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ERICH SEGAL: A LIFE OF LITERATURE, RESILIENCE, AND PASSION

Some figures in literature make a lasting impact, yet their contributions gradually fade from public awareness. Erich Segal was one such individual – a brilliant scholar, a gifted storyteller, and a man of extraordinary perseverance. Best known for his bestselling novel *Love Story*, Segal's influence extended far beyond popular fiction. He was a respected classicist, a dedicated educator, and even an avid marathon runner. His life, shaped by both remarkable achievements and personal struggles, remains a testament to intellectual fervor and steadfast fortitude.

Born on June 16, 1937, in Brooklyn, New York, Segal was the eldest of three brothers in a Jewish family with roots in Vilnius, Lithuania. From an early age, Segal showed a love for literature and storytelling. One of the most significant moments of his childhood was the fact that a serious canoeing accident during high school led him to take up jogging as rehabilitation – an activity that would become a lifelong pursuit, leading him to compete in the Boston Marathon more than a dozen times. Segal's academic journey took him to Harvard College, where he graduated in 1958 as class poet and Latin salutatorian. He went on to earn a master's degree in 1959 and a doctorate in comparative literature in 1965. A dedicated scholar, he spent much of his career teaching classics, primarily at Yale University, with visiting positions at Princeton, Oxford, and the University of London. In 1975, he married Karen James, and they settled in North West London, raising two daughters, Miranda and Francesca. The latter followed in his literary footsteps, becoming a journalist and critic.

While working at Yale University, Erich Segal wrote “*Love Story*” – the novel, which brought him worldwide recognition. Primarily it was written as a screenplay which was subsequently approved by Paramount Pictures. When the filming began, Paramount requested Segal to adapt the story to a novel as part of its marketing campaign. The book was symbolically released on February 14, 1970 (St. Valentine's Day). “*Love Story*” was an instant commercial success, selling 21 million copies. It became a *New York Times* bestseller and was translated into 33 languages worldwide. The eponymous film was released on December 16, 1970. Erich Segal's screenplay brought him a Golden Globe Award and one of the film's seven Oscar nominations.

The book tells the story of Harvard student Oliver Barrett IV and Radcliffe student Jennifer Cavalleri, who fall in love with each other, despite all their differences – he comes from a wealthy and prominent family, and she is the daughter of a middle-class Italian immigrant. In spite of Oliver's dad's objections, the couple get married. Oliver is left with no money, newlyweds live in poverty. However, the only force that can keep Oliver and Jenny apart is death. Jenny is diagnosed with leukemia and has her days numbered. Oliver spends all his time with Jenny and she eventually dies in his hands.

In “*Love Story*” Erich Segal addresses vital and complex topics that resonate in the hearts of readers. One of the most important issues raised in the book is hardships in parent-child

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relationships. In Erich Segal's own words, the book is about a young couple, but even more about a father and a son. The coldness and strain between Oliver Barrett and his father are sharply opposed to the warm and loving relationships of Jenny and her dad. Moreover, in his book, Erich Segal shows that if people truly love each other nothing can be between them – neither different social backgrounds nor financial difficulties. Oliver sacrifices everything he has to be with Jenny – riches, social status, and privileges. However, the couple were happy even in poverty, they were finding joy in small things like a boat trip or just in time spent together. The loss of a loved person is another important topic raised in a book. Unfortunately, this theme is timely for Ukrainians. Every day people of Ukraine face the loss of loved ones, who died on the front line or due to air strikes.

Seven years after realizing his prominent romantic book, Erich Segal wrote “Oliver's Story” – a sequel to “Love Story.” In this book, Oliver tries to recover from Jenny's death. He attempts to build new relationships with a rich heiress and reconnect with his father. The book was also adapted into the film, which was released on December 15, 1978. Besides, he wrote one children's book – “Fairy tale” (1973) and six romantic books – “Man, woman and a child” (1980), “The Class” (1985), “Doctors” (1988), “Acts of Faith” (1990), “Prizes” (1995), “Only Love” (1998). In his novels, Eric Segal wrote about themes close to him – religion, medical and scientific ethics, as well as about love that is challenged or impossible for various reasons.

Erich Segal had a gift – the ability to tell stories that made people feel. Whether through books or films, his work was filled with emotion, depth, and unforgettable characters. He wasn't just a novelist or a screenwriter; he was a storyteller in the truest sense. One of his earliest contributions to cinema was the screenplay for *Yellow Submarine* (1968), the vibrant, surreal animated film inspired by The Beatles. It became a pop culture milestone, beloved by generations. A few years later, he wrote “R.P.M.” (1970), a drama that captured the political and social upheaval of the 1960s, proving his ability to tell stories that reflected the world around him. But Segal's real influence wasn't just in the films he wrote – it was in the way he inspired others. Many writers, both in novels and screenplays, credit him with shaping their approach to storytelling. His ability to create deeply human, emotionally rich narratives set a standard that still resonates today. When *Love Story* was published and later adapted into a film, it changed the way love and loss were portrayed in popular culture. The raw emotion, the heartbreak, and the now-iconic line – “Love means never having to say you're sorry” – became part of a generation's vocabulary. People saw themselves in the story, felt its joys and sorrows, and carried it with them long after the last page or final scene. But Segal wasn't just a writer of romance – he was also a scholar, a professor, and a lover of classical literature. He spent years teaching Greek and Latin at Yale, Princeton, and Oxford, weaving the wisdom of the past into modern storytelling. His ability to blend academic insight with accessible, heartfelt narratives made his work unique, and it left a lasting impression on students, writers, and scholars alike. Even now, years after his passing, his influence remains. His books still touch readers, his films still move audiences, and his storytelling style continues to inspire new generations of writers. Segal once admitted, “I was afraid of being rejected, yes. I was also afraid of being accepted for the wrong reasons.” That honesty, that vulnerability, is what made his stories feel so real. Through his words – whether on the page, on screen, or in the classroom – Erich Segal left behind something more than just books and films. He left behind stories that live on in the hearts of those who read, watch, and remember them.

Despite his successes, Segal faced significant challenges. Diagnosed with Parkinson's disease in his 40s, he refused to let the illness define him, continuing to write, teach, and run with remarkable determination. He passed away on January 17, 2010, at the age of 72. At his funeral, his daughter Francesca paid tribute to her father's unwavering spirit, saying, that he fought to breathe, fought to live, every second of the last 30 years of illness with such mind-blowing obduracy, is a testament to the core of who he was – a blind obsessionality that saw him pursue his teaching, his writing, his running, and my mother, with just the same tenacity. He was the most dogged man any of us will ever know.

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