

## MATT CHRISTOPHER

“I’m a dreamer. Writing fulfills my Dreams.....I am my own fantasy island.”  
-- Matt Christopher “What Writing Means To Me”



Matthew Frederick Christopher (1917-1997) was born the first of nine children on Aug. 16, 1917, in the mining town of Bath, PA to Fred and Mary Christopher. Matt’s mother and father were recent Hungarian and Italian immigrants respectively. His father struggled carving out a minimal living as a Depression Era laborer in the mining industry.

It was evident early on to the Christopher’s that their eldest son was of the athletic sort. When not actively engaged in his household chores, young “Matty” was outside playing baseball in the pastures or basketball in the barn. He excelled in nearly every sport he attempted and played baseball and football while attending High School in Ludlowville, NY.

After graduation in 1935, he continued to play both basketball and baseball. Of the two, his talents were more pronounced as a switch-hitting third baseman. While working for the Cayuga Rock Salt Co. as a laborer during the day, Matt played for a semi-professional league in his off-hours.

For two months in 1937, Matt realized his dream and briefly found himself a professional baseball player. He played in the Class C minor leagues with the Smith Falls Beavers of Ontario, Canada. Matt’s professional career started out well with two hits in four at-bats and two RBIs in his first game. He soon found major league pitching too tough to hit consistently and he was cut from the team. While he was offered a spot on a team from Brockport of the same league, he decided that he was not good enough to play at that level.

Returning home, Matt continued to play on other semi-professional teams in New York. While playing for Freeville-Dryden, Matt suffered a severe knee injury which, despite team MVP honors, essentially ended his baseball career.

Matt would take consolation later in 1938 when he played against the New York Giants in an exhibition game in Truxton, New York. In front of 10,000 fans, Matt found himself opposite Major League Baseball’s New York Giants. He managed to go one for two in the game, hitting a single off of the Giant’s Johnny Wittig in his first at-bat.



Matt’s athletic career provided the background and foundation for his future writing career. Realizing that his dream of playing professional ball was unrealistic, he turned his attention to writing.

Matt had long had a passion for reading and at the age of fourteen he put his active imagination to practice by writing poems and short stories. At fifteen Matt convinced his father to buy him a typewriter since it was an

essential piece of equipment for an aspiring author. Splitting his time between school, sports, and family chores, he studied published works and wrote at a fever pitch. His early short stories were predominately inspired by his favorite literature, Dime Detective Novels. In fact, most of Matt's early works were detective mysteries and not the sports oriented children's books for which he would later be known.

In 1935 Matt won a prize in a *Writer's Digest* short-story contest, placing 191<sup>st</sup> out of 200 winners. Five years later, after many rejection slips, Matt made his first sale. His one-act play *Escape* was published in an *Anthology of 100 Non-Royalty One-Act Plays* in 1941. He only received five dollars, but he was encouraged enough to apply even more of his energy towards his writing career.



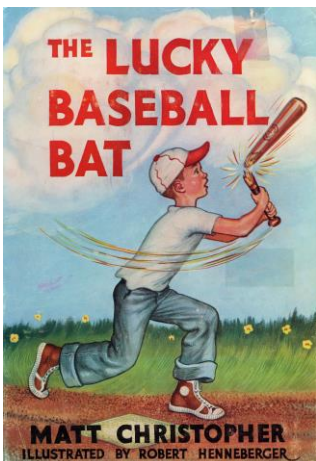
Matt married Catherine M. Krupa on June 13, 1940, adding family life to his ever increasing responsibilities. Along with working fulltime at the National Cash Register Co. (NCR) in Ithaca, NY, supporting his family (which eventually would expand to include four children: Martin, Dale, Pamela, and Duane), and playing baseball and softball, Matt was determined to write a detective story a week. He did so and on the fortieth week, Matt was able to secure his first short story sale. He received fifty dollars for "The Missing Finger Points" when it was published by Fiction House Inc. Matt, however ecstatic over the sale, knew that fifty dollars for forty weeks of work was not going to allow him to make writing his full-time job.

He began writing novels with varying themes from science fiction, mystery, adventure, and even romances, but he found it difficult to get any of these major works published. While his short stories continued to sell, the money he received for them never exceeded the level of mere supplemental income.

Then in 1952, Matt finally received word from Phoenix Press that they were interested in publishing his 60,000 word detective novel published as Look for the Body. The sale which amounted to \$150 along with that of his various short stories were simply not enough to solidify the budding author's confidence, but Matt was determined to succeed as a writer.



Over the course of his early career, he averaged nearly fifteen rejection slips for every story he managed to get published. Sometimes he would submit the same story more than a dozen times before it was accepted.



Then one fateful day Matt received a rejection slip that planted a seed for future success. On this particular slip, the publisher recommended that he concentrate on writing stories for children since he seemed to "...have a talent for writing about children." This episode, combined with a conversation he had with a local librarian concerning the dearth of sports-centered books for children, sparked an idea.

Over the 1952 Thanksgiving weekend Matt wrote *The Lucky Bat* and sent the manuscript to Little, Brown & Co. Not expecting a favorable reply for an unproven author, Matt was pleasantly surprised when the editor praised his work and agreed to

publish his novel under the new title *The Lucky Baseball Bat*. It debuted in 1954 and netted Matt \$250.

Matt's confidence as a writer was invigorated and he quickly began writing again. He submitted a few more works to Little, Brown and *Baseball Pals* was published in 1956.

Over the next few years, while Matt continued to work fulltime at National Cash Register Co., he wrote every spare moment he could. His efforts were rewarded when Little, Brown published several of his works. By 1963, Matt had fifteen novels published, mostly by Little, Brown. He was finally able to retire from NCR to concentrate solely on his writing.

Matt went on to publish over 100 novels and 300 short stories and articles, mostly in the area of sports, although there are many exceptions such as the little known fact that Matt was the author of "Chuck White" comic strip adventure series in the *Treasure Chest* magazine. In the process he endeared himself to generations of children, many of whom credit Matt for sparking their interest in reading. His books were so popular that "...the spirit of his work continues to flow from the pens of other authors who write under the "Matt Christopher" banner..." even after he lost his battle with cancer on September 20, 1997.

Matt and his wife Cay moved to Rock Hill, South Carolina in the 1981 to be near their youngest son Duane. He continued to write and quickly became an integral part of the surrounding community. In 1983, Matt donated a portion of his personal papers to the Winthrop University Archives. The Matt Christopher Family Trust donated more in 2003 and 2004, while another portion was given by Duane Christopher in 2005.



In all, The Matt Christopher Papers include 70,000 pieces and 800 bound volumes. The Papers, extending from the 1910s to 2004, include most of his published and unpublished manuscripts (poems, short stories and articles, screenplays, and novels) as well as his notes, outlines, synopses, and drafts. Matt Christopher's galleys, leather bound author's editions, and bound editions of his books are also part of this collection. Other items included are his research materials, contract agreements, royalty statements, correspondence, fan-mail, memorabilia, personal book collection, and biographical information.