

## What's Your Story, Rich Wallace?

I grew up in northern New Jersey in a very busy household. I had three older brothers, two younger sisters, and a little brother. We were all very involved in activities like Scouts, music (not me), art lessons, and especially sports, so my mother cooked a lot of meals in shifts because some of us would be late getting home and others would go back out for something in the evening. We had a big house, but I always wanted my own space, so I'd spend a lot of time in the back yard or the cellar, playing games and sports (often by myself). That really contributed to my imagination.

From my bedroom I looked out the window at Teterboro Airport right down the hill and New York City not far in the distance. My father took a bus or train into New York every day for work. Sometimes my brothers and I would go into the city after school and meet him to have dinner and to watch a sports event at Madison Square Garden. We'd get home very late and always had a great time.

I loved sports from the time I was very young. I played all of them growing up. By the time I got to high school I began to concentrate on running, and became quite good at that. I also competed in track and cross country in college, and still do today even though I'm over 50.

I'm married to a wonderful woman named Sandra Neil Wallace, and she's a writer, too. Before that she was a sportscaster on ESPN-TV, which was pretty exciting. We moved to New England a little more than a year ago to a small city with a busy downtown and a nice college that offers a lot of events to the public.



- **What were your favorite things to do when you were young?**

*Play sports, anytime and anywhere. I joined organized programs like Little League baseball and Pop Warner football, but I had the most fun just playing in a field with the other kids in the neighborhood. We played football in the fall, street hockey in the winter, and basketball all year.*

- **Did you have any bad or funny habits as a child?**

*I read a lot of comic books when I was a kid. Often, the characters would just have a large question mark (?) or exclamation point (!) above their heads to express confusion or anger. Whenever I came across a mark like that, I had to pronounce it in my head. A question mark sounded something like this to me: "Umsthatta?"*

- **Did you ever do something brave when you were young?**

*When I was about 10, my best friend Gene and I were playing in my yard. We noticed smoke coming from the roof of the house next door. We ran over and pounded on the door, and when the woman answered we yelled, "Your house is on fire!" She came to our house and called the fire department, and they put out the fire quickly. A few weeks later Gene and I were invited to the town council meeting and the mayor had us stand up while he told the audience how brave we'd been. We laughed the whole time because we were nervous.*



- **What books were favorites as a child?**

MIKE MULLIGAN AND HIS STEAM SHOVEL by Virginia Lee Burton is still my favorite picture book. I also loved MAKE WAY FOR DUCKLINGS, CAPS FOR SALE, and any book by Dr. Seuss. Later I read a lot of mysteries, and sport novels by Matt Christopher.

- **Did you have a best friend? Who was it and why were you best friends?**

My best friend Gene was the most clever and funniest kid I ever knew. We played together constantly for years. We understood each other and almost never argued. We played lots of games like chess and Monopoly, and of course more active games like basketball.



- **Did you play an instrument? Which one(s)?**

Nearly all of my six brothers and sisters are quite musical, but I had no ability at all. My parents bought me a guitar in sixth grade and my older brother Jim tried to give me lessons, but I wasn't very good at it and didn't have the patience to try harder. I wish I'd tried harder, but I was too interested in doing other things.

- **What did you want to be when you grew up?**

I always wanted to be a professional athlete. I did make a small amount of money in sports after college, but not nearly enough to make a living. I love being a writer, so I'm glad that worked out. I still play sports all the time anyway.

- **If you weren't a writer, what would you like to be?**

A coach or an athlete, but I've done both and still do. You're never limited to being one thing.

- **What advice do you have for aspiring young readers and writers?**

Read all the time – anything that interests you. Pay attention to the things you like best to read and think about why you enjoy them.

- **Do you have a special place where you write your books?**

I write in a small office in my house, just across the hall from the small office where my wife writes her books. When I'm away from my desk, I'm always making notes and jotting down ideas in little notebooks so I won't forget them when I get back to my computer.

- **Where do you get your ideas?**

Mostly from my own life. I remember things that happened to me as a kid and think about why they were so important. It's funny which events stay with you and help to shape who you are. For me, it's usually about some time when I tried really hard to accomplish something and succeeded, especially if I failed several times first but kept trying. Often the failures are more memorable than the triumphs.



- **Do you write everyday? If so, for how long?**

*I work at my writing almost every day. That involves a lot of things – thinking about what comes next in a story, going back and adding some action or conversation to a scene, and sometimes just making notes. I don't keep track of my hours, but I'm at my desk for a good portion of the day.*

- **Do you listen to music while you write, or do you like silence?**

*I don't usually listen to music unless it's relative to what I'm writing about. I just finished writing a novel set in 1969 (when I was twelve) so I listened to a lot of music from that summer while I was writing it. A song called "Get Together" by the Youngbloods is one of the greatest songs of that era, and I listened to it a lot and quoted it in the book.*

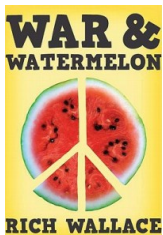
- **What's the hardest part about writing a book?**

*Getting past the middle part of it. I usually start with a good idea and a character I like, and I have a pretty good idea of what the ending might be. So making the middle parts exciting and funny and worth reading takes a lot of effort.*

- **How many times do you have to revise? Do you love revision or hate it?**

*I constantly revise my work, and I enjoy it. It's like editing, which I've also done for a long time professionally.*

**What your favorite book you wrote?**



*Hard to say. The ones I like the best have the most "me" in them; they're drawn from events that happened to me. So [WAR AND WATERMELON](#), which comes out in the summer of 2011, is my most recent favorite. It has a lot to do with my relationship with my older brother Bobby in the summer of 1969. [SPORTS CAMP](#) is another recent favorite, about being one of the smallest kids at a competitive camp and being away from home for the first time.*



- **Do you have any children or pets and have you ever used them in a book?**

*I have two sons, Jonathan and Jeremy. They've both graduated from college and are working in good jobs. I always base characters on people I know, so they've shown up in one form or another in my stories. We have a nutty dog named Lucy who is a great deal of fun to be around. She's almost ten but still has puppy energy. She's a Labrador/hound mix and we found her at a shelter when she was about one.*



**Rick's wife, Sandra, and their dog, Lucy**



*Jeremy picked her out.*

#### **Quick Picks**

- **Favorite stationary item?**

*Blue ball-point pen.*

- **Soup or salad?**

*Both!*

- **P & J or Mac and Cheese?**

*Peanut butter but never with jelly. And I don't eat cheese.*

- **Favorite or least favorite vegetable?**

*I love them all (really!). I eat lots of broccoli, tomatoes, and carrots. (And tons of fruit.)*

- **Sourdough, whole wheat, white or rye?**

*Any whole-grain bread.*

- **Longhand or computer?**

*I like to make notes longhand, but do my actual writing on the computer.*

- **Early Bird Writer or Night Owl?**

*I wrote my first several books late at night because it was the only time I could truly concentrate when my kids were little. I still enjoy writing late at night when I'm on a roll with a book, but I work all day at it.*