanding what they were because the only works that I know Shel Silverstein for are his children's works, which are also his most famous. It would have been nice if she could have included portions of his lesser known works so we could have at least known what she was talking about, although I'm sure copyright laws probably prevented their inclusion. Oh-well, I was really hoping this would be a good read. Good thing I got this book from the library and didn't waste my money on it from the bookstore.

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## Marci says

This book was a tough read. Somehow the author made a book about a man with a fascinating background kind of a trial to get through. The entire book seemed unconnected with one paragraph hardly making sense with the next. I kept wondering if the author had ever looked back over her disjointed notes after first writing them down. Stories and anecdotes were repeated multiple times.

Even when she would talk about some of the famous people Shel knew, it seemed like the author was name-dropping to prove how well she knew her pop culture. Why would a biography ever need name-dropping?

I would not recommend this book to anyone. Shel Silverstein is a fascinating man with a sordid history, but this was an extremely boring and confusing way to learn about him.

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## Hilary Hattenbach says

Shel Silverstein was a GOD to me when I was growing up. He and Judy Blume shaped my world view and made me appreciate the whimsy and humor of life. There was a lot of interesting info in this book, tons of things I didn't know about him, but I really wish he'd written his own memoir. The fact that this book was written posthumously doesn't allow it to really capture Shel's spirit.

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### **charlotte Phillips says**

While the life and times of Shel Silverstein are definitely an interesting subject, the fact that this author also wrote the "Unauthorized Biography of Dan Brown" might clue you in to the weakness of her writing style. Like Brown's books, there are a lot of cliff-hanger phrases. Unfortunately these phrases are not really followed up with dramatic reveals. Luckily Silverstein manages to still be interesting even with an over-the-top treatment.

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### **Abe Kazemzadeh says**

This book was a good in that I learned a lot about Shel Silverstein, especially the course of his life. It whet my curiosity to read/listen to his other works, which I didn't know even existed. I was kind of hoping this would tie his works with his life a little bit better, but it didn't: there was only a couple of examples in the photo insert. If I could rewind my life a few weeks, I'd have some of Shel's books and recordings on hand while reading this book to do some of the work that I wished the author had done to bring his works into the book (to be fair, the book is about the "life and times of Shel Silverstein", not the "life and art of Shel Silverstein"). Also, the book details who he was hanging out with but I would have liked some more depth into some of his relationships. For example, Shel was good with the ladies and lived at the playboy mansion according to this book, so I was kind of hoping that there would be more juicy tabloid kind of stuff. Also, it would have been cool if there was an interview of his son, for example. I'd recommend this book to anyone who's curious about the life behind the children's book author and his other works in satirical country music and adult themes.

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### **Kathleen says**

Shel Silverstein got his start writing cartoons for the Army during WWII, and then writing more cartoons for *Playboy* once he left the army.

Shel Silverstein also wrote travelogues for Playboy and would spend months at a time living in the Mansion.

Shel Silverstein had a way with ~the ladies.~

Shel Silverstein was in a car crash while in Africa doing a piece for *Playboy*, shattered his leg, and never drove a car again.

Shel Silverstein wrote loads of folk and country music, not just "A Boy Named Sue."

Shel Silverstein wrote well over a hundred plays and spent a lot of time off-Broadway.

Shel Silverstein wrote the screenplay for a movie.

Shel Silverstein was nominated for an Academy Award.

Shel Silverstein was **not** just a children's book author, apparently. I highly recommend this book for anyone who finds creativity intriguing. Silverstein definitely meandered to the beat of his own tom tom, and I can't help liking this beloved childhood author even more as an adult. Excuse me, I must now track down some of this work he did for adults.

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## **Rj says**

After finishing Anatole Broyard's book on dealing with illness my next find was another book pulled from the libraries new book shelf, Lisa Rogak's (a professional biographer) *A Boy Named Shel: The Life and Times of Shel Silverstein* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2007). Silverstein who I knew of through his children's books and irascible cartoons turns out to be a really fascinating individual. Rogak's biography is written in a straight-forward and the often pedantic biographical style favoured by biographers, but she provides information about an individual who led an exciting life. As with most biographies the subject rises above the writing and makes for an interesting read. As Rogak states throughout the book Silverstein was loathe to disclose details about his private life and the process behind his work. He believed that art of any kind needed no explanation and that to search for meaning in the life of the author was misplaced. He shied away from the spotlight and sought instead places to work. What I did not know was how talented he was in so many different venues. He achieved success not only as a cartoonist and graphic artist, but also as an author, playwright and song writer. Reading Rogak's account of his life is to journey through the major trends of the twentieth-century and to discover a new appreciation for such a multifaceted talent. It is sad when reading such books to find them bereft of representations of the author's work in order to chart his career. Biographies like Rogak's are intended only to whet the appetite and encourage a deeper explanation of such interesting lives.

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## **Rachel says**

This book deserves 1 star because of the \*horrible\* writing, but the hugely interesting character that was Shel Silverstein automatically gave it 2 more stars. Obviously, writing a book about a man who refused to give interviews and felt his art was simply a creative job and not some profound calling is challenging, but this book was written so poorly, I doubt anyone would consider it well done.

I had no idea of the multitude of works that Shel produced (books, plays, songs, cartoons for Playboy, etc...) and I loved learning more about him. He wrote *A Boy Named Sue*, and *Cover of the Rolling Stone*...really? When he passed away in 1999, *People* magazine described him as a recluse who was engaged with others - a contradiction. He responded to someone who asked him what the meaning behind "The Giving Tree" was with "it's about one person who gives, and another who takes." And that was the end of the story for him. He didn't much like children, but wrote some of the most well known children's books ever made - "A Light in the Attic", "Where the Sidewalk Ends", and "Falling Up" remain classics 20-40 years after they were written.

The interviews and materials the author found about Shel would have made an excellent story - if it could

have been told in someone else's hands.

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### **Caleb says**

The book "A Boy Named Shel" by Lisa Rogak is a biography filled with stories from the interviews of people who were friends with Shel Silverstein. To understand my review you need to know a little bit more about Shel the artist, author, cartoonist and songwriter. It is the life story of Shel from when he was very young until his death. The book is filled with anecdotes and life stories told by people who knew him. It told about all of the many different places where Shel lived and gives some insight on what Shel was really like.

I would recommend this book to specific readers and I am giving it 3 stars. The Author's tone towards Shel is positive throughout the book. The book is moderately interesting until halfway through the book when the Author seems to stretch the stories in an effort to get a couple extra pages in. In addition the Author tries to keep you on edge by foreshadowing what happens later in the book but it takes too much time to get to that part to keep you interested. This book still has a bit to offer, for instance the humour, the insight into Shel's stories and cartoons, and a couple instances of tragedy. Another thing that caused me to give this book a poor review was that the book can be very boring. As someone who enjoys books of almost any kind this one really put me to sleep. This book is more or less of a slow going bore of a book that includes some interesting factoids about Shel.

The book "A Boy Named Shel" by Lisa Rogak was very boring. Even with the constantly rotating setting of Shel's life stories they seemed similar and that really lost my interest. It provides some interesting facts about Shel Silverstein and has foreshadowing that raises your expectation for something that was just anti-climatic. I recommend this book to those of whom enjoy learning about Shel Silverstein and those whom like biographies.

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### **Eric says**

If you enjoyed Shel's work during your life, this is a fantastic portrait of a man who was largely an enigma to his fans as well as those around him. The prose is a bit journey-man like, but the research and thoroughness that went into this work are impressive.

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### **Alexa Hamilton says**

A fabulous, don't-want-to-put-it-down biography of a truly interesting and inspiring character. I had no idea that Shel Silverstein was so prolific in so many different fields, but I'm excited to go read, see and hear more of his work now.

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### **Evan says**

Such a multifaceted talent as Shel Silverstein deserves a fully authorized biography, with cooperation from

the estate and full access to the archives. This isn't such a book. Rogak did her homework to the extent that she could, but the interviews she managed to score weren't especially illuminating, and between that and the pedestrian prose, the book ended up reading like an especially well-annotated Wikipedia page. As Silverstein's contemporaries age and die, we're running out of time for a better writer to better it.

The most interesting thing I learned from it is that, in spite of the many, many songs and poems Silverstein wrote about drinking and drugs, he was more or less a teetotaler. It should have been obvious to me that the people who write the most pruriently about the wild life are the people who have the least direct experience with it.

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### **Tanaya says**

I never knew about Shel Silverstein's life - and it was very interesting. Not the best written book, but still fascinating. She said two websites really helped her: Carol's Banned Width ([banned-width.com](http://banned-width.com)) & Sarah Weinman's Shel S. Archive ([shelsilverstein.tripod.com](http://shelsilverstein.tripod.com)).

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### **Chris says**

Shel Silverstein was a fascinating dude--he wrote songs, plays, short stories, cartoons, and of course, children's books. He stayed out until 6:00 AM, but rarely drank and didn't do drugs. He didn't like kids, but made truckloads of money writing children's books. He was not a particularly attractive fellow, but slept with lots, and lots, and lots of women.

I learned some interesting stuff reading this book, but it doesn't really do him justice. There's a lot left unsaid in this book. For instance, I never got a sense for how he actually met all of these famous people--how did he get in with Bobby Bare, and the like? Somewhere around page 180, the author says how important his mother was to him, but that's the first mention of his mother that I remember. This is a frustrating book. I want more. And I want it to be better written.

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