



Written by [Sam Blumenfeld](#) on July 25, 2012

## How a Homeschooler Became a Best-Selling Author

How did Christopher Paolini, a homeschooler from Montana, become one of the world's best-selling authors? The story of his remarkable career has appeared in *The Writer* magazine of May 2012 in the form of an interview and also in an illustrated article in *Rolling Stone* magazine of March 1, 2012 by freelancer Amanda Fortini. Indeed, if you type in his name in Google search, you'll find that he has already become a world literary celebrity.



It appears that Christopher, now 28, who still lives with his parents, started writing his first fantasy novel at the age of 15. He got his inspiration from reading J.R.R. Tolkien, E.R. Eddison, and Anne McCaffrey. His family liked the story and decided to publish it themselves as a homeschool family business. It took them a year to prepare the book for publication. The book, [Eragon](#), was published in 2001, when Christopher turned 18.

Living in Montana's Paradise Valley, the family then spent the next year promoting the book, taking Christopher to libraries, bookstores, and schools around the Western states, building a fan base among young readers. To attract readers, Christopher wore a medieval costume consisting of a red swordsman shirt, black pantaloons, knee-high boots, a black pirate sash, and a black beret. He spent eight hours a day talking to every person who came in the store. Thus, the family was able to sell 10,000 copies of the book. But it was barely enough to pay the family's bills.

But then something miraculous happened. A writer by the name of Carl Hiaasen was visiting Montana with his preteen son, Ryan. His wife had bought a copy of *Eragon* at a local supermarket and gave it to Ryan to read. Hiaasen recalls: "I remember driving around and not a peep coming from the backseat of the car, and Ryan just blazing through the book. Finally I said, 'How do you like it?' He looked up and said, 'Dad, this is better than Harry Potter.'" Quite impressed, Hiaasen sent the book to his publisher in New York, Knopf, a division of Random House.

Michelle Frey, Knopf's executive editor, immediately recognized Christopher's talent, and decided to make a six-figure publishing offer that the Paolini family could not refuse. Knopf's edition was an instant hit with young readers and took off in sales. That book was followed by three others, [Eldest](#), [Brisinger](#), and [Inheritance](#), to complete the series, which have sold 32 million copies worldwide.

In other words, this is a homeschool success story involving a young writer and his entire family, who helped him achieve an incredible success. Concerning how he got started, Christopher told *The Writer* interviewer:

I was homeschooled, and my mother was a trained Montessori teacher and kept me busy doing lots of creative projects. I often tried writing stories, but they always flat-lined after five or six pages, mainly because I didn't know what was going to happen in the story.

I would have a cool idea, the kernel of a story, but no idea how to play it out over the course of a book.... I was aware of what the problem was. I didn't know how to structure a story.



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After studying a number of books on the subject of structure, he gained a basic understanding of how to plot out a whole series of books. He wrote a 12-page outline for *Eragon*, which became the book's overall plot. Christopher's strategy was similar to an architectural plan for a house: The house, or in this case the story, is created according to the plan. Here is the plot of the story as Christopher finally structured it:

*Eragon* follows the adventures of a 15-year-old farm boy who finds a mysterious gemstone covered with white veins. It is actually a dragon's egg, and when the egg hatches and a magnificent blue dragon emerges, the boy's life is changed forever. Eragon names the dragon Saphira, and the two become so inseparable that they share their innermost thoughts and feelings. Their bond is challenged, however, by an evil tyrant named King Galbatorix. A hundred years earlier, Galbatorix had outlawed dragons and destroyed the Dragon Riders, the lodge of dragon-riding warriors who protected them. When the king becomes aware that Eragon is the first of a new generation of Dragon Riders, he has his family killed and plots to capture the boy and his blue-scaled companion. Eragon and Saphira embark on a journey of escape and revenge, and along the way meet up with a wise magician, elves, dwarves, and several beautiful maidens.

The reason why the story appeals to young readers is that they can identify with a 15-year-old boy who outwits all of the evil adults. That is why the famous children's series, such as the Nancy Drew and Hardy Boys books were eagerly read by millions of juveniles: In these stories, the children are always smarter than the adults. What a boost to a young reader's self-esteem!

Christopher has become so famous that his biography is already on the Internet. According to the *Encyclopedia of World Biography*, Christopher was born in 1984 in Southern California. His mother, Talita, quit her job as a Montessori preschool teacher to devote her time to raising her new son. She used the Montessori method to teach Christopher at home, and two years later when sister Angela came along, she, too, became part of the Paolini classroom. The biography reveals:

When Christopher was old enough to attend public school, his parents were worried that he would be bored by a traditional curriculum, so they thought long and hard and decided to educate him at home. In fact, focusing on their children was such a top priority that the Paolinis made a deliberate choice to live simply, drawing small salaries from Kenneth Paolini's home-based publishing company. In interviews Paolini has talked about the nurturing environment his parents created for him, and he credits them for being his inspiration. He has also admitted that he was not always a receptive student. A particularly interesting note is that Paolini was a reluctant reader. When he was about three or four, he refused to learn to read, but his mother worked patiently with him until one day a door opened that would change his life.

The decision to homeschool was made by parents who truly cared about their children's future happiness and success. And they were willing to make the economic sacrifices in order to be able to do the right thing. In other words, strong parents are the backbone of the homeschool movement, and that is why the education establishment will never be able to control them. The essence of a free society is educational freedom, and in the end it also produces great economic benefits.

The biography goes on:

"I enjoy fantasy because it allows me to visit lands that have never existed, to see things that never could exist, to experience daring adventures with interesting characters, and most importantly, to feel the sense of magic in the world."



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That door was his first visit to the library. In his essay titled “Dragon Tales,” Paolini described going to the library with his mother and being attracted to a series of mystery books with colorful spines. He took one home and, according to Paolini, something clicked. He was spellbound by the characters, the dialogue, and the fascinating situations. “From then on,” wrote Paolini, “I’ve been in love with the written word.” He went on to devour books of all kinds — classics, myths, thrillers, science fiction, anything that seemed interesting. In particular, he was drawn to the fantasy genre and to writers who wrote tales about heroes and elves, swordfights and quests and, especially, dragons.

Homeschooling gave Christopher the time, the encouragement, and the incentive to write a successful series of books on a subject he loved. That is the creative power of homeschooling, and that is why the Paolini family story could serve as an inspiration and model for other homeschooling families.

Contrast the self-generating creative power of this one homeschooling family with the frustrated parents of Highland Park, Michigan, where the public schools have produced children who can’t read, can’t write, can’t do basic arithmetic. Yet, the parents of Highland Park are just as free as the Paolinis to educate their children at home. But for some reason, the Highland Park parents seem paralyzed by sheer ignorance of what is still possible in America. So, their only recourse has been to sue the schools for not educating their children.

The author of the *Rolling Stone* article characterizes Christopher Paolini as “nerdy.” I am not sure what that word means, but I assume it means that he uses his brain. That’s what a “nerd” is: someone who uses his brain instead of just his emotions to master reality. Fortini writes:

But perhaps the most obvious effect on his writing is an aversion to groupthink. One of the major preoccupations of the *Inheritance* series is that Eragon remain independent of mind, free of allegiance to any authority, answering to his conscience alone. “I definitely have an appreciation of how easy it is for people to end up getting led astray if you let other people make decisions for you,” he says, “and part of that certainly comes from family experience.”

Homeschooling encourages individualism, the basic social philosophy that has made America the most creative nation in human history. But the public schools are inculcating collectivism, which characterizes individualism as selfish, self-centered, and anti-social. Yet, what have the collectivist societies produced? Communist Russia and Cuba have produced misery on a grand scale, nothing to ennoble human existence. Communist China simply imitates what America has created. In contrast, tiny Israel, where individualism flourishes, has become a powerhouse of technological innovation.

America’s atheist, progressive public-school system will continue to destroy young minds, disparage individualism, and betray our future as long as it exists in its present form.



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