

Potential:
Acts of
Greatness
A Memoir

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Being born by cesarean section has some perks. You can always say you burst out your mother's womb at birth. A la Caesar. Taking life in your own hand. Then you can ask the doctor. Where is my salad?

We lived in Starrett City on the other side of Brooklyn. An enclave, closed off from the world. I called 200 Bethel Loop apartment 13H my home. My family were living the American Dream by being business owners.

They were rich and I was a paid for baby. That means that my birth was paid for with cash. These beginnings, as I later recount, lead to my acts of greatness. In trying to keep a family together.

My mother, and my father worked in the family pharmacy business and I grew up in that business during childhood. That is where I learned everything about business and life.

I started early learning school at Starrett City when I was 3 years old. I celebrated my 3rd birthday there. My mom ordered a cake and I licked my lips looking at the cake. I went 3 days a week from 9am to 11am for early learning.

When my family decided to expand their business in Brooklyn, they found a property and shortly after we owned prime pharmacy real estate at 506 Clarkson Avenue across from Kings County Hospital. The mortgage was cheap a month. And they put a deposit on the pharmacy. After Early learning, I would go to the pharmacy with my mom, Noshi as we called her. We would call our parents by their first names.

I casted my first ballot for President of the United States of America on Tuesday, November 6, 1984 when I was 3 for the re-election of Ronald Reagan. Back then the voting booths were giant machines with a red lever to cast your ballot, then you switch the black knobs down and then after you make all your selections you pull the lever back to the other side. I pulled the black knob, for President, when Mumtaz took me into the voting booth. I didn't know too much. But I knew America was an amazing place. Now that I think about it, I felt that this moment defined what I would later go on to do.

My parents were able to find a school that would accept me as a student. Montessori Academy of Park Slope, Brooklyn was my school that I went to for preschool. As a 4 year old I fit right in. They told my family that I would be reading the New York Times by the 3rd grade. It was true.

During the day, I would stay in school for what felt like forever. From 3pm to 6pm for homework. I felt lonely. I was usually the last to get picked up. Noshi would pick me up after working in the pharmacy. And she used to take me to the auctions to pick up merchandise for the stores. I helped her with auctions.

I used to tell stories to the Principal. I was an excellent story teller.

I was also a swimming prodigy, a gifted swimmer since birth. At the age of 3 months, my mother took me to the Starrett City recreation center. She enrolled us in mother/child lessons to make me comfortable in swimming. In Montessori Academy, I used to go every Thursday to the gym located in Beth Elohim's gymnasium. I marveled at the gymnastics section. But I really wanted to get into the pool.

I would keep my locker key in my swimming trunks hidden pocket. I went for a long time.

I almost drowned there. One day we were swimming. And I was in the middle of the lane. When suddenly someone decided to have a raft race while I was in the way. I wasn't able to get to safety. And the older kids kicked my head in the water and I was knocked out for a moment. I was going to die. Right there. I bobbed in and out of the water for what felt like an eternity. I saw the lifeguard and my teacher were chatting. And I knew that it was up to me to survive. I couldn't count on them. Until when I went underwater, I saw the metal ladder. I bobbed up and down in the water I slowly walked my way underwater to the metal ladder. Grabbing and kicking my arms and legs out and taking breathes when I went up for air. The waves were overwhelming. I pulled through in the end. I made it to the ladder and climbed it. Wrapped in a towel I waited 10 minutes before I can tell what happened. My teacher and the lifeguard could care less. I would go back into the pool one or two more times. But I gave up my love of swimming. From then on, I knew that love is something you could lose and I knew in my heart that I would never love a thing again. Little did I know that my heart will love again. Goes to show you time heals old wounds.

This near drowning incident called for a parent teacher conference with my Principal. She says your son doesn't want to go back in the water. My parents are separating at this time and I can't take it. My parents promise that I will give it another try. No, I won't, I thought to myself.

The next time he grabbed me by the hands and swung around the pool in a circular motion with my legs dangling close to the pool walls. It scared me. I never went back to that pool or later to that school. Even though they skipped me in the 3rd grade into the 4th for next year. Public school changed all that.

I was a lonely child.

But I excelled in Montessori Academy. Singing songs, the arts, learning languages, math and current events. I used to never understand when you divide something why does it have a remainder? One of life's great mysteries. Go figure!?!

Friday's at school we had Italian, not language, buy rather Italian Pasta. Sometimes I would go with the 6th graders led by their teacher for Pizza at Roma's pizza on 7th avenue and union street. I couldn't wait. I had my money ready and I would eat a great meal.

My mother goes to parent teacher conference every 6 months. I am doing well. Still shy in class but prospering. I was an excellent student.

After school I help in the store. Talking to customers, playing with paper towel hideaway's and toys. I opened all the transformers and hot wheels toys. Every Saturday me, Mumtaz and Noshi would go to the store. I study in the pharmacy.

Noshi and I eat breakfast and lunch outside. She works 18-hour days and doesn't have time to cook.

For school, she would fill up my lunchbox with samosa's, aloo tikka, sandwich's and a boiled egg.

One time in the school bus my metal lunchbox opened up and the boiled egg rolled all over the floor of the small school bus. I was so embarrassed.

We went on auctions in summer holidays.

My baby brother's birth. That was the happiest day of my life. His skin was almond white, dark lush black hair and chubby cheeks. I remember going to see him at Lutheran hospital in Sunset Park, Brooklyn. His was a natural canal birth. I loved him the moment he was born.

I watch Saved by the Bell and I want a girlfriend like Kelly. I thought that Zack was the coolest guy on the planet. TNBC was my shows.

My father took one of his employees Sega game gear and games and gave it to me in the security and construction business he was running.

The chaos continues. My mother kicks out my father for what he did to us.

I went to public school for the. First time in Starrett City at P.S.346. 4th grade with Ms. Lovely. She loved me. She would ask me how I knew the material. Montessori Academy prepared me for handling all matters. I am grateful for that school. Except, during lunch when I saw a sea of kids. I sat down next to a white blonde girl.

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She said "You should chew with your mouth closed!"

I felt so out of place that I told my mother.

"I don't want to go back to that school. Why can't I go to my school" I said.

I was a big fish in an even bigger pond.

I rebelled when my parents separated. I went for a month to 4th grade. Mainly because I was so defiant they didn't put me in the 5th grade. They took my report card and made me read a passage and arbitrarily put me in the 4th grade. It's like those lotto Powerball games. It's a matter of chance. So, I stayed home and just lived my life.

Summer before 5th grade. We all had super soakers. I used to play with all the black kids in Starrett City super soakers. Once, I grabbed the super soaker to stop him from spraying me. It broke. He said I owed him money.

Everyone told me not to give him. I gave him anyway and he disappeared afterwards.

P.S.346 5th grade. I used to sneak out in lunch time and buy my friends pizza. We used to go to the strip mall right next to school to have lunch. I would whip out \$100 bill and pay for everyone. I run from bullies and thugs from the neighborhood. They would chase kids and make them slap box each other. It was cruel and awful. All the young kids ran. I told friends that we need to form our own gang The Dragons.

They all let me play their video games. I learned about Sega Genesis and Nintendo entertainment system the NES. And it was like a new world opened up to me. I played video games at the arcade but now you can play it in the comfort and safety of your home.

I stood up to bullies all my life. And there is more power in a group then individually.

But it went nowhere.

I used to hitchhike to Kings Plaza and Canarsie to buy video games, watch movies and go to the arcade.

One time my baby brother followed us with help from a neighbor. He was lured by my brother for a dollar. I don't know why he followed me, his big brother, but I waited hours after I came back from Kings Plaza Electronic Boutique video game store.

Fearing the result of what will happen if he doesn't come home. When he finally returned his white tee shirt was covered in soot. Electronic Boutique is today's

GameStop stores for buying video games. Compared to today's kids who download

everything through iPhone's and iPads and video game consoles. We had to go and buy the cartridges and insert them into the video game systems. They let me play their video games and I lent them my DC comic cards and comics. I wasn't allowed to have comics in my apartment.

My father left the apartment at 13H when my brother was 1 years old, I think.

My father kicked me and brother out. So, I went to the parking lot where there is a security box. I called 911 and got the cops. I was a pro talking to the police officers.

And they were nice. They picked us up and took us to the police precinct. My brother was small and doesn't remember. They took my pulse and it was zero.

Then I told them to take us to relatives house on Dean Street in Brooklyn. He was a pharmacist. They refused to take us in. They told the police officers that they have a grandparents house in park slope near them, The police officer took the address, loaded us in his squad car and drove us there in 15 to 20 minutes.

P.S.39 The Henry Bristow School from 1992 to 1993

In my first day at P.S. 39. I looked over at classmates, book and immediately raised my hand. I didn't have a book. That didn't stop me. I answered successfully and My teacher was impressed. She favored me the entire school year.

My mother was improving and got better. She was always sitting by the security guard at the entrance.

I enrolled in P.S.39 after school started, October 1992 or so. My brother enrolled in Kindergarten at the same school. His kindergarten teacher was nice. My 6th grade teacher was great. Getting out of Starrett City

Projects was one of the best things that happened to me that year.

My teacher took us to Marvel Comics where my mother bought me comics. Then we went to the Pilgrim's Remake where I churned butter and ate fresh cornbread.

I had my first taste of computers. All they were good for was playing Oregon Trail and Where in the World is Carmen San Diego. On the Apple computer was my first experience with computers. Other than, my electronic typewriter without a ribbon cartridge in Starrett City.

I was a big fish in a small pond.

I received an award for Progress through Justice from Brooklyn District Attorney Charles Joseph Hynes at Brooklyn College Whitman Hall. I received lots of awards at the end of the school year in 6th grade. For Math, Social Studies and Academic Excellence. I got excellent grades in mostly everything. Except satisfactory in computer class at the beginning of the year. By the end of the school year, I received an excellent in computers too. I have most of my report cards one from Montessori Academy and from 5th and 6th grade.

I was recognized to be a people-to-people goodwill ambassador for Australia, Germany and Great Britain to have a dinner with presidents of the countries and the Queen of England. My mother used to take us to the people-to-people conference at the Marriott hotel in Downtown Brooklyn by the Courts.

I went to three things that I remember vividly about in 6th grade. Going to a classmate's birthday party where I got him his most favorite gift a Nerf football. Nerf was the toy to get sports players.

Then there was the one time I went to see a movie in Green Acres Mall. We had to choose between Free Willy and Jurassic Park. I choose Jurassic Park.

The final thing I remember is doing the world cultures tour for our class presentation. Each of us dressed in our cultures clothes. I wore shalwar and kameez. It's what everyone wears in Pakistan. Mine was sky blue. The Nalla, or belt holding up my shalwar broke so I had to put the shalwar over my jeans. Tucking it into my jeans was tricky. All I could remember from the others was traditional attire and another classmate who was given the line that pizza is Italian. Now it's American. I had the time of my life in 6th grade but it would never be the same again.

As a graduation gift, My teacher, bought me Jules Verne's 20,000 leagues under the sea and a 1776 book. I devoured the Jules Vernes book and hardly looked at the book 1776. Boys... You know. Now I seek out that book to recapture something she saw in me the potential.

I helped Russell Pinto who was running as a Republican for New York City Council 39 at the time.

We helped his campaign. He is a good man.

We had to take my brother to New York University's Orthodontist for fixing his teeth. I took them in the subway. My brother got money to go to the ice cream when he rang his bell for all the kids to buy ice cream. I really didn't like ice cream. I don't know how he heard the sound of the ice cream pickup truck with a freezer on top of the pickup from the 13th floor. Bat sonic hearing. I suppose.

We got Medicaid, Food Stamps, now call SNAP, and public assistance and left the businesses.

In 1993, we started Sunday school at the Brooklyn Society for Ethical Culture. It was great. I felt supported. We couldn't afford the Sunday school so the Society so we

went for free at the organization. They let us come for free. Me and classmate became best friends. I graduated that year from Sunday school and went on my way to Middle school.

For graduation our 6th grade sang the traditional folk gospel song written by Harry Dixon Loes.

During the summer after graduating from P.S. 39. I used to go to the libraries a lot. Especially Grand Army Plaza Central main library in Eastern parkway and Flatbush avenue. Andrew Carnegie did an amazing job building that library. Former first lady, Nancy Reagan put together a program for young, developing minds entitled "Reading is Fundamental." Or RIF as I call it. I used to go every week and checkout books from that desk and I remember loving the Dragon Lance book series cover art. I could never finish them in time. But I wanted the free book you get when you return the borrowed library books. It was cool. I got tickets to go see the New York Mets play for free as a treat for completing RIF. I never went, I was disappointed, the players went on strike that year. Didn't they know I had tickets.

William Alexander Middle School 51 7th and 8th grade 350 5th avenue Brooklyn, New York.

In 7th grade, I was a freshman in middle school. It was another big school. Thanks to my efforts reading during the summer I received the only honor of all the school to come before the Principal. I giggled my way in front of my friends in the auditorium and walked up the stairs on the side of the stage and collected my gifts. I received a silver, monographed initialed pen and pencil cross company brand set for my reading

achievement. It seemed like no one else in the school went to the library. I went to the library on my own.

My classmate. sat next to me cracking jokes. He told me a story about someone he knew getting blue balls and how bad it hurt his balls. I was rolling laughing. I would call him. He answered and we'd be rolling some more. Eventually he couldn't talk no more. Don't know what happened.

My homeroom teacher he was all about history. He had us do something for the United States of America's Bicentennial celebration.

That was cool. I went to Math club after school where they gave us solar-powered blue calculators to practice math games with. My mother went to the parent teacher conferences. I was terrible at Spanish.

I was now a big fish in an even bigger pond. They failed to put me into the rainbow. I went into the Environmental Studies program. It worked out for me.

I enjoyed computers, art and engineering. I would program on Radio Shack branded monitors with keyboards. We would draw a picture on grid paper and then match the coordinates on screen with inputs.

During 7th grade I ran for President. My family helped me run. We printed flyers and handed them out. Even though I lost I gained notoriety.

We hung out in the playground across the street. After eating dollar pizza or a bagel with fake cream cheese. On Friday's I would race to McDonald's on 9th street and around 5th avenue for the two-cheeseburger meal with French fries and a Coca-Cola for \$2.99 plus tax. It came out to \$3.25 total.

My science teacher, in environmental sciences took me in. We had a Nerf spongy orange ball and basket in the back of the room for a game called 1-2-3 shootout. I don't know what the point of the game was.

My favorite science teacher carried my bookbag to my home.

I would go early to school and use the computer.

In the 8th grade my homeroom teacher was, the art teacher, I got ready to graduate. I went to 8th grade prom. I did not get admissions to any good high school. I applied for the admissions test for Stuyvesant High School in Manhattan, New York but I didn't get in. No worries. I went to any high school that accepted me. Miracle-Gro program enrolled me into the High School for Telecommunications Art and technology at 350 67th street, Brooklyn, New York 11220. It was a long commute from park slope to bay ridge. But it was worth it.

Our senior year's last trip was to Hershey Park. Love the chocolate. Hated the rides.

There was one ride that was really scary. It had a egg-shaped laid flat on its side shaped seat, no harness and it would elevate from horizontal to vertical. It felt like you were getting creamed from the pavement and sun at the same time. I barely survived.

We stayed friends into high school. Then we all parted our separate ways.

Clarkson at 14

The summer before high school, Mumtaz returned. He tried to sabotage me. He gave Noshi the business and I ran it. It was a remaining Health and Beauty Aides Store. I was learning and managing the store. I learned to make boutiques of roses, flowers arrangement's and stuffed toys gifts to bring to patients and others in Kings County Hospital. I opened the store by taking a cab to the business and running the shop. I

really felt a sense of pride in my work. I was a natural salesman. I would cut deals with customers to unload merchandise.

We stayed in that apartment for a couple of months then we moved to where I would spend my formative years in 530 2nd Street Apartment A4 in park slope Brooklyn.

Meanwhile my mother got well. She took charge of everything. Like she did in business.

My father confused me making me think that he was a business genius. All he ever did was sit outside the store in the chair and read the New York Times. I've never seen him do work.

High School of Telecommunications Arts and Technology 1995-1999

My joking years. I remember this well. When everyone in your class said you made jokes left and right.

I made myself into a serious student freshman year. Later I became a slacker's best friend. A slacker myself. I really did as little homework as possible. I failed Biology and Math Freshman year. I had to take summer school. I vowed never to go to summer school again. I never did throughout the rest of high school. Here I applied the philosophical maxims of the theme song of Saved by the Bell by Louise Goffin.

I got a 1200 junior year on the PSAT By the time I graduated I was in the bottom quartile of my graduating class.

Freshman year I excelled at html programming. Back in the day, we had manually write all programming for the internet. I was in the middle of tech bubble and I did not know it. Never read the paper that time. By Senior year I took a graphic design course. It was easy and I made my own version of the rush hour soundtrack cover art. And my project

was to take my yearbook pictures and retouch them to look good enough to print. So, I didn't have to pay for the photo service.

I also got a call from the, Youth Group Leader, around my time starting High School. They had a group of teenagers meeting on Friday nights once a month for the Brooklyn Society's Ethical Culture's Y.E.S. or Youth of Ethical Societies group. It was intellectual haven. It's where I could craft a niche. I remember all the times that we went to the now David's tea's formerly Grecian Corner Greek Diner.

The highlight of the year was the Y.E.S. Conference. Mostly on the East Coast for St Louis YES members to see the rest of the country. We all hung out together.

One night she rubbed my back under my shirt and guided her fingertips across my back while her boyfriend was watching under the table in the dark. I liked the massage, but I wasn't thinking about sex. I just wanted to have a good time.

I had a classmate who was good friend freshman year. Then he disappeared when he got a girlfriend. He would contact me to hang out with him while he bought gifts for her. A necklace from Chinatown, clothes from Macy's.

Kissing girls. I gained practice kissing girls at the retreat and other YES group chapters in the area. It was fun.

My high school teachers were great in their own special ways.

My Geology teacher's class she sat me in front of the class and I got B's consistently in her class. The best work of my high school years. She was sweet.

My chemistry professor junior year. She would get tired of my antics and kick me out of class. I would go to my gym class teacher who I talked to and explained what happened. It was a small room in the cafeteria. Power fitness is an ab making course.

She cared She says you have so much potential. She would call me after class and have lectures with me that I'm like the childhood story of the Tortuous and Hare. Me being the Hare. Trying to rush things. I should apply myself. She was the first to criticize me and I took it as a positive role model. She inspired me to spend my lunches learning Chemistry. Old habits. I reverted to pleasing my classmates Anthony and his entourage. She wrote my college recommendation letter. I thank for that.

If I found out that our classmates were playing hooky and cutting school to go play basketball. I would sneak out and leave school too. I spent my afternoons finessing my game. Hitting fadeaway's like Michael Jordan. After that we would walk a route to 17th street where the Miracle-Gro Program was. I dropped off each of my friends at there houses on the way. Then I went to Project Reach Youth's office and the miracle-gro program. I did my homework there. I studied for the regents there with the help of Wendy. I spent 6 years in the program. I was in the program since 7th grade. When I asked Sam.

"What are you doing in the gym?"

He said he was in a program to go to college. I wanted in. I told my mother. We signed the papers and I got put into the program. Needy kids for College readiness. I knew that I was smart but I lacked emotional support. It's that potential that lead to a life of Acts of Greatness that I am blessed with today.

I spent my high school years, watching tripleheaders of NBA on TNT and watching a lot of tv. Particularly the WB now CW channel 11. Everwood, Buffy the Vampire Slayer and Dawson's Creek were my favorites. I never stepped into the college office and I

received my high school diploma sans Regents sticker because I never took the Spanish regents.

My high school graduation was uneventful. A classmate, kissed me on the cheek and congratulated me. My family came and saw me graduate. I was looking beyond the horizon. I punched my ticket for college I went forward not looking back. I was a college man but I had a lot of growing up to do.

Thank you.