

Related Reading - Roald Dahl

Roald Dahl had a lifelong love of **chocolate**. Visitors to his home in Buckinghamshire, England, are still allowed to examine the giant, heavy ball of silver foil that he made out of the wrappers from chocolate bars he'd eaten, and he was even buried with chocolates after he passed away!

Roald began his love affair when he was a small child—he described the candy shop in his hometown of Llandaff, Wales as the center of his life. On the way to and from school, he and his friends would stare into the window, arguing about which candies were the most delicious (young Roald preferred something called a “sherbet sucker”).



When he was an adolescent, he attended a boarding school located near the Cadbury chocolate factory. Cadbury used the boys at the school as taste-testers for their newest confections—the company would send the schoolboys a box containing 12 chocolate bars wrapped in plain foil. The boys had to sample each one, grade it on a scale of 1 to 10, and explain why they liked or disliked the new sweets.

“I have no doubt at all that, thirty-five years later, when I was looking for a plot for my second book for children, I remembered those little cardboard boxes and the newly-invented chocolates inside them,” Dahl wrote later, describing the inspiration for his book, ***Charlie and the Chocolate Factory***.

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Augustus Gloop, Veruca Salt, Violet Beauregarde, Mike Teavee...chances are, you're familiar with these names. They're the bad kids in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, and all of them get their just desserts on Willy Wonka's tour.

But have you ever heard of **Miranda Piker**? In Roald Dahl's original draft of the book, there are *six* golden tickets, with the final one going to Miranda, "a nasty-looking girl with a smug face and a smirk on her mouth" who believes that recess, vacations, and holidays should be outlawed.

During the factory tour, Miranda and her father—an equally humorless school headmaster—become outraged at Wonka's "spotty powder," a confection that makes children seem to have chicken pox so they can stay home from school. They head into the room where it's manufactured, intending to smash the machinery and prevent kids from skipping class. Of course, they come to a bad end, and are themselves ground up into spotty powder.

Wonka explains that the Pikers are actually "part of the recipe," and that spotty powder wouldn't work unless "one or two schoolmasters" were put into the mix on occasion. Then, the Oompa-Loompas sing a song about how soon, "this child who is so vicious/will have gotten quite delicious."

The chapter was deemed too gruesome for young readers and cut by Roald Dahl's publisher.



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In spite of the fun and good humor of his books, Roald Dahl's life was full of personal tragedy. His older sister died of appendicitis when he was a small child. Then, heartbroken, his father died of pneumonia a few months later.

In 1960, a baby carriage carrying Dahl's four-month-old son, Theo, was hit by a taxicab in New York City. Although Theo survived, he developed **hydrocephalus**, a life-threatening condition in which excess fluid accumulates in the brain. Dahl enlisted the help of two friends—an engineer and a neurosurgeon—and invented an apparatus called the Wade-Dahl-Till valve to relieve the pressure inside Theo's skull and allow him to live a fuller, more active life (he has since made a complete recovery).

In 1962, Dahl's eldest daughter, Olivia, died of measles; she was only 7 years old. And in 1965, Dahl's wife, Academy Award-winning actress Patricia Neal (pictured, on left), suffered a horrifying series of strokes while pregnant with the couple's fifth child. She was in a coma for three weeks.

When she awoke, Dahl supervised her rehabilitation, setting up marathon sessions through which she gradually re-learned how to walk and talk. He used a "tough love" method to get her back on her feet—needling and cajoling her back to health. After only two years, she was able to make a triumphant return to acting. Nevertheless, the couple divorced in 1983 after 30 years of marriage.

