

# Liam Neeson - Biography

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*"No drama school ever teaches you how to deal with being unemployed," says Liam Neeson. "What are you going to do when you become a waiter? How do you remind yourself you're an actor? You do it for three weeks, then three weeks becomes six months, then that becomes five years. It's very, very hard to deal with."*

Northern Ireland

### Horoscope : Capricorn

As an established screen star with Oscar, Bafta and Golden Globe nods on his CV, Liam Neeson doesn't need to worry about being out of work these days. But his ascent up the Hollywood ladder has been a long and hard one. In his 20s he was still making his mark in Irish regional theatre; by his 30s he had progressed to small parts in TV mini series. It wasn't until he was 41, when his Academy Award-nominated role in *Schindler's List* put him firmly on the map, that he felt he had truly arrived.



William John Neeson was born on June 7, 1952, in Ballymena, County Antrim, in Northern Ireland, to Barnard Neeson - a Catholic school caretaker - and his wife Kitty, a cook. He was the third child in the family and the only boy among four siblings.

Aged nine and big for his age he started boxing lessons at a local club, later going on to become Ulster senior champion. He dreamed of competing in the Olympics, but dropped the sport aged 17 when a blackout following a victory scared him into retirement.

He transferred his passion to acting, something he'd become interested in aged 11 after auditioning for a school play because a girl he fancied was appearing in it. Having landed the role he found he loved being on the stage, and as a teenager ended up joining a local troupe and touring Irish drama festivals.

His stint treading the boards was interrupted when he enrolled to study maths,



physics and geology at the University of Belfast, but the fledgling thesp soon realised the life of a student was not for him. He lasted less than a year before returning to his home town to take up a series of temporary jobs, from driving a forklift truck to working for Guinness.

While he never completely gave up on acting, he wasn't sure he saw it as a full-time career so, inspired by two of his sisters who'd become teachers, he embarked upon a teacher training course in Newcastle. Finding it difficult to cope with the attentions of some of the female students who'd flirt outrageously to get their own way he gave that up, too.

Liam finally committed to acting in 1976 after winning a two-minute part in a production at Belfast's Lyric Theatre. From that point on his stage career took off, and in 1980 he made the transition to the big screen after Oscar-nominated *Deliverance* director John Boorman - impressed with Liam's performance in *Of Mice And Men* - offered him a part in *Excalibur*.

The film proved a life changing experience in more ways than one. Not only did it introduce Liam to the widespread public, it also drew him the attention of his co-star Helen Mirren. The pair began a high profile romance, and Liam moved to London to be with Helen, who took an interest in his career, seeking out interesting projects and introducing him to the right people.



When, five years on, they parted ways amicably his CV included parts in several notable TV shows and movies, including an appearance in *The Bounty* opposite Anthony Hopkins and Daniel Day-Lewis.

In 1987 Liam headed for Hollywood. After scoring a part opposite Cher and Dennis Quaid in *Suspect*, he spent some time on Broadway. And, as at the start of his career, there was a director in the audience sizing him up for his new project.

Steven Spielberg liked what he saw and cast him in the lead role in 1993's *Schindler's List*. The film received critical acclaim and a best



actor Oscar nomination firmly establishing Liam's status. Afterwards the scripts poured in, including *Star Wars*, *Gangs Of New York*, *Love Actually*, and the *Chronicles Of Narnia*, providing voice for its main character, the lion Aslan.





He once said getting married and settling down wasn't the most important thing in his life, but Liam had a change of heart after falling for Natasha Richardson, the daughter of famed British actress Vanessa Redgrave. A decade after meeting on the set of small screen series *Ellis Island*, the pair tied the knot in New York in July 1994 and had two sons, Michael - born in 1995 - and Daniel, who arrived a year later. Liam loved being a dad, and from 2005 onwards began to scale back his work to spend more time with his sons.



Then, in 2009, tragedy struck. While Liam was filming his latest movie, *Chloe*, in Toronto Natasha, on a ski break in Canada, took what seemed to be a minor tumble. Refusing medical aid, she returned to her hotel but later died as a result of a head injury sustained during her fall.

### Number the events in chronological order

- ☐ He enrolled in a teacher training course in Newcastle.
- ☐ He was offered roles in various films.
- ☐ He went to the University of Belfast.
- ☐ He was given a part in *Excalibur*.
- ☐ He dropped out of university after less than a year.
- ☐ He joined a local troupe and touring Irish drama festivals.
- ☐ He was born into a Catholic working class family.
- ☐ Steven Spielberg cast him in the lead role in *Schindler's List*.
- ☐ The couple married and had two sons.
- ☐ He took boxing lessons.
- ☐ He met Helen Mirren and had an affair with her.
- ☐ He was nominated for an Academy Award.
- ☐ He got a two-minute part in a theatre production.
- ☐ He met his future wife on the set of a small TV series.
- ☐ He has three sisters.
- ☐ He did temporary jobs.
- ☐ His wife died tragically.
- ☐ He took part in several TV shows and movies.
- ☐ He auditioned for a school play.
- ☐ He worked with Cher and Dennis Quaid in *Suspect*.

### Correct these sentences

1. His father was a security guard in a museum.

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2. His mother was a dressmaker.

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3. He competed in the 1972 Olympics.

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4. He auditioned for a school play because he knew he would be an actor.

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5. He graduated from the University of Belfast.

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6. He worked as a taxi driver.

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7. The first major film he was on was *Suspect*.

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8. He married Helen Miller.

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9. He auditioned for *Schindler's List*.

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10. He acted in *Star Trek*.

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11. He married Vanessa Redgrave in Hollywood.

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12. His wife died in a road accident in New York.

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