

WALTER JOHN LAMB

Doctor of Letters

*Presented by Lucy Ferriss, Writer-in-Residence
Escorted by David Rosen, Associate Professor of English*

Born and raised in Norwich, Connecticut, you graduated from Norwich Free Academy. After graduating from the University of Connecticut in 1972, you returned to Norwich to embark upon what would become a 25-year career as a high school English teacher.

Though teaching was your first vocation, it was not without digressions. You had earned your master's degree, also from the University of Connecticut, and were nine years into your teaching career when you experienced a moment of transformative change. Discovering a voice within you that demanded to be heard, you turned your hand to writing fiction.

To hone your writing skills, you enrolled in the M.F.A. program at Vermont College, earning your M.F.A. in 1984. Your first novel, *She's Come Undone*, a story of triumph over a life of misery and abuse, quickly found a receptive audience. It was already a bestseller by the time Oprah Winfrey chose it for her book club in 1997, catapulting you into the national spotlight. At the same time, you were also putting the final touches on your second book, *I Know This Much Is True*. When it was published in 1998, it was welcomed with enthusiastic critical praise and became another Winfrey selection.

In 2008 you published your third novel, *The Hour I First Believed*, and a year later you published *Wishin' and Hopin'*.

Though you ended your long tenure at Norwich Free Academy in 1997, you did not stop teaching. As an associate professor at the University of Connecticut, you directed the English department's creative writing program. And at Connecticut's York Correctional Institution, you taught a celebrated workshop that was the focus of a segment on CBS-TV's *60 Minutes* and that resulted in two published anthologies of nonfiction, *Couldn't Keep It to Myself: Testimonies from Our Imprisoned Sisters* and *I'll Fly Away*.

Of your writing, you have said, "I write fiction so that I can move beyond the boundaries and limitations of my own experiences and better understand the lives of others. That's also why I teach."

You have been honored with a National Endowment for the Arts grant, the Connecticut Center for the Book's Lifetime Achievement Award, the Connecticut Bar Association's Distinguished Public Service Award, the Barnes and Noble "Writers for Writers" Award, the New England Book Award for fiction, and the Kenneth Johnson Memorial Book Award.

In his Nobel Prize acceptance speech, William Faulkner said that the writer's duty and privilege is "to help man endure by lifting his heart, by reminding him of the courage and honor and hope and pride and compassion and pity and sacrifice which have been the glory of his past." For creating a body of literature that consistently reminds us of how indomitable the human spirit is, I have the honor of presenting you, Walter John Lamb, for the degree of Doctor of Letters, *honoris causa*.