

# Isabel Allende Biography

Chilean author Isabel Allende won worldwide acclaim when her bestselling first novel, *The House of the Spirits*, was published in 1982. In addition to launching Allende's career as a renowned author, the book, which grew out of a farewell letter to her dying grandfather, also established her as a feminist force in Latin America's male-dominated literary world.

She has since written 20 more works, including *Of Love and Shadows*, *Eva Luna*, *Stories of Eva Luna*, *The Infinite Plan*, *Daughter of Fortune*, *Portrait in Sepia*, a trilogy for young readers (*City of Beasts*, *Kingdom of the Golden Dragon* and *Forest of the Pygmies*), *Zorro*, *Ines of My Soul*, *Island Beneath the Sea*, *Maya's Notebook*, *Ripper* and her latest book, *The Japanese Lover*. Books of nonfiction include *Aphrodite*, a humorous collection of recipes and essays, and three memoirs: *My Invented Country*, *Paula* (a bestseller that documents Allende's daughter's illness and death, as well as her own life) and *The Sum of Our Days*.

Allende's books, all written in her native Spanish, have been translated into 35 languages and have sold nearly 70 million copies. Her works both entertain and educate readers by weaving intriguing stories with significant historical events. Settings for her books include Chile throughout the 15th, 19th and 20th centuries, the California gold rush, the guerrilla movement of 1960s Venezuela, the Vietnam War and the 18th century slave revolt in Haiti.

Allende, who has received dozens of international tributes and awards over the last 30 years, describes her fiction as "realistic literature," rooted in her remarkable upbringing and the mystical people and events that fueled her imagination. Her writings are equally informed by her feminist convictions, her commitment to social justice and the harsh political realities that shaped her destiny. A prominent journalist for Chilean television and magazines in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Allende's life was forever altered when Gen. Augusto Pinochet led a military coup in 1973 that toppled Chile's socialist reform government. Allende's cousin Salvador Allende, who had been elected Chile's president in 1970, died in the coup. The Pinochet regime was marked early on by repression and brutality, and Allende became involved with groups offering aid to victims of the regime. Ultimately finding it unsafe to remain in Chile, she fled the country in 1975 with her husband and two children. The family lived in exile in Venezuela for the next 13 years.

In 1981 Allende learned that her beloved grandfather, who still lived in Chile, was dying. She began a letter to him, recounting her childhood memories of life in her grandparents' home. Although her grandfather died before having a chance to read the letter, its contents became the basis for *The House of the Spirits*, the novel that launched her literary career at age 40. The novel details the lives of two families living in Chile from the 1920s to the country's military coup in 1973, and has been described as both a family saga and a political testimony.

In addition to her work as a writer, Allende also devotes much of her time to human rights. Following the death of her daughter, Paula, in 1992, she established in her honor a charitable foundation dedicated to the protection and empowerment of women and girls worldwide.

Since 1987, Allende has made her home in the San Francisco Bay Area in California. Allende became a U.S. citizen in 1993, but lives, she says, with one foot in California and the other in Chile. ❀