

## **D.E. Kendall Writing Sample 5 - Biography**

*The following is an extract from a draft manuscript in a pre-publication phase.*

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One of equine welfare's unsung heroes, Anna Sewell's story resides in the shadows of her world-famous novel. So, over two-hundred years since her birth, Anna Sewell's remarkable story is finally being given the attention it deserves.

Isaac and Mary Sewell welcomed their daughter, Anna, on 30<sup>th</sup> March 1820 – followed by their son, Philip, a few short years later. Anna was born in Great Yarmouth, a maritime town in Norfolk. Isaac ran a small shop, and Mary was a children's author who enjoyed success with her writing in her sixties. Isaac and Mary were also Quakers, a denomination of Christianity who believe all people are equal and that every life is important. Quakers were one of the first organisations to stand against slavery, and they were involved in epic campaigns to bring such barbaric violations of human rights to an end. Though for Anna, this compassion for fellow living creatures extended to animals.

As a child, Anna was home-schooled by her mother until the age of twelve. This education style allowed Anna to pursue her interest in natural history, which led her to develop an extraordinary skill for drawing.

Anna's family moved to London in 1822, where Anna grew up witnessing first-hand the diabolical treatment of horses pulling hansom cabs. Hansom cabs were a popular means of travel in the nineteenth century. They were lightweight, faster, and had safety features uncommon in large carriages, but also because they could be pulled by one horse – which meant cheaper fares for passengers and lower upkeep costs for cab drivers. Horses were expected to work continuously for hours every day, ferrying passengers to and from their destinations as quickly as possible. Conditions were terrible for the horse, as traffic build-up forced them into situations their sensitive dispositions weren't evolved to handle. Horses were expected to wade through tons of urine and faeces for hours every day, poisoning their systems and burning their skin. Many cab drivers had a basic knowledge of the horse, though they did not understand the severe damage endless hours of hard work on cobbled roads could cause a horse's legs. The lifespan for a horse working in these conditions was approximately four years, which is shocking compared to their average lifespan of around twenty-five years, as seen today.

The deplorable conditions in which horses were expected to work undoubtedly inspired Anna's future efforts to improve equine welfare. However, Anna and her family didn't reside in London for long. In an unfortunate accident, Anna injured both her ankles. That injury never healed and led to her needing a crutch for the rest of her life. Along with Anna's lack of mobility, her father's work drew them away from the unrelenting bustle of England's capital city. The family moved to Sussex, where they hoped the seaside surroundings would help Anna's affliction heal.

Whilst her ankle injuries never healed, Anna's disability led her to learn to ride a horse – eventually, Anna learned to drive a carriage too – so the horse played a major role in Anna's life.

Horses gifted Anna the freedom she'd never otherwise have enjoyed. They also provided her with solace as young Anna underwent various painful procedures in the hope of improving her mobility.

Sadly, by the 1860s, Anna's condition had worsened. So, her family had no choice but to move closer to their wider family in a village called Old Catton, located near Norwich, to fund Anna's treatment. Anna and her family had to travel to Europe to seek further treatment for her.

It is widely believed that her surroundings at Old Catton inspired various settings in *Black Beauty*. Old Catton is as quaint and charming as the fictional setting of Birtwick Park. Its storybook churches, picturesque cottages, and quiet country lanes make it the perfect place to write. Anna's house overlooked Deer Park, with sweeping emerald fields grazed by deer and horses, separated by hedgerows teeming with wildlife and occasionally graced by magnificent trees. Upon returning to Old Catton in 1871, Anna soaked up its charm and began writing *Black Beauty*.

Although it'd be easy to assume the horses who resided in such a glorious place would enjoy a gentler way of life than those driving hansom cabs in London, that certainly wasn't the case. A popular practice of the upper classes was the use of a 'bearing rein' for their carriage horses. A 'bearing rein' ran directly from the neck strap of a horse's carriage attire to the top of their head, with the intended purpose of holding the horse's head in an unnaturally high position. Not only would this cause extreme discomfort, but it also made the horse's work infinitely more challenging and caused irreparable damage to their neck muscles. This practice was deemed inhumane in the late nineteenth century – largely thanks to Anna Sewell and *Black Beauty* – and has long since fallen out of fashion.

Unfortunately, Anna's health deteriorated significantly whilst writing *Black Beauty*, to the point Anna had to dictate the story to her mother to write on her behalf. Upon its completion, the manuscript for *Black Beauty* was submitted to Jarrold & Sons, a publishing company located in Norwich that had previously published the works of Mary Sewell.

Jarrold & Sons paid Anna £40 – approximately £4,700 today – and *Black Beauty* was published in November 1877.

Succumbing to illness in 1878, Anna never saw the remarkable impact her story had worldwide. *Black Beauty* continues to be one of the world's bestselling children's novels of all-time.

*Black Beauty* was the first publication of its kind, allowing humanity to view the world through a non-human entity's perspective. Anna's story educated people, taught readers how to tend to a horse's needs through the veil of fiction. Her writing inspired a world ignorant to the emotional wellbeing of the animal upon whose back their civilisation had been built to view the horse in an entirely new light. *Black Beauty* honoured the life of every horse to have served humanity, as the story portrayed their voice in a manner never before experienced. There are memorials of many descriptions across the world to thank Anna for all she has done for the plight of the horse. Though she may not have survived to see the wonders of her work, Anna Sewell's efforts to improve equine welfare are everlasting.