

RITA MAE BROWN

b. November 28, 1944

AUTHOR

*“Don’t ask to live in tranquil times.
Literature doesn’t grow there.”*

An author and screenwriter, Rita Mae Brown is best known for her semi-autobiographical lesbian-themed novel, “Rubyfruit Jungle.” She is a groundbreaking activist for lesbian and civil rights.

An only child, Brown was adopted and raised in York, Pennsylvania. At age 11, her family moved to Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

Brown’s interest in political activism began with the black civil rights movement. In 1964, after losing her scholarship at the University of Florida due to her involvement in a rally, Brown was forced to drop out of school. She hitchhiked to New York where she lived in an abandoned car before enrolling at New York University (NYU).

At NYU, Brown cofounded the Student Homophile League. In 1968, she joined the National Organization of Women (NOW). She worked there until a schism over whether or not to support lesbian issues caused her to resign. She says she was “kicked out” for raising the gay issue.

Betty Friedan is largely blamed for Brown’s expulsion from NOW. Years later, Friedan publicly apologized and admitted her actions were wrong.

After severing ties with NOW, Brown joined the Redstockings, a liberal feminist group. She helped form the lesbian feminist newspaper Furies Collective. Thereafter, she earned a Ph.D. in political science from the Institute for Policy Studies, a progressive think tank in Washington, D.C.

Brown’s coming-of-age lesbian novel, “Rubyfruit Jungle,” sold over 70,000 copies and made her a champion of lesbian rights. The book’s success encouraged her to author other lesbian novels.

In addition to more than 50 books, Brown has written numerous television screenplays. She received Emmy nominations for the variety show “I Love Liberty” and the miniseries “The Long Hot Summer.”

Brown lives on a farm outside of Charlottesville, Virginia. She is a Master of Fox Hounds and advocates for animal rescue.

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