**John Griffith** "**Jack**" **London** (born **John Griffith Chaney**,[[1]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jack_London#cite_note-FOOTNOTEReesman2009.5Bhttp:.2F.2Fbooks.google.com.2Fbooks.3Fid.3DfbrV_fwgcq4C.26pg.3DPA23_23.5D-1) January 12, 1876 – November 22, 1916)[[2]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jack_London#cite_note-2)[[3]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jack_London#cite_note-3)[[4]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jack_London#cite_note-FOOTNOTELondon193912-4)[[5]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jack_London#cite_note-FOOTNOTENew_York_Times_November_23.2C_1916-5) was an American author, journalist, and social activist. He was a pioneer in the then-burgeoning world of commercial magazine fiction and was one of the first fiction writers to obtain worldwide celebrity and a large fortune from his fiction alone.[[6]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jack_London#cite_note-6) Some of his most famous works include [*The Call of the Wild*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Call_of_the_Wild) and [*White Fang*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/White_Fang), both set in the [Klondike Gold Rush](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Klondike_Gold_Rush), as well as the short stories "[To Build a Fire](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/To_Build_a_Fire)", "An Odyssey of the North", and "Love of Life". He also wrote of the South Pacific in such stories as "The Pearls of Parlay" and "The Heathen", and of the San Francisco Bay area in [*The Sea Wolf*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Sea_Wolf).

London was a passionate advocate of unionization, [socialism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Socialism), and the rights of workers. He wrote several powerful works dealing with these topics, such as his [dystopian novel](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Utopian_and_dystopian_fiction) [*The Iron Heel*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Iron_Heel), his non-fiction exposé [*The People of the Abyss*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_People_of_the_Abyss), and *The War of the Classes*.

**Early life**



London at the age of nine with his dog Rollo, 1885

London was born near Third and Brannan Streets in [San Francisco](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/San_Francisco). The house burned down in the fire after the [1906 San Francisco earthquake](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1906_San_Francisco_earthquake); the [California Historical Society](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/California_Historical_Society) placed a plaque at the site in 1953. Although the family was working class, it was not as impoverished as London's later accounts claimed[*[citation needed](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia%3ACitation_needed%22%20%5Co%20%22Wikipedia%3ACitation%20needed)*]. London was essentially self-educated[*[citation needed](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia%3ACitation_needed%22%20%5Co%20%22Wikipedia%3ACitation%20needed)*].

In 1885, London found and read [Ouida](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ouida)'s long [Victorian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Victorian_era) novel *Signa*. He credited this as the seed of his literary success.[[11]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jack_London#cite_note-11) In 1886, he went to the [Oakland Public Library](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oakland_Public_Library) and found a sympathetic librarian, [Ina Coolbrith](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ina_Coolbrith), who encouraged his learning. (She later became California's first [*poet laureate*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poet_laureate) and an important figure in the San Francisco literary community).

In 1889, London began working 12 to 18 hours a day at Hickmott's Cannery. Seeking a way out, he borrowed money from his black foster mother Virginia Prentiss, bought the [sloop](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sloop) *Razzle-Dazzle* from an [oyster pirate](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oyster_pirate) named French Frank, and became an oyster pirate. In his memoir, [*John Barleycorn*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Barleycorn_%28novel%29), he claims to have stolen French Frank's mistress Mamie.[[12]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jack_London#cite_note-12)[[13]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jack_London#cite_note-FOOTNOTELondon193941-13)[[14]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jack_London#cite_note-14) After a few months, his sloop became damaged beyond repair. London hired on as a member of the [California Fish Patrol](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/California_Department_of_Fish_and_Wildlife).

In 1893, he signed on to the [sealing](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seal_hunting) [schooner](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Schooner) *Sophie Sutherland*, bound for the coast of [Japan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Japan). When he returned, the country was in the grip of the [panic of '93](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Panic_of_1893) and [Oakland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oakland%2C_California) was swept by labor unrest. After grueling jobs in a [jute mill](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jute_mill) and a street-railway power plant, he joined [Kelly's Army](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kelly%27s_Army) and began his career as a tramp. In 1894, he spent 30 days for vagrancy in the [Erie County](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Erie_County%2C_New_York) Penitentiary at [Buffalo, New York](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buffalo%2C_New_York). In *The Road*, he wrote:

*Man-handling was merely one of the very minor unprintable horrors of the Erie County Pen. I say 'unprintable'; and in justice I must also say undescribable. They were unthinkable to me until I saw them, and I was no spring chicken in the ways of the world and the awful abysses of human degradation. It would take a deep plummet to reach bottom in the Erie County Pen, and I do but skim lightly and facetiously the surface of things as I there saw them.*

After many experiences as a hobo and a sailor, he returned to Oakland and attended [Oakland High School](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oakland_High_School_%28California%29). He contributed a number of articles to the high school's magazine, *The Aegis*. His first published work was "Typhoon off the Coast of Japan", an account of his sailing experiences.[[15]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jack_London#cite_note-15)



Jack London studying at Heinold's First and Last Chance in 1886

As a schoolboy, London often studied at [Heinold's First and Last Chance Saloon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heinold%27s_First_and_Last_Chance_Saloon), a port-side bar in Oakland. At 17, he confessed to the bar's owner, John Heinold, his desire to attend university and pursue a career as a writer. Heinold lent London tuition money to attend college.

London desperately wanted to attend the [University of California, Berkeley](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/University_of_California%2C_Berkeley). In 1896, after a summer of intense studying to pass certification exams, he was admitted. Financial circumstances forced him to leave in 1897 and he never graduated. No evidence suggests that London wrote for student publications while studying at Berkeley.[[16]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jack_London#cite_note-FOOTNOTEKingman197967-16)



Heinold's First and Last Chance, "Jack London's Rendezvous"

While at Berkeley, London continued to study and spend time at Heinold's saloon, where he was introduced to the sailors and adventurers who would influence his writing. In his autobiographical novel, [*John Barleycorn*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Barleycorn_%28novel%29)*,* London mentioned the pub's likeness seventeen times. Heinold's was the place where London met Alexander McLean, a captain known for his cruelty at sea,[[17]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jack_London%22%20%5Cl%20%22cite_note-17) on whom the protagonist in London's novel [*The Sea-Wolf*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Sea-Wolf), Wolf Larsen, is based.[[18]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jack_London#cite_note-18)

Heinold's First and Last Chance Saloon is now unofficially named Jack London's Rendezvous in his honor.[[*citation needed*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia%3ACitation_needed)]