Stephen Crane Biography

Crane was born in 1871 in Newark, New Jersey. He was the youngest of 14 children born to devout Methodist parents. His father was a reverend. By all accounts, he had a normal childhood, and his earliest ambition was to be a professional baseball player.

He attended Claverack College, working in the summer at a newspaper for his brother Townley in Asbury Park, New Jersey. He attended Lafayette College, but he was asked to leave after a semester, so he left for Syracuse University, leaving there after a semester, as well. At this point, Crane began doing reporting for the New York Tribune, and he left New Jersey for New York, so he could experience what he considered to be the low life of the city.

He spent his time, in the Bowery, where lower-class immigrants congregate, because he felt that in order to get beneath the surface of their existence, he needed to live the life of the poor, not just observe it. He wanted to gain artistic authenticity by imposing the conditions of suffering on his own body.

Interestingly, he often wrote about things he had yet to experience: The Red Badge of Courage was written after the Civil War, but before Crane had observed his first military battle.

The Red Badge of Courage was Crane’s first commercially successful novel, having been published in a serial form in various newspapers before it was published as a book. The critical praise the novel received put a lot of pressure on Crane to produce masterpieces of literature while at the same time producing quality journalistic work. After the novel was published, Crane was unable to duplicate its style or its success, and his later work often appeared to be an appeal for popular approval, and were not as successful.

The last few years of Crane’s life were very eventful. He traveled as a reporter to the West, Mexico, Greece, Cuba, and Puerto Rico, all in an attempt to observe war. In March 1900 he leaned over to pat a dog and found that his mouth had filled with blood. Three months later, Crane died of tuberculosis in a sanatorium in Germany.