
A Name for Himself

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A Name for Himself

A BIOGRAPHY OF THOMAS HEAD RADDALL

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A Name for Himself: A Biography of Thomas Head Raddall

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In memory of Fred

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FOREWORD

“If I live through this war I hope to see you graduate at Varsity. In any case take the ideal for the goal, and strive to make a name for yourself.”

These were the last words his father wrote to Thomas Raddall, Jr., *A Name for Himself: A Biography of Thomas Head Raddall* just before he was killed on the battlefield of Amiens in 1918. Tom was only fourteen years old. He never did graduate from Varsity. He was forced to leave school and go to work at once, to support himself and to help his family. But he never forgot his father’s words.

Today he is known as one of Canada’s greatest storytellers.

Born in Hythe, England, Tom moved to Nova Scotia with his family when he was ten years old. His early life was marked by tragedy. A few months before his father was killed, *A Name for Himself: A Biography of Thomas Head Raddall* he had lived through the terrible Halifax Explosion of December, 1917. Some tough experiences followed. He became a marine telegrapher at the age of fifteen, and served at sea for more than two years before he was posted to remote Sable Island — that desert in the sea, far off the coast of Nova Scotia. He was there when he had his first short story published, at the age of eighteen — a ghost story called *The Singing Frenchman*.

Disenchanted with the life of a telegrapher, Tom took a business course in Halifax, and bought himself an old typewriter. He was working as bookkeeper for a paper mill in Liverpool, Nova Scotia, when he took the unprecedented step of giving up his nine-to-five job to devote himself, full time, to writing.

At that time no Canadian author of fiction had been able to earn even a subsistence income. Tom had a wife and two small children to support. But Tom dared, and he succeeded. This is the story of his courage, his suffering, and his successes. Out of the loneliness and despair of his stay on Sable Island, eventually he wrote one of his *A Name for Himself: A Biography of Thomas Head Raddall* greatest novels, *The Nymph and the Lamp*.

Three times winner of the Governor General’s award for literature, Dr. Thomas Head *A Name for Himself: A Biography of Thomas Head Raddall* Raddall has received almost *A Name for Himself: A Biography of Thomas Head Raddall* every honour Canada can bestow on an author. His stories are read in countries all over the world. He has made a name for himself.

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CHAPTER 1

The Great Explosion

To fourteen-year-old Thomas Raddall the fateful morning of the sixth of December, 1917, began like any other day. He sat down to a breakfast of hot oatmeal porridge with his mother and his little sister, Winifred. The baby, Hilda, was in her high chair and his older sister, Nellie, was upstairs in bed A Name for Himself: A Biography of Thomas Head Raddall with a bad cold. Tom's father was somewhere in Europe on the battlefield fighting in the World War which, it was said, would end all wars.

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