

McKenna, Richard Milton ^[1]

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Richard Milton McKenna, novelist and free-lance writer, was born in Mountain Home, Idaho, the oldest of four sons of Milton Lewis and Lucy Ertz McKenna. After graduating from high school and attending the College of Idaho, he was forced by the depression to join the U.S. Navy. He served from 1931 to 1953, retiring as a chief machinist's mate. While serving aboard a variety of ships at home and abroad, McKenna began to read widely, collecting books and observing the naval life—especially in China and Japan—which later became the material for his fiction. At thirty-six he discovered that he wanted to be a writer, and his remaining years were forged into an enduring American success story.

Leaving the navy after twenty-two years, McKenna enrolled at [The University of North Carolina](#) ^[2] with the idea of becoming a writer. Taking a variety of courses, he was elected to Phi Beta Kappa and was graduated in three years. He received a B.A. in English in 1956. The day after graduation he married Eva Mae Grice, a librarian at the university.

The story of his apprenticeship as a writer is recorded in *New Eyes for Old* (1972), a posthumous collection of essays and speeches. He was forty-four when he published his first story, a fantasy entitled "Casey Agonistes." There followed other stories that appeared in popular magazines, most of them collected in *Casey Agonistes and Other Science Fiction and Fantasy Stories* (1973), which earned the Nebula Award. When he was forty-nine he published *The Sand Pebbles* (1962), the dramatic story of a gunboat in China in the 1920s. This novel won him the Harper's Prize and a national reputation as a novelist. *The Sand Pebbles* was a Book-of-the-Month Club selection and later was made into an award-winning movie. When McKenna died in Chapel Hill, he left a second novel of naval life unfinished. It was published as *Sons of Martha and Other Stories* (1966).

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