

BIOGRAPHY DETAILS

I was born in New York City in 1972; and I am the son of Hollywood legends Mel Brooks and Anne Bancroft and I was raised with my two feet planted firmly on the ground. I am recognized as successful author not only by the market place, but by critics and cultural observers. In my work, I am dedicated to challenging and encouraging systems and institutions to think outside the box to solve problems. Even when I write fiction, one of my major goals is to raise awareness on the issues of disaster preparedness, crisis management, and survival for the common reader—often under the thematic guise of a zombie apocalypse.

I have devoted much of my life to the study and development of systems and security, culminating in a genuine interest in the fundamentals and logistics that go into keeping our world safe from natural and man-made disaster threats.

Even in my loving and financially advantaged home, I still had some personal challenges to overcome. **As a child**, I was diagnosed with dyslexia. For me, dyslexia was nearly as bad as the feelings of anxiety, shame, and low self-esteem that it caused. For me, 'learned dependency' was the real enemy, the self-narrative that "I can't do this" can destroy children's learning potential for the rest of their lives. That was ALMOST me. I've spent the last 30 years unlearning the lesson that dyslexia taught me, that society has no use for me. How many other people were taught that lesson by ignorant teachers and bullying classmates? How many of them are in prison or on welfare, or simply divorcing themselves from the country around them? All we need is a little awareness and education, teaching the teachers to teach these kids that their curse is actually a blessing. My mother did it for me, she made sure I was tested, that I was tutored and she worked with my teachers to develop coping skills that I still use to this day. I got as much one on one instruction as I could; untimed tests were a life saver. I've experienced the downside of dyslexia by my slow reading and the bullying I've endured. I've also learned that the blessing of my dyslexia is just that because it forced me to be a critical thinker and truly understand what I was learning instead of just memorizing and regurgitating it for a standardized test.

Dyslexia forced me to think outside the conventional cube and maybe that manner of thinking is why I've been invited to speak at the US Naval War College, at West Point, at various military and homeland security exercises and at a few strategic studies groups that I probably shouldn't be talking about here. And I'm just the tip of the iceberg. How many class clowns or troublemakers or dropouts could actually be the innovators of tomorrow if parents and teachers understood that dyslexia is both scientifically proven AND scientifically treatable? A little awareness and flexible teaching methods could unlock unlimited potential in these kids who now think they're losers. If we already have mandatory racial sensitivity training for our police, why not have mandatory dyslexia

recognition training for our teachers? It's so simple, so easy, and when you look at all the other government programs designed to help citizens help themselves, it's probably the least expensive.

After working for the BBC and then Saturday Night Live, I began writing *The Zombie Survival Guide* and then, what became a *New York Times* best-seller, *World War Z: An Oral History of the Zombie War*, which has been made into a major motion picture starring Brad Pitt.

Even though I am a best selling author and I had difficulty with reading in school, I never had difficulty with *thinking*, particularly with thinking *creatively*. While I am quite proud of having published four successful books—*The Zombie Survival Guide*, *World War Z*, *The Zombie Survival Guide: Recorded Attacks*, and now *THE HARLEM HELLFIGHTERS*—my ultimate goal was to challenge old ways of thinking and encourage mental agility and flexibility for problem solvers and leaders. I am told that my **unconventional thinking has even inspired the U.S. military to examine how they may respond to potential crises in the future. 'Survival Guide' was read and discussed by the sitting Chairman of the Joint Chiefs** and, as I noted above, I have been invited to speak at a variety of military and crisis management conferences and symposia—from the Naval War College, to the FEMA hurricane drill at San Antonio, to the nuclear "Vibrant Response" wargame. By developing the dystopian mythos of a "zombie apocalypse" in film and literature, I have attempted to drive the dialogue as a thought leader on how to manage and coordinate emergency responses and to suggest better ways to prepare for crisis and conflict. Today, I see a crisis in the classroom and that is why I am here today.

In my work I am exploring the consequences of failed leadership, making the leap from mythos to American History with the release of my latest book, *The Harlem Hellfighters*. This book chronicles the little-known story of the first African-American regiment mustered to fight in WWI. They spent longer than any other American unit in combat and displayed remarkable valor on the battlefield. Despite extraordinary struggles and overt racism, the 'Hellfighters', as their enemies named them, became one of the most successful—**but least celebrated**—regiments of the war. **My goal, here too, is to drill down to help find what lessons can be learned from the triumph and tragedy of the Harlem Hellfighters. Success in the face of adversity, be it racism or DYSLEXIA LIKE I HAVE.**

Using fictional metaphor and historical events, my goal is to prompt serious discourse on large-scale problem-solving, and to explore new ways to attack old problems and new concerns. For example, whether I am on stage speaking or writing, my goal is to

tackle the tougher questions, like what are the threads that hold society together, and what's really at stake when those threads are stressed, loosened, or torn. From the basic responsibilities of civilians and corporations to the over-arching role of government and the military, I try to shed light on what each can—and should—be prepared to do, to not only survive, but thrive in the face of real-world threats, disaster, and the unexpected.