

FOLLOW YOUR DREAMS

MYCHAL WYNN

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to my wife, Nina, who has stood by me and supported my dreams and the dreams of our children; to my sons, Mychal-David and Jalani; and, to all of the students who have asked me to share the story of how I discovered my dreams.

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Introduction

For over 25 years I have worked with school boards, superintendents, state departments of education, parents, teachers, administrators, and students throughout the United States. My work has taken me beyond America's borders to Canada, Mexico, the Caribbean, Bermuda, and Africa. I have received proclamations from Governors, Keys to Cities, been recognized by the United States Congress, and received plaques and awards from numerous school districts, churches, and community organizations. I have written twenty books (and still writing) that are considered to be some of the most insightful, inspiring, and enlightening. The poems in my book of poetry, *Don't Quit*, have been recited by students at graduation ceremonies and in oratorical contests. My story, *The Eagles who Thought They were Chickens*, has been told and retold by teachers, ministers, motivational speakers, and storytellers. My book, *Ten Steps to Helping Your Child Succeed in School*, has forever changed the lives of parents and their children as they have worked together to discover their dreams.



Introduction

I have shared my thoughts and ideas with superintendents, school boards, teachers, administrators, government officials, business leaders, and parents about how to create schools of excellence. And, I have talked to over five hundred thousand students about discovering their dreams and aspirations.

In the midst of it all, I have been so busy working to turn schools into places of passion and purpose that I have never taken the time to write about how my passions (writing and talking) developed into my purpose (helping to create great schools) and my career (writing and speaking).

Despite being born poor and having my second grade teacher predict that I would never make it out of elementary school, I am living my dreams. After growing up in an apartment, amidst the gangs and violence of Chicago's South Side, just a stone's throw away from the projects, I now own homes in California, Georgia, and Florida. After being given up for adoption, I now have a loving wife and two handsome and intelligent sons. And, despite the frustration of never being able to find a summer job while growing up in Chicago, my



wife and I own our own business and have worked for ourselves for over twenty years.

Many students have asked, “Mr. Wynn, are you rich?” If being rich is measured by how many people respect, admire, like or love you, (as it should be) then, yes, I am rich. I have the best job in the world ... *I am doing what I love to do and I get paid for doing it.* I have my faith, my family, and my health. I am rich beyond measure.

I am sharing my story because I want to inspire you to discover your dreams; work toward your dreams; set goals to guide your efforts toward achieving your dreams; and, I want you to live your dreams so you, too, may live a rich life.

Perhaps one day you will share your story with others and inspire them to discover their dreams.



DARE

Dare to be different
when all around you seek conformity

Dare to encounter obstacles
when all around you avoid conflict

Dare to seek possibilities
when all around you see only the impossible

Dare to seek new and greater challenges
when all around you are procrastinating

Dare to remain strong
when all around you are weakening

Dare to continue
when all around you are quitting

Dare to have faith
when all around you are doubting

Dare to dream
even if no one dreams with you

– Mychal Wynn

CHAPTER I

In the Beginning

When I was born, there was nothing to suggest that I would have any great dreams or achieve anything extraordinary in my life. I was not born rich. I was not born brilliant. I was not born with an extraordinarily high I.Q. My parents were not doctors, lawyers, politicians, teachers or business owners. In fact, they were not even married. My father was not a publisher and my mother was not a writer. They did not have plans to send me to a private school. I was not born into a big house. We did not have a butler, a maid, a chauffeur or even a car.

When I was born, surviving was the most important thing. Getting a job as a sharecropper or picking cotton, working as a dishwasher, waitress or seamstress, maybe, but to dream of becoming a writer—NOT. At least, not where I was born.



I was born to a single mother (which means that she was not married to my father) who already had one son. She was very poor and lived in one of the poorest parts of the country (rural Alabama). I was not born in a hospital, I was born in a “shotgun shack.” They were called shotgun shacks because you could walk into the front door, take five to ten steps, and walk straight out of the back door. They had “outhouses,” which means that the toilets were outside of the houses. They were little wooden sheds with a hole in the ground! Times were tough and the people were poor.

I do not know how old my mother was, what she looked like, what she believed or if she even loved me. All that I know is what my court records state and what people have told me.

My court records state that I was born in Pike County, Alabama, on July 7, 1956. Pike County is a poor rural county about 40 miles from Montgomery, Alabama. Although 1956 was not really that long ago, to most of the students whom I speak to in schools today, it may as well have been a hundred years ago. Even when I talk



In the Beginning

with my own children about where I was born, they look at me like there could not have been any place like that on earth; and certainly not in the United States. They cannot imagine living in a house where you have to get up and go outside to use the bathroom or living in a house that does not have running water, a shower or a bathtub.

The year, 1956, was a significant time in the history of the United States. A few months earlier, Rosa Parks, a black woman, had refused to give up her seat on a bus in Montgomery, Alabama, to a white man (which was against the law at that time). Most of the students I talk to cannot imagine that either. While many young people today choose to sit in the back of the bus, when I was born, the law stated that black people *had* to sit in the back of the bus and that they *had* to stand up and give their seats to white people.

Well, Mrs. Parks had been working hard all day as a seamstress and dreamed of resting her tired, aching body, and getting off of her tired, aching feet. She just wanted to sit down in one of those bus seats for her ride home. Unfortunately, few people cared about the dreams of black people



or other minorities, whether they were Native American, Hispanic, Asian or women. In fact, many laws were written to keep people from dreaming of getting the education that they needed to follow their dreams; dreams of good jobs; dreams of eating wherever they wanted to eat; dreams of going wherever they wanted to go; dreams of living wherever they wanted to live; or dreams of taking a ride on the bus and just being left alone! Rosa Parks was a hardworking, tired black woman who only dreamed of resting her tired, aching feet by sitting on one of those bus seats (which were not even comfortable) and she was not allowed even that simple dream!

When the bus seats were filled, the bus driver told Mrs. Parks to get up and give her seat to a white man. I do not know if it was because Mrs. Parks was tired, angry, or both, but she refused to give up her seat. Rosa Parks reminds me of my wife, Nina. Most of the time, she is an easy-going person, and will do anything for her family and friends. However, there are days when people can wear on her nerves and she just says, "Enough is enough!" Those are the days when everyone should duck. When she has had enough, she is



In the Beginning

not going to take any more. On those days, my boys and I usually go to the park, take a walk, go to the movies or anything. We just know to leave her alone. Well, this was one of those days for Rosa Parks. I can imagine that she said to herself, “Enough is enough. My feet are tired and I ain’t going to move.”

Rosa Parks was sent to jail because she would not give up her seat. That eventually led to the Montgomery Bus Boycott and the beginning of what became known as the Civil Rights Movement. It could even be called the “Dream Movement.”

Much of what people in America have the freedom to do today, particularly women and people of color, has resulted from the dreams of millions of people during that time in our country’s history. People who dreamed of the freedom to vote; dreamed of the freedom to eat wherever they chose; dreamed of living wherever they chose and of buying a house wherever they could afford to live; dreamed of the freedom to attend whatever school they chose; dreamed of the freedom to drink from any public water fountain,



to use any public rest room or to sit in whatever bus seat they chose. And, people who dreamed of the right to equally pursue the American Dream.

The year that I was born, 1956, may be considered the year that millions of dreams were born throughout America. Maybe my mother gave me up for adoption because she had a dream that another family would help me escape the poverty of Pike County, Alabama. Since I have never met or spoken to my biological mother, I do not know what she actually thought. What I do know is that as an undernourished, crying, dirty little baby, I was given up for adoption when I was six months old.

In 1956, the year of the Montgomery Bus Boycott, I was put on a segregated bus and sent northward from Montgomery, Alabama, to Sharon, Pennsylvania. It was in Sharon, Pennsylvania, that my biological father's aunt arranged to have me adopted by her best friend, who lived in Chicago, Illinois.



In the Beginning

*Where you come from does not determine
where you are going, only where you began.*

