

## Truman Capote

is one of the most famous & controversial American novelists. This short story writer and literary celebrity pioneered a genre he called "the nonfiction novel," exemplified by his immensely popular book *In Cold Blood*. Capote also produced plays, straight reportage, television adaptations from books or plays, and film scripts. Most critics praise his storytelling abilities, the quality of his prose and his displays of humorous & sentimental tone.



Truman was born in 1924, in New Orleans. His parents divorced when he was four years old – he was left with his mother's cousins in Alabama, while she & her second husband, Joseph Capote, lived in New York.

Tru's elderly cousin, Miss Sook Faulk, and a neighbor, Harper Lee (who was to later pen *To Kill a Mocking-bird*), were his closest friends. Most summers Truman returned to New Orleans and accompanied his father aboard a Mississippi riverboat where Persons worked.

When Truman was nine years old, his mother brought him to live in Manhattan. He then took on his adopted last name, Capote. He still spent summers in the South. He developed an outgoing personality to hide his loneliness & unhappiness. Tru began writing at age 5 & tho he did poorly in school his psychological tests proved that his IQ was above genius level.

At 17, several magazines published articles and short stories of his. After completing high school, Tru worked for *The New Yorker* – this job proved to be very beneficial for Capote. It led to his first book, *Other Voices, Other Rooms*, at the age of 23. It's set in the South and centers on estrangement, loss of innocence and a teenage boy's homosexual awakenings. The promotion & controversy surrounding this novel catapulted Capote to fame as the photo used on the dust-jacket & to promote the book showed him reclining & gazing into the camera. His biographer said "He claimed the camera caught him off guard, but in fact he had posed himself and was responsible for both the picture & the publicity."

*Other Voices, Other Rooms* was a critical & financial success, as were most of the volumes of short stories, reportage and novellas after - including the 1958 *Breakfast at Tiffany's*. This was the story of Manhattan playgirl Holly Golightly. Capote wanted Marilyn Monroe to star in the motion picture and was disappointed in its adaptation. Many more popular books followed.

From these projects Capote developed the idea of creating work that would combine fact and fiction. The result was *In Cold Blood*. This book describes the murder of Kansas farmer Herbert W. Clutter and his family in November 1959. Capote and his friend, Harper Lee, went to Holcomb, Kansas to research the case; Capote gathered over six thousand pages of notes, and the project took almost six years. *In Cold Blood*, published in 1965, became a best seller. It won him enthusiastic praise, mountains of publicity, millions of dollars and the luxury of time to work on his next book. It was then he gave a much-publicized masked Black & White Ball at the Plaza Hotel in New York in 1966 for 500 of his "very closest friends."

Capote began suffering from writer's block in the late 60's and during the mid-1970's he published several chapters of his book *Answered Prayers* in *Esquire* magazine. It was a gossip-filled chronicle of his experience with society's jet set. Throughout his life Capote made friends with the rich & famous, developing trust & close friendships that he would betray with this book. The chapters were true & mostly scandalous stories about his famous friends. He named names & thinly disguised others - and in so doing forever lost years' long and close bonds - and many other friends followed suit.

Banished from café society, he embraced the decadent world of Studio 54 where he took a downward slide into clubbing, alcohol & drugs. In 1984 Truman Capote died from liver disease complicated by phlebitis and multiple-drug intoxication, shortly before his sixtieth birthday.

