*Hans Christian Anderson*

Hans Christian Andersen was born in the slums of Odense. His father, Hans Andersen, was a poor shoemaker and literate. Andersen's mother, Anne Marie Andersdatter, worked as washerwoman. Although she was uneducated and superstitious, she opened for his son the world of folklore.

Andersen received little education. As a child he was highly emotional, suffering all kinds of fears and humiliations because of his tallness. Encouraged by his parents he composed his own fairy tales and arrange puppet theatre shows. His father loved literature and took Andersen often to the playhouse.

"My father gratified me in all my wishes," wrote Andersen in The True Story of My Life (1846). "I possessed his whole heart; he lived for me. On Sundays, he made me perspective glasses, theatres, and pictures which could be changed; he read to me from Holberg's plays and the Arabian Tales.

In 1816 his father died and Andersen was forced to go to work. He was for a short time apprenticed to a weaver and tailor, and he also worked at a tobacco factory.

At the age of 14 Andersen moved to Copenhagen to start a career as a singer, dancer or an actor - he had a beautiful soprano voice. The following three years were full of hardships although he found supporters who paved his way to the theatre. Andersen succeeded in becoming associated with the Royal Theatre, but he had to leave it when his voice began to change. When he was casually referred as a poet it changed his plans: "It went through me, body and soul, and tears filled my eyes. I knew that, from this very moment, my mind was awake to writing and poetry." He then began to write plays, all of which were rejected.

In 1822 Jonas Collin, one of the directors of the Royal Theatre and an influential government official, gave Andersen a grant to enter the grammar school at Slagelse. He lived in the home of the school headmaster Meisling, who was annoyed at the oversensitive student and tried to harden his character. Other pupils were much younger, 11-year-olds, among whom six years older Andersen was definitely overgrown. His appearance drew also uninvited attention - he had a long nose and close-set eyes.

Collin arranged in 1827 a private tuition for Andersen. He gained admission to Copenhagen University, where he completed his education.

As a novelist Andersen made his breakthrough with The Improvisatore (1835), using Italy as the setting. The story was autobiographical and depicted a poor boy's integration into society, an Ugly Duckling theme of self-discovery in which Andersen returned in several of his works. The book gained international success and during his life it remained the most widely read of all his works.

Andersen's fame rests on his Fairy Tales and Stories, written between 1835 and 1872. Tales, Told for Children, appeared in a small, cheap booklet in 1835. In this and following early collections, which were published in every Christmas, Andersen returned to the stories which he had heard as a child, but gradually he started to create his own tales.

The third volume, published in 1837, contained 'The Little Mermaid' and 'The Emperor's New Clothes.' Among Andersen's other best known tales are 'Little Ugly Duckling,' 'The Tinderbox,' 'Little Claus and Big Claus,' 'Princess and the Pea,' 'The Snow Queen,' The Nightingale,' and 'The Steadfast Tin Soldier.'

Andersen died in his home in Rolighed on August 4, 1875. He never married.