

WORLD

## J.K. Rowling, the author with the magic touch

'It's going to be really emotional to say goodbye,' says Rowling as she writes the last book in the Harry Potter saga.



— J.K. Rowling talks to NBC's Katie Couric about her latest book "Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince," and how her life has changed since the series. Dateline NBC

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**By Katie Couric**

EDINBURGH, SCOTLAND— *It seems like yesterday, he was a lonely unwanted orphan stuck with his insufferable relatives on Privet Drive. Harry Potter, the pride of Hogwarts, has come a long*

*way in the last seven years and so has his creator.*

*J.K. Rowling is celebrating the publication of her new book, "Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince" and this past weekend, here at Edinburgh Castle in Scotland, she met with some of her most rabid fans for a special reading. She also talked with us in a rare and exclusive interview about the latest adventures of the boy who lived.*

**J.K. Rowling:** Harry has, I think, taken the view that they are now at war. He does become more battled hardened. He's now ready to go out fighting. And he's after revenge.

*The literary juggernaut known as Harry Potter continued to cast its spell on wizard wanna-be's all weekend, as copies of "Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince" flew off the shelves **faster than a golden snitch**.*

*For devoted fans, it meant the end of two long years of hankering for the new Harry. And for booksellers, it marked the publishing event of the year.*

*"It is also a moment of great celebration for reading and literacy," said Barbara Marcus, executive vice president of Scholastic. "But behind all the excitement is the genius of J.K. Rowling."*

*You might say J.K. (a.k.a. Jo) Rowling is the author with the magic touch. That's certainly what they were thinking at a Potter party Friday night, when she held a private reading, something she often does to launch a new book.*

*Only this time, it was followed by a kids-only Q&A.*

**Rowling:** I love it. They ask the best questions, you know? They really know the books back to front. In fact it's now reaching the point where I feel I should revise this kind of event. I've now produced six novels and I feel I should go back and read them all meticulously to make sure I know what's going on. Because I have been caught out, people have asked me questions and I've—"What books are they in again? Who are you talking about?"

*Call it "Hogwarts Heaven" for those chosen few aficionados, most of whom had won contests hunting for Harry's most bewitched fans.*

*So needless to say, I felt privileged J.K. Rowling granted her only "Half-Blood Prince" television interview to a muggle like me.*

**Katie Couric:** Not many adult journalists are being given this opportunity so I'm very, very flattered. And why have you decided to keep the number of grownups at a minimum?

**Rowling:** Mainly because I've just had a baby, to be totally honest with you. It's pressure of time. I just couldn't really fit a whole bunch of interviews into the, you know, the nursing

schedule, so I just decided that I was going to try and focus on the kids this time.

*The 39-year-old native of England and her Scottish husband, Neil Murray, have some kids of their own. They just had their second child together, and Jo has one older daughter from a previous marriage.*

**Rowling:** And we've got a mad dog as well that your crew met earlier.

*Jo says her growing family has given her new perspective, and made writing more of a labor of love.*

**Rowling:** I took a break, as you may remember, between the end of "Goblet" and "Phoenix." And then since I started writing again, I have to say I've absolutely love it. But I am pacing myself a little better.

**Couric:** How are you doing it differently?

**Rowling:** I think that emotionally, I've probably felt a little bit more balanced when I started writing again. And, although, life was actually fuller because I got married again and was pregnant for most of the writing of "Phoenix." I was almost pregnant for most of the writing – in fact for all of the writing of...

**Couric:** Maybe pregnancy makes you more creative.

**Rowling:** Well, I was also pregnant while writing "Philosopher's Stone" so actually half of my novelistic output has been done while pregnant, so.

**Couric:** So maybe you shouldn't stop having babies.

**Rowling:** No, really Katie, I think we'll stop here. That's not a good enough reason.

*Her publisher may disagree. Not including this newest novel, the wildly popular series about the sensational but shy, young wizard has sold some 270 million books in 62 languages, even Braille, turning a generation of couch potatoes onto the lost art of reading.*

**Couric:** You ever get mobbed by throngs of 11-year-olds?

**Rowling:** The most embarrassing one was last year. I was in a café in Edinburgh, and I got up and I went into the ladies room, and I heard a whole lot of people come into the bathroom and a lot of whispering. Didn't really think about it. Came out of the cubicle to find about 11 teenage girls all standing holding bits of paper. And you really don't want to be ambushed in that situation preferably. So that one was, I mean, they were they were adorable. But I would have preferred them to wait while I was out of the ladies room. Call me prudish.

*And this seven year phenomenon shows no sign of waning.*

*“Half-Blood Prince” is expected to out-sell the fastest selling hardback in history, “Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix.”*

*“Harry Potter five was the largest product release ever in the history of Amazon.com,” says Jan Baker-Strand of Amazon.com. “And it was nearly double the size of Harry Potter four.”*

*That’s why for book six, Potter’s publisher, Scholastic, ordered a printing of 10.8 million copies, the largest first printing of any book ever.*

**Couric:** You’ve said the opening chapter of this book has been brewing in your mind for 13 years.

**Rowling:** It has, yeah. You find out a lot more back story, really a lot. Harry finds out a lot more about the past which hopefully will be useful to him in the future. You see, I’m even measuring what I’m saying because I can see it written on fan sites, with them analyzing what I’ve just said, and thinking “What does this mean?” But you know, you could go a little bit mad.

*Her paranoia is justified. Spoiler sites and stolen book pages have plagued previous installments. So, in the months leading up to book six’s release, binderies both home and abroad were forced to take extraordinary security measures to make sure Harry’s secrets were safe.*

**Couric:** There were basically armed guards everywhere. People had to wear ID badges. And one employee joked that as of yet there had not been a body cavity search.

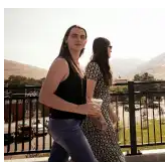
**Rowling:** No you wouldn’t want it in a body cavity. This is a big book.

*Still, rumors were rampant the manuscript had leaked, especially after betting Web sites based in Britain were taking odds on whether or not Harry’s headmaster Dumbledore was doomed. For those of you who haven’t read the book yet, we won’t spill the beans.*

**Rowling:** They think Dumbeldore’s a goner. Well, I will say that I have actually never said that a major character is going to die.

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WORLD

**Eritrean migrants involved in violent clashes should be deported, Israel's Netanyahu says****Couric:** So it's not true?**Rowling:** I'm not saying that.

*But even Jo couldn't have conjured up this Potter plot: Last month, two men were arrested for allegedly trying to sell a stolen book to a British tabloid. British police confirm one of them was charged with possession of a firearm.*

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**Rowling:** Has gone insane? Yeah, absolutely. I mean ultimately what is this? It's a kid's book. And I mean obviously it's my life. I mean I've worked very hard on it. But 15 years ago, if someone had said "You know yeah, you'll publish it, it will be popular, and they'll be guns involved." I think it's just— it's surreal isn't it?

*Meanwhile, Rowling's money keeps... well, rolling in.*

*Never mind the books, the first three Harry Potter movies have grossed over \$2.5 billion. And the fourth film, "Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire" comes to theaters this fall.*

**Couric:** I know that you're very modest about your success. On the other hand, I read, Jo, that you are one of four self-made female billionaires in the world—

**Rowling:** Billionaires?**Couric:** No, is that wrong?

**Rowling:** It's okay— well— You feel really sorry for me, I'm not a billionaire, what a tragedy.

**Couric:** Well—

**Rowling:** No, this about that figure came from Forbes Magazine.

**Couric:** Right.

**Rowling:** And I have been told that they are speculating on all possible future earnings, all past earnings. And, frankly, they're adding figures together that don't exist. So I am not a billionaire. I've got plenty of money, more money than I ever dreamed I would have. But I am not a billionaire.

**Couric:** So the b-word does not apply?

**Rowling:** No, not at all. But if we assume that they've inflated the other women similarly. So, you know, relatively speaking, I'm doing okay.

*But Rowling hasn't forgotten what it was like before she became synonymous with fame and fortune— less than a decade ago, when the only checks coming in to her house were welfare checks.*

**Rowling:** Last year, when I was pregnant with Mackenzie, Neil and I were on the other side of Edinburgh. And we were very near the flat in which I finished writing "Philosopher's Stone." I hadn't been back there since I had left it and moved to a new house. And I said to Neil, "Let's go around the corner, this is where I used to live."

And when I clapped eyes on the place, I burst into tears. I couldn't stop crying. For a moment, I was back where I had been all those years ago. It brought back this tidal wave of emotion. And I think it hit me so hard how life had changed. And in all respects, how wonderful it was.

And I'm standing there and I'm looking at this place and I'm thinking, it was almost like, I would see the ghost of myself standing in the window and I would be able to communicate to that person, "It's all going to be okay. You know, you're working so hard, and it will be okay. And it will be more than okay, it will be fabulous." I will never forget how it felt to go back there.

*While Rowling understands everyone loves a rags-to-riches story, she says "happily ever after" is not automatically her epilogue.*

**Rowling:** This was something that I always had difficulty with expressing when it had all just happened to me, and everyone wanted my emotions to be very simple. They wanted me to say, "I was poor and I was unhappy, and now I've got money and I'm really happy." And it's what we all want to see when the quiz winner wins the big prize, you know. You want to see some jumping up and down, for everything to be very uncomplicated. The fact is, I was living

a very pure life. There was no press involvement, there was no pressure. Life was very pure and it became more complicated.

*Jo told us, she's already begun writing book seven— the one in which she will bring the Harry Potter saga to its climactic end.*

**Couric:** If you, God forbid, got hit by a bus...

**Rowling:** Yeah, it's perfectly possible, I'm a very distracted person.

**Couric:** Does anybody know your ideas for book seven?

**Rowling:** No.

**Couric:** Nobody? Not a soul?

**Rowling:** No.

**Couric:** Not Neil?

**Rowling:** I wouldn't tell— Neil would forget. You know, he wouldn't be a good person to tell anyway. No, no one knows. Which is good, because if I do get hit by a bus, I would really hate to think someone else was going to take over. It's my baby.

*And as she looks forward to a literary life beyond Harry Potter, Jo says she will savor her final journey aboard the Hogwarts Express.*

**Couric:** When you finish it, and obviously you have a lot of work ahead of you, are you going to be sad or—

**Rowling:** Yeah. It's going to be really emotional to say goodbye. I'm going to find it very difficult. But it must be done, it must be done. It's been a fabulous ride, but you have to know when to get off, and I know when to get off, and it will be the end of book seven.

**Couric:** Terrifying, though, to think about what you'll do next—

**Rowling:** No, liberating. Definitely. Yeah. It is. The world is my oyster. I can do whatever I like.

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Katie Couric

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