

Seemingly ripped straight from the pages of one of his novels, John Grisham's life has taken many a twist and turn leading to unparalleled success. Grisham left two careers to pursue a "secret hobby" that eventually won him acclaim as one of the most popular and successful American authors of all times. Admitting that he never planned on becoming a best-selling writer, Grisham's advice to college graduates is, "You'd better be careful. Life may have other plans." Life certainly had other plans for John Grisham.

Born in Jonesboro, Arkansas, to hard-working parents committed to providing a sound education for their five children, Grisham and his siblings received the formalized education their parents never had. Grisham's family moved through the years to towns like Delhi, Louisiana, and Parkin, Arkansas, finally

John Grisham

AUTHOR

settling in Southaven, Mississippi. Sights and sounds from these places resonate throughout fictional locales of Grisham's thrillers.

Grisham doggedly pursued his childhood dream of becoming a professional baseball player through his sophomore year in college. Finally realizing that the dream was just that, Grisham transferred to Mississippi State University and switched to accounting. Upon graduation, Grisham enrolled in law school at the University of Mississippi, where criminal law caught his eye.

Once out of law school, Grisham established a private practice in Southaven. His legal career provided a foundation of expertise from which he draws when developing plots for many of his stories. Grisham also served as the representative from Mississippi's Seventh District in the state's House of Representatives. While serving in the legislature, Grisham found time to write, working in predawn hours on the draft of his first book, *A Time to Kill*. Grisham discovered that he enjoyed writing about law rather than practicing it and in 1991, he left his law practice, said goodbye to politics, and pursued his writing career full time.

Authenticity is a hallmark of Grisham's work. Believable characters grappling with identifiable struggles keep readers coming back for more. Committed to integrity in his writing, the author shares, "When the fiction is authentic and accurate and com-

PELLING, the pages turn and the readers are happy." A regular on the *The New York Times* best seller list, Grisham's most famous works include *A Time to Kill*, *The Firm*, *The Pelican Brief*, and *The Chamber*. His eighteen titles have sold more than one hundred million copies

Despite his stellar rise to fame, John Grisham has successfully managed to keep his feet on solid ground. Seemingly unimpressed with his notoriety, Grisham stays connected with friends and organizations that were part of the early fabric of his life. Mississippi State University students and alumni reap the benefits of Grisham's generosity while enjoying the John Grisham Room, located in Mitchell Memorial Library. Hoping to encourage and support aspiring new writers, Grisham established the John and Renée Grisham Emerging Southern Writers program at the University of Mississippi, which provides writers in residence a stipend and a home.

Little League baseball players in the Charlottesville, Virginia, area have enjoyed Grisham's passion for the game. Grisham and his family moved to Charlottesville from Oxford a number of years ago. He funded a sports complex for the community and is personally involved in coaching and managing the teams. "We are able to teach kids that good sportsmanship is more important than winning." Grisham's childhood dream of playing baseball has taken on a new reality, fueling the dreams of others as well.

The most recent example of Grisham's benevolence and undying devotion to Mississippi is a five-million-dollar gift creating the Rebuild the Coast Fund Organization. The program provides financial assistance to individuals and businesses that fell victim to Hurricane Katrina, which struck the Louisiana and Mississippi coasts on August 29, 2005. Commenting on the indomitable spirit of Mississippi's people, Grisham shares, "Hope here comes from the people and their remarkable belief that, if we all stick together, we'll survive."

Enjoying the fruits of his success, Grisham now writes about half of the year and spends the other half at his leisure. Book signings only occur at five Mississippi bookstores and one in Virginia. Despite the passage of time and the trappings of success, Grisham has never forgotten where his success began. When asked what keeps him coming back to Mississippi, Grisham responds with a twinkle in his eye, "Friends, family, catfish." ■

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