

# SUSAN SONTAG

b. January 16, 1933 – d. December 28, 2004

*“To me, literature is a calling, even a kind of salvation. It connects me with an enterprise that is over 2,000 years old.”*

Susan Sontag spent her childhood in Tucson, Arizona, and Los Angeles, California. A precocious child who excelled in academics, Sontag graduated from high school at age 15. She earned her bachelor's degree at the University of Chicago. Sontag pursued graduate work in literature, philosophy and theology at Harvard University and at Saint Anne's College, Oxford.

In 1950, at age 17, Sontag married Philip Rieff, a professor of sociology theory. Two years later, Sontag gave birth to her only child, David Rieff. After her divorce nine years later, Sontag never remarried.

Sontag began her writing career at age 30 with “The Benefactor” (1963). Literary critics consider her critically acclaimed short story “The Way We Live Now” (1986) a monumental work of literature on the subject of AIDS. It was selected for inclusion in John Updike's “The Best American Short Stories of the Century.”

In addition to writing six works of fiction, including her best-selling novel, “The Volcano Lover” (1992), Sontag produced her most celebrated work as an essayist. The New Yorker, The New York Review of Books, the Times Literary Supplement, The Nation and the London Review of Books have published her provocative essays.

Sontag kept her sexuality mostly private. In an interview with Out Magazine, she discussed her reluctance to live an openly gay life: “Maybe I could have given comfort to some people if I had dealt with the subject of my private sexuality more, but it's never been my prime mission to give comfort, unless somebody's in drastic need. I'd rather give pleasure, or shake things up.” Sontag had several committed relationships with women, including her decade-long relationship with photographer Annie Leibovitz.

On December 28, 2004, Sontag lost her battle with cancer. Her Village Voice obituary read: “She was the indispensable voice of moral responsibility, perceptual clarity, passionate (and passionately reasonable) advocacy: for aesthetic pleasure, for social justice, for unembarrassed hedonism, for life against death.”



**The “Dark Lady” of American intellectualism, Susan Sontag was an internationally acclaimed writer, director and human rights activist who added an unparalleled female voice to the American cultural fabric.**

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