

Amor Towles Biography

Patricia Moore Smith

Towles states that his path to becoming a novelist is unusual but it conforms to what you'd expect. Born in Boston in 1964, he wrote throughout his youth, he wrote in high school, in college at Yale and grad school at Stanford. In 1989 when he was 25, he had a series of short stories published in *The Paris Review*. Associated with the *Paris Review*, American novelist Peter Matthiessen was an encouraging mentor to him. So writing was always what he wanted to do and had been training to do.

He states: When I moved to New York when I was 25, I also had to make a living. And rather than become a bartender or a fact-checker at the *New Yorker* or an editorial assistant at Random House—which other friends who wanted to be writers were doing—I opted to work in an investment firm.

So I'd set aside writing for the first 10 years because we'd been building the business. But at about that 10 year mark, I knew I had to get back to writing. I had the mindset that if I didn't have a novel that I felt good about by the time I was 50, that I would end up very bitter and a big drinker.

He then wrote *Rules of Civility* over seven years while on the job and then retired as he started *A Gentleman in Moscow*. These 2 novels plus [The Lincoln Highway](#) collectively sold more than six million copies and have been translated into more than 30 languages. His first novel, [Rules of Civility](#) (2011), set among social strivers in New York City in 1936, took its inspiration from F Scott Fitzgerald and its title from George Washington's [Rules of Civility & Decent Behavior in Company and Conversation](#). His well-loved second novel, *A Gentleman in Moscow* (2016), incorporated nods to the great Russian authors as well as Wes Anderson's [The Grand Budapest Hotel](#). Our current novel, [The Lincoln Highway](#), was chosen as Best Book of the Year by NPR, Time Magazine, and The Washington Post, and selected by the NYT as a

notable book. Both Bill Gates and President Barack Obama included Highway on their annual book recommendation lists. He currently writes full time and lives with his wife and two children in Gramercy Park in Manhattan. He also collects fine art and antiques.

Commenting on *Aspiring to Excellence in Art*, he states: "What Malcolm Gladwell contends—about putting in your 10,000 hours—I think, is generally true if you want to find excellence in any field, art included."

"The comparison that I make for people about the novel as a form is this. Andre Agassi did not have a great forehead. He had a hundred great forehands. And Agassi's training was to master every aspect of every possible shot that any match might require of him to the point where it doesn't even require conscious thought. In that way, he could direct his attention to the game itself and not to the stroke. And that's what novel writing requires, too. There are so many elements of craft involved in effective novel writing. Characterization, setting, dialogue, metaphor, allusion, theme, sentiment, detail—you name it. And ideally, you work and train and read and draft until those crafts are all second nature and you can focus on the game at hand."

Amor Towles shares that in developing a story he starts with a detailed outline laying out story lines, developing the characters. He compares this process to opening the front door of an unfamiliar house, wandering around, opening other doors, seeing new venues, and adding details until he has fleshed out the complete structure of his tale.

Our novel is set in June of 1954, a period of prosperity, peacefulness, and upward mobility. This era was before rock and roll, the sexual revolution, recreational drugs, the civil rights movement, and the Viet Nam War. This was an age of innocence far from today's mores but within memory's reach. In preparation for writing, Towles read books related to his chosen period: James Baldwin's **Go Tell It on the Mountain**, Sloan Wilson's **The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit**, Flannery O'Connor's' **A Good Man Is Hard to Find** and Raymond Chandler's **The Long Goodbye**, not because he wanted to replicate any one of them. This research was because he wanted this novel to be true to the period.

Here are several fun facts about our author:

1. Towles is an ardent Led Zeppelin fan.
2. Towles does not share his work while writing his first draft. When he's completed that draft, he gives copies on the same day to the following: his wife, his New York editor, his London editor, his agent and four friends. He asks for feedback within three weeks. He then uses that feedback to begin revising. For both his first novels, he revised the initial draft three times over three years.
3. As a boy of 10, he threw a bottle with a note about himself into the Atlantic Ocean at the end of summer. A few weeks later, there was a letter waiting for him on New York Times stationery. Harrison Salisbury, the managing editor of the Times, had found the bottle, and he and Towles ended up corresponding for many years. Salisbury makes a cameo appearance in "A Gentleman in Moscow."