

BIOGRAPHY OF PEARL S. BUCK

Pearl Comfort Sydenstricker was born on June 26, 1892, in Hillsboro, West Virginia. Her parents, Absalom and Caroline Sydenstricker, were Southern Presbyterian missionaries, stationed in China. She was born when her parents were near the end of a furlough in the United States. When she was three months old, she was taken back to China, where she spent most of the first forty years of her life.

The Sydenstrickers lived in Chinkiang (Zhenjiang), in Kiangsu (Jiangsu) province. From childhood, Pearl spoke both English and Chinese. She was taught principally by her mother and by a Chinese tutor, Mr. Kung. In 1900, during the Boxer Uprising (an antiforeign and antimodern upheaval at the beginning of the twentieth century in north China, in the late 1890s), Caroline and the children evacuated to Shanghai. Later that year, the family returned to the United States.

In 1910, Pearl enrolled in Randolph-Macon Woman's College, in Lynchburg, Virginia, and graduated in 1914. She returned to China shortly after graduation when her mother was seriously ill. In 1915, she met John Lossing Buck, and they got married in 1917. From 1920 to 1933, Pearl and Lossing made their home in Nanking (Nanjing). In 1921, Pearl's mother died and shortly afterwards her father moved in with the Bucks. In 1927, the Bucks spent a terrified day in hiding, in the "Nanking Incident" (The third "Nanking Incident", the attack on foreign legations by the Nationalist Army in March 1927. The Japanese consulate was one of the targets. This event began the process that put

an end to Foreign Minister Shidehara Kijūrō's diplomacy of cooperation with the Western powers in dealing with China.). Fortunately, they were rescued by American gunboats. After a trip downriver to Shanghai, the Bucks sailed to Unzen, Japan. They then moved back to Nanking although conditions remained dangerously unsettled.

Pearl's first novel, East Wind, West Wind, was published by John Day Company in 1930. John Day's publisher, Richard Walsh, eventually became Pearl's second husband in 1935 after both received divorces.

In 1931, John Day published Pearl's second novel, The Good Earth. This became the best-selling novel of both 1931 and 1932, and it won the Pulitzer Prize. Other novels and books of non-fiction quickly followed. In 1938, Pearl became the first American woman to win the Nobel Prize in literature. When she died in 1973, Pearl had published over seventy books: novels, collections of stories, biography and autobiography, poetry, plays, children's literature, and translations from Chinese books.