



# Growing Up Jersey

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If you want to impart a lesson and have it stick in the minds of your audience, it is best to do it within a story.

Traditional lectures or essays relay important information but often fail to engage and penetrate the mind at the deepest subconscious levels. No matter how insightful the viewpoint or clear the theme, traditional messages directly delivered are forgotten soon after. Lectures are much like a mosquito biting you. You can feel or sense the bite and if you are really quick you can smack the mosquito before it makes its escape. Either way, a mosquito bite is a non-event. The skin swells slightly, it itches for a day or two but the effect is generally gone and forgotten within a few days. Stories leave a much more lasting impression on your mind and a great story can stay with you forever. Stories evoke emotion and stir old memories because we can relate to the characters and the circumstances they face. A good story transports the listener into the story so they can feel the fear, joy, embarrassment or triumph of the character on their own terms. Stories remind us of wood ticks. Those are the large black ticks found in the woods that attach themselves to a human host by burrowing into your skin. If you have ever had one of them on you and in you, you'll never forget it. What is odd is that you rarely feel the tick bite into you and by the time you know they have gorged on your blood and become a big ugly dime sized growth hanging off your body.

While you never remember the mosquito bite, the sight of a wood tick hanging off your body is something you don't forget. Watching your spouse or friend pull it out or burn it off leaves both an indelible impression and an unpleasant memory. Like ticks, stories go deep under your skin and penetrate both the conscious and subconscious mind. You will almost always remember a good story and it's quite likely you'll remember the message within it.

We want to share a few memorable stories from our "Growing Up Jersey" collection that we draw upon today to help us lead large complex businesses. If you remember these stories a few days from now or they pop into your mind a few weeks from now then our manifesto may have some validity. If you never remember the stories or recall the underlying messages then we are either really bad writers or our manifesto is complete bunk. We apologize in advance if it's the latter.

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## LESSON 1: No matter how well you prepare you still may get shit on you.

**Incoming!!!!** | Our sister Terri was a sophomore in high school and active in the Catholic Youth Organization which was referred to by all as the CYO. Every year the CYO had a formal dance at the St. Mary's gymnasium where we all went to grade school and where our mom was a substitute teacher. We remember Terri being extremely nervous because not only was it her first dance but her heartthrob was going to be there.

Terri took hours to prepare and screamed at our mom for any small thing that went wrong. That's what fifteen year old girls do when they are nervous and scared. It comes out as wretched anger and selfishness but it is just fear. And the greatest fear of a fifteen year old girl is being embarrassed. Finally, her hair was done up, the turquoise gown was on and the corsage on her wrist matched everything beautifully. It was a Saturday night and the CYO had organized it so that the kids would attend the 7pm Mass at the church and head over to school gym for the dance thereafter. When the Mass ended, my excited and nervous sister exited the church and was talking to some friends on the front steps when disaster struck.

A bird, of unknown origin, and of a size and scale never before seen in New Jersey, dropped the load of all loads of bird crap on our sister Terri. It was in her hair, down the entire side of her dress and all over that previously beautiful corsage. As her friends and her basketball heart throb looked on, she tried to no avail to remove the droppings. The worst case nightmare scenario that Terri could never have imagined had just come true. She came home crying hysterically, but shocked us all when she quickly regrouped and rallied. To our surprise Terri took a quick shower, borrowed a dress from a neighbor and allowed my mom to redo her hair without incident. She was in the car and back at the dance within thirty minutes. This was an amazing feat for an anxious fifteen year old girl who got pooped on in front of all her friends.

**Business Lesson:** In business, no matter how well you plan, prepare and execute there will be times when things just go horribly wrong. This is especially true when you do something for the first time. Bad things happen at work despite our best efforts. If you take risks and try new things, one day you will find yourself on the front steps of the church with all of your colleagues laughing at the large turd covering the project you worked so hard to deliver. You need to respond like Terri did. Wipe the shit off, regroup, start over and get back to the dance as quickly as you can.

## LESSON 2: Never bring colleagues into the battles you start at work.

**We interrupt this cereal...** | On the topic of fighting your own battles, we have to tell this entirely true story from our youth. Our brother Tommy, the angelic, blonde haired, boy boxer from our book *Kiss Your BUT Good-bye* was a 10 year old paper boy in 1974. He delivered the Bergen Record newspaper in our neighborhood in Dumont, New Jersey. He dragged around one of those two wheel shopping carts that old ladies, who could not drive a car, would drag to the supermarket. Paper routes involve a daily routine so every day Tommy would be at the same place at the same time. Apparently, this 13 year old bully had a similarly predictable routine. It seemed like almost every day this bully would ride by on his bicycle, spit on my brother's newspapers and kick over Tommy's shopping cart. After each incident as the bully was riding away, Tommy would call him a four letter expletive and inform him that his twelve year old brother, Joey, was going to kick his ass.

One early Saturday morning, Tommy goes to Grant Sweet Shop—a small confectionary store with an old fashioned, sit-down soda fountain. Recall that Tommy is ten years old and in the prime of his youth boxing career. The spitting thirteen year old boy who repeatedly knocked over Tommy's shopping cart was in the store as well.

The bully, who was relatively new to town, glares at him and makes some comment about the lime green gym shorts Tommy is wearing. As Tommy told it, the thirteen-year-old boy follows him outside and says, “Hey wise ass, get over here.” Tommy turns around with his fists clenched and says “You wanna go?” The thirteen-year-old boy looks down at the undersized Tommy and asks, “How old are you?” Tommy lets him know that he’s ten. The thirteen-year-old aggressor quickly dismisses the idea of fighting a ten-year-old. Rather than pass on the opportunity for a fight, Tommy reminds the bully, “I have a twelve year old brother at home (Joey) who will kick your ass.” The bully says, “Go get him!” So Tommy peddles the two blocks to our home and lets Joey know that there is a fight waiting for him around the corner. Joey stoically finishes up his Wheaties cereal and jumps on his Schwinn bicycle and rides to Grant Sweet Shop with Tommy.

Now Joey was a very big and athletic 12- year old who did not relish fighting like his younger brother Tommy, but was more than capable of dismantling almost any 13 year old. The older boy sized up Joey, and realized that this would end very badly for him. The bully then came up with an unexpected proposal that would end very badly for someone not yet on the scene. He told Joey and Tommy he was going home to get his 10 year old brother to come and fight Tommy. That seemed like a creative and reasonable solution to this unresolved problem.

Fifteen minutes later this blonde haired ten-year-old, a little bigger than Tommy, shows up on his bicycle with the older brother. The ten-year-old with great haste and bravado slams his bike to the ground and puffs his chest out in an attempt to intimidate Tommy. Well, if you read about Tommy in our book, you know by now how this one ended. The bully stepped in as referee and said something stupid about not hitting below the belt. He then stepped back from between the two boys and yelled “Fight!” Little Tommy quickly moves in and fires off two punches that slam into the kid’s nose and mouth in rapid succession and knocks him to the ground. The battered kid then releases a deafening primal scream, exactly the sound of a woman having a baby. The kid slowly gets up, then bends over and starts sobbing uncontrollably. Tommy goes over to comfort the kid while the brother is yelling at him to keep fighting. When the kid regains some sense of composure, he screams the f-bomb at his older brother and jumps on his bicycle and rides away.

This fight never should have happened. Two people got dragged into this mess, who were quite content sitting at home, eating cereal and watching Saturday morning cartoons. A little brother, trying so hard to impress his spitting and paper cart dumping older brother, got punched in the face two times. Almost forty years later, we still feel very badly how this situation unfolded. Needless to say the bully never bothered Tommy again.



**Business Lesson:** Fight your own battles at work. Don't go getting other people involved in your skirmishes. When problems or conflicts arise, do everything in your power to resolve them yourself. That's what you are getting paid for. Go get the facts. If someone has done something that appears to be out of bounds get out of your cubicle or office and go see them. If they are physically remote then pick up the phone and find out why they did what they did and the reasoning behind it. Most likely you will find their actions were well intentioned and completely appropriate given their particular circumstance. Or you may find they took those actions because you or your group failed to keep them informed of the things you were doing. More often than not, your colleagues are acting rationally and in good faith. So before you start beating the war drums and rallying your allies with stories involving atrocities against mankind, go talk to the person who pissed you off. Have a conversation before unleashing your weapons of mass disruption and getting other people involved and risking innocent people getting hurt.

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## LESSON 3: Treat everyone with respect because one day you may need them.

**Help! I Need Somebody.** | The Dean of Discipline at the Irish Christian Brother, all boy high school we attended was responsible for keeping order and meting out punishment. The brother who was the dean of discipline during Joe's era was one of those people who goes looking for trouble rather than allowing the trouble to come to him. He may have been well intentioned because anyone who dedicates their life to turning boys into young men should be well intentioned. However, this particular brother was a petty, vindictive and annoying pest. He would roam the halls looking for the slightest infractions and go out of his way to embarrass people. Whether you were a good kid or bad kid, you were not safe from this guy. Other deans or teachers were feared or respected because if you were truly out of line they were on top of you quickly. This man was neither feared nor respected. He was just hated.

There was a telling and unfortunate incident at the school that highlights why you should treat people kindly and fairly. A young man who had been expelled by this brother the year before suddenly showed up in the hallway of the school. He walked right up to the dean of discipline and said, "Brother, I owe you something." He then proceeded to punch the brother repeatedly.

The students who were on the scene watched in shock and astonishment at what was happening in front of them. However, none of them stepped in to stop the assault and some probably enjoyed watching the brother get pounded. It took a few more seconds for two teachers to be alerted and they successfully subdued the attacker. We surmise that if any other brother or teacher were assaulted by a former student the response from the young men in that hallway would have been immediate and aggressive.

We contrast this story with an equally improbable and violent incident that you can see on [YouTube](#). A video camera shows a prison guard sitting at his desk. A prisoner in an orange jumpsuit walks up behind the guard and begins choking him from behind and punching him. The speed and ferocity of the attack was unforgettable. What was more amazing was the response from the other prisoners who came running immediately and violently in defense of the prison guard. The beating the guard received paled in comparison to the beating his attacker received from his fellow prisoners.

So how do you explain the different reactions from the witnesses in these two unrelated incidents? Catholic school boys stand by while a Christian Brother is beaten. Hardened criminals respond immediately to save a prison guard being attacked by a prisoner.

It all goes back to how you treat people. We imagine that prison guard was liked and respected by the violent criminals under his supervision. He probably treated them with respect and did not go out of his way to make their prison lives any more difficult than they needed to be. In contrast, the clergyman made it his mission to harass and embarrass his charges.

**Business Lesson:** Treat everyone the way you would like to be treated. Don't push people too hard or too far. And never, ever, give anyone a reason to hate you. It's a whacky world out there filled with stressed out people. Be kind to your co-workers and they will be there for you when you are under attack. Be especially nice to people who are down on their luck. Perhaps they are losing their job due to firm cutbacks or individual performance. Or perhaps the stresses of work and life have overcome them. A dose of timely compassion can make a big difference to someone in distress. In extreme cases it could conceivably save a life... maybe even yours.

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## LESSON 4: Never overestimate the relationship you have with your boss or any other authority figure.

**“I Am The Egg Man”** | Our dad, a New York City policeman, was in uniform walking his beat in Harlem at 125th street and Lenox Ave late one Sunday morning. He stopped into a local diner, sat at the counter and ordered his bacon and eggs. Just as the waitress delivered his meal he heard a loud commotion coming from the kitchen. Suddenly the swinging doors fly open and a man in his mid-twenties sprawls on the floor and quickly scrambles to get back on his feet. Just as the doors swing closed they explode open again when another man in a white cook’s outfit, carrying a twelve inch butcher knife, bounds into the room. The cook is repeatedly screaming the words kill, mother, and a curse word beginning with the letter F, mixed in with some pronouns. The younger man runs past my father as the cook lunges at him with the knife. Dad jumps off his stool at the counter and faces the cook, ordering him to stop. Dad’s arm is extended to a halt position while his other hand reaches for the 38 caliber service revolver in his holster. The young man, who is the target of the cook’s rage, is now standing behind our father when he orders the oncoming cook to stop. The enraged man looks right past him to his target and continues to move closer. Dad once again orders him to freeze and drop the knife while he shifts into a firing position with his gun aimed directly at the head of the knife wielding cook. He orders him to drop the weapon again and incredulously the man moves forward and waves the knife menacingly at

his target. The uniformed policeman standing before him, pointing a gun at his head goes unnoticed. Dad again orders the cook to drop the knife while violently shaking the pistol in front of his face in the hopes of getting the assailant's attention. The cook again ignores the command. It was at this very moment, my Dad says his world stood still. He could only hear his own pounding heartbeat and see the cook's bloodshot left eye that the site of his gun was fixed upon. It was then that our dad decided that he would shoot this man if he moved any closer to him. After a few seconds that felt like minutes, suddenly, without warning the cook dropped the knife and it clanged as it hit the floor. As if awakening from a trance, the cook strangely smiles at my father and says, "Man, you wouldn't shoot me. I make your eggs." The cook turned his back and walked through the swinging doors into the kitchen. Dad, both shaken and relieved sat down at the counter and finished his bacon and eggs.

Think about the dynamics here. The cook believed that because he cooked my Dad's eggs that they had a relationship that somehow protected him. Even though the knife wielding cook was aggressively approaching an armed police officer in a crowded diner, he somehow felt he was immune to the consequences. The cook had no idea how close he came to dying that morning and our father knows how close he came to living with that man's death for the rest of his life.

**Business Lesson:** Never over-estimate the relationship you have with your boss. We have seen too many situations where people behave in a destructive manner that hurts their team. A senior executive who has been a successful and a longstanding employee feels they have built up enough goodwill to behave in a way that is destructive or obstructive. They inevitably get fired and it is the boss they believed they had a great relationship with that takes them out. No one on the team is surprised by the firing except the person who is fired. A manager's main priority is the success, harmony and well being of the team. Anyone who acts in a way that threatens the team will be gone. Know the boundaries of the relationship with your boss and never pick up the proverbial knife that threatens the safety of your team.

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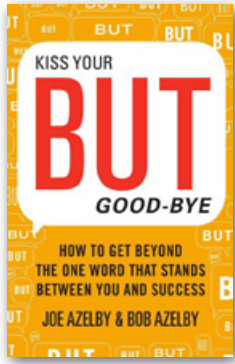
# Conclusion

Think about the most memorable or powerful stories from your life. The fact you remember the stories indicates profound meanings or lessons were buried within them. Write those stories down, apply those lessons to your business life and share them with your colleagues.

**Make your manifesto a summary of your life's stories and you will teach and lead like you never have before. 📖**



# Info



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**ABOUT THE AUTHORS** | **Joe Azelby** is the managing director and CEO of the Global Real Assets Group of a large financial firm, leading a team of more than 400 investment professionals. A graduate of Harvard University, he earned an MBA in finance from NYU's Stern School of Business. While at Harvard, he was the captain of the football team and then went on to play professionally with the Buffalo Bills. **Bob Azelby** is the vice president and general manager of the oncology unit of a large West Coast biotechnology firm, overseeing more than 500 sales and marketing personnel and responsible for more than \$5 billion in annual revenue. He received his undergraduate degrees in economics and religious studies from the University of Virginia and his MBA from Harvard University.

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