

About The Author



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Eleanor Randolph is a veteran journalist who has covered national politics and the media for *The Washington Post*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and other newspapers. Her articles have appeared in *Vogue*, *Esquire*, the *New Republic*, and other magazines. A member of the *New York Times* editorial staff from 1998 to 2018, she focused on city and state politics, media, and Russia. The author of *The Many Lives of Michael Bloomberg*, she lives in Manhattan with her husband.

About The Book

This authoritative and anecdote-filled biography of Michael Bloomberg—2020 presidential candidate and one of the richest and famously private/public figures in the country—is a “masterful work...[and] an absolutely first-rate study of leadership in business, politics, and philanthropy” (Doris Kearns Goodwin, Pulitzer Prize–winning author) from a veteran *New York Times* reporter.

Michael Bloomberg’s life sounds like an exaggerated version of *The American Story*, except his adventures are real.

From modest Jewish middle class (and Eagle Scout) to Harvard MBA to Salomon Brothers hot shot (where he gets “sent upstairs” and later fired) to creator of the Bloomberg terminal, a machine that would change Wall Street and the financial universe and make him a billionaire, to presidential candidate in 2020, Randolph’s account of Bloomberg’s life reads almost like a novel.

“A vivid, timely study of Bloomberg’s brand of plutocracy” (*Publishers Weekly*), this engaging and insightful biography recounts Mayor Bloomberg’s vigorous approach to New York City’s care—including his attempts at education reform, anti-smoking and anti-obesity campaigns, climate control, and new developments across the city.

After he engineered a surprising third term as Mayor, Bloomberg returned to his business and philanthropies that focused increasingly on cities. The chapter that describes this is one of the most revealing of his temperament and energy and vision as well as how he spends his “private” time that was virtually off-limits even when he was mayor.

Bloomberg promised to give away his money before he died, and his giving has focused on education, gun control, and a fighting climate change. He joined the 2020 presidential campaign as a moderate liberal and spent his millions focused on ousting President Donald Trump.

Excerpt

The Many Lives of Michael Bloomberg

“I thought of myself as the hero patriot, sticking it to old George III—a maverick role I still try to emulate.”

Even today, the working-class community of Medford outside Boston looks like the perfect set for a 1950s sitcom. Ozzie and Harriet could have lived right down the road. Soft hills, modest homes, public schools where everybody knew your grandparents. For the Bloombergs in 1945, it must have seemed like the ideal nest for an ordinary little family.

When Charlotte and William H. Bloomberg chose the small house at 6 Ronaele Road, they were much like millions of young couples who wanted a normal, sedate life. The ugly memories of the Depression and war and especially the Holocaust were still agonizingly raw, and most families craved something quiet and comforting. The Bloombergs selected an Irish and Italian neighborhood where they undoubtedly hoped that Jews might be just another religious group, another ethnic strain in the all-American mix.

It was not that easy, not at first. Charlotte had carefully chosen the house—which was affordable and near William’s job as bookkeeper at a dairy in Somerville—only to be told that it was off-limits. The realtors would not sell to Jews. Others might have looked elsewhere. Not Charlotte Rubens Bloomberg. She convinced the family’s Irish lawyer, George McLaughlin, to buy the house. He then quickly resold it to the Bloombergs—a transaction that Bloomberg used years later as an example of the insidious ways discrimination works. But as the Medford tale was told and retold in the Bloomberg family, it offered another lesson about how to succeed in a tough world. If you’re blocked in this direction, go in that direction. Get over it. Go around. Find another way. Mike Bloomberg learned that lesson extremely well. Throughout his life, a failure meant it was time to try plan B in business, politics, and his personal life.

Young Mike’s parents offered what every child needs—one parent who sees only the perfect offspring and the other parent who does all the hard work of managing and coaching a smart child into adulthood. Bloomberg’s father was the soft one. His mother was the rock, the disciplinarian, the religious beacon who kept a Kosher house, the guide who eventually had to keep repeating one phrase to her son as he grew more and more successful. “Don’t let it go to your head,” she would say, tucking her pride beneath that motherly warning. Their story, the story of Bloomberg’s parents and grandparents, is the fundamental story of America, the reason so many distressed people leave whatever homes they had and start from scratch in a new country.

Mike Bloomberg, who would later champion the cause of immigration in the face of growing anti-immigrant pressures in his America, explained his background this way: “Three of my grandparents, and six of my great-grandparents were immigrants. All placed education and reverence for the United States at the core of our family values . . . and they made my story

possible.”

Bloomberg’s father, William Henry Bloomberg, was born in 1906, near Boston and grew up in the relative safety of Massachusetts. He was the son of Lithuanian immigrants, and his father, Elick Bloomberg, taught Hebrew in an immigrant neighborhood near Boston. When Elick filed his intention to become an American citizen in 1898, he declared that he was “renouncing allegiance to foreign sovereigns, especially and particularly to Nicholas II Czar of Russia.” Russia’s czars and their orthodox Christians had in many ways fed the vicious anti-Semitism that would result in repeated pogroms against Jews living in their empire. America meant the freedom to criticize the czar, on an official document no less.

Bloomberg’s father worked most of his adult life as an accountant, earning just enough to support his family. (His son estimated his dad’s salary at \$6,000.) If there is one memory of Mike’s father that made its most durable mark, William Bloomberg took some of those scarce dollars and donated them every year to the NAACP. When asked why, he said simply that “discrimination against one group is really discrimination against all groups.”

Mike Bloomberg’s mother, Charlotte “Lottie” Rubens, was born into a more comfortable family in New Jersey in 1909. She was the child of strong parents, especially her mother, Ettie, who pushed her four children to take every advantage of America’s free education system. Ettie’s husband, Max Rubens, was born in what is now Belarus, and when his family fled to England, they struggled to survive in the hard, industrial port of Liverpool. The Bloomberg family would later describe that period as being “as bleak as a Dickens story.” When Max finally came to America, he flourished in the wholesale grocery business, carrying around his samples in a gladstone bag and making enough money to buy five brick houses in a German neighborhood of Jersey City. If there is a peddler’s DNA, Mike Bloomberg inherited it from his grandfather Max.

Max was suddenly hospitalized in May of 1922 with a lung disorder and died nearly a month later, leaving Ettie to take command of her four children, including Lottie, who was barely a teenager. With the help of her strong mother, Charlotte Pearl “Lottie” Rubens weathered her father’s early death and became an unusually independent woman for her day. Her high school graduation photo nearly three years later shows a very determined-looking young woman, and besides being “as bright as a sunbeam,” as the 1925 yearbook for Dickinson High School announced, she was a member of the fencing club. (At the time, fencing for women was extremely popular because New Jersey native Adeline Gehrig became a national champion and was chosen to represent America in the 1924 Olympics as a member of the first-ever women’s foil event.)

After graduating from high school, Lottie worked in New York City while she also earned a bachelor’s degree from New York University’s School of Commerce, Accounts and Finance. There were 430 men in the class and 21 women. Obviously, it would have been tough for a girl in her late teens fighting her way in a man’s world: night and day, no whining, no excuses. Just set the goal and go for it. It was that personal manifesto of hard work and no complaints that she would pass on to her son.

Lottie soon became an assistant auditor at a dairy company in New York City where she grew to

admire another employee, William Bloomberg. Charlotte and William were married in 1934, and soon moved to Boston—first to the neighborhood of Allston, then to the town of Brookline, and finally outside the city to Medford, where she would stay in the same house for the next sixty-six years.

Nearly eight years after Charlotte and William's wedding, Michael Rubens Bloomberg was born at 3:40 p.m. on Valentine's Day 1942 at St. Elizabeth's Hospital in Boston. The baby's parents were on the older side by the day's standards. His father was thirty-six, and his mother, thirty-three. They moved quickly to make the family complete with a second child, Marjorie Rubens Bloomberg, born two years later.

Mike Bloomberg began early testing the standards and limits of Medford's small, confining world. His public version of these early years would concentrate on the science museum in Boston, the Boy Scouts, and evening dinners with his parents, when his mother always used the good silver and every member of the family told about their day.

Friends and associates described a far more complicated youngster. Sure, he could be patriotic and good to his mother, they remembered. Yes, he quickly learned how to be funny, if you were swift enough to get the joke. But he was also a rascal, a smarty-britches who didn't, or couldn't, restrain an urge to show off his brainpower. And underneath all that combustible energy, there was always the ambition—to do something big, to be a force somewhere.

On occasion, even Bloomberg himself would admit that, as a boy, he was a classic handful.

“I had discipline problems. I threw erasers. I dipped pigtailed into inkwells—I was totally bored.”

William Bloomberg especially loved to indulge his son's mischief and his untapped curiosity. On Saturdays, he would take young Mike for a bacon and egg, greasy spoon, non-Kosher breakfast and then to the science museum in Boston. “It changed my life,” Bloomberg said years later. Starting at age ten, the boy who was so bored with the rote learning in Medford during the week would be allowed to hold snakes, porcupines, and an owl named Snowy on Saturdays in Boston. He would learn a few of the basic laws of physics and peek into other corners of the mysterious scientific world.

One day the instructor asked his listeners to give “the age of a redwood tree,” pointing to the rings on a stump nearby. Members of the class carefully counted and recounted the rings, and yet with each answer, the teacher kept saying no, wrong. Bloomberg loves to recall what happened next. As he put it, “I don't know what possessed me, but I said it was not a redwood, it was a giant sequoia.” Right, the professor said, to Bloomberg's great pride. Even decades later, when he would tell this story, Bloomberg always looked immensely pleased with himself for getting the right answer. But he also gave the museum credit for helping him realize that he needed to “listen, question, test [and] think.”

In a very similar way, Bloomberg would talk about his strongest memory of television, which was just becoming a household item in the 1950s. For either financial or educational reasons, probably both, the Bloomborgs were among the last in the neighborhood to add TV. What shows

did he watch? Bloomberg recalled that one of his favorites was John Cameron Swayze's Camel News Caravan.

The Swayze news show—fifteen minutes, five times a week—barely covered the days' headlines from 1949 to 1956. What Bloomberg remembered best were the commercials for Camel cigarettes, which featured a large picture of the company's elegant mascot. Bloomberg, with his head full of Saturday's visits to the science museum, said that he quickly realized that the camel in the commercial was not a camel. It was a dromedary with one hump instead of two. Young Bloomberg could not let such a travesty go unnoticed, so he wrote Mr. Swayze to alert him to the error, thus forcing some feckless aide to write the kid back and explain that, yes, he was right, but the company insisted that the dromedary looked better on the screen (and the package) than the double-humped camel. The dromedary on Camel cigarettes never became a real camel, but much like the sequoia versus redwood story, Bloomberg loved to show how he could be right.

He could also admit, at least occasionally, when he was wrong. Bloomberg often told a family story about how politics entered his world. The Bloombergs were solidly Democratic back then, and he recalled how the family went to see Harry Truman giving a speech from the back of a train as part of a whistle-stop campaign tour in 1948. Years later, a family photo surfaced of the event that Bloomberg had described. The problem—it wasn't Truman giving that speech to the Massachusetts crowd. It was Adlai Stevenson—probably in 1952, he said a few years later to correct the record.

If the museum piqued his scientific interest, the Boy Scouts became an obsession. Going to the scouts' summer camp became such a powerful goal that young Bloomberg sold Christmas tree wreaths around Medford in order to pay his own way. He studiously collected the small embroidered patches that scouts wear like medals on their official uniforms, but one badge was particularly hard to get.

“In the sixth grade I went to Mrs. Kelly—this old battle-ax who I'm sure has since gone on to meet her maker—and I had to get her to sign a paper that I was a good student, for my Boy Scout merit badge. And I remember she looked at me and started laughing.

“We made a deal: that if I stayed out of the principal's office for a month, she'd sign it.”

Bloomberg was disciplined enough to behave, at least for a month, since he not only got that merit badge, he also went on to become one of the youngest Eagle Scouts in the country.

If the scouts taught him how to tie knots and make a fire, they also gave him a taste for food that would never touch his mother's table. Food in Bloomberg's youth was often little more than fuel for the day, the Betty Crocker basics that fed most of America in the postwar era. He once wrote in a birthday card to Kitty Carlisle, a noted singer, actress, and advocate for the arts, that his mother's advice for longevity was to “never eat anything that tastes good.”

What tasted good to young Mike was junk food. He liked Chinese takeout, and he especially adored the basics served at Boy Scout camp: hot dogs, beans, macaroni and cheese, and particularly the grape-flavored punch called “bug juice.” He would later dine at the best gourmet

restaurants and enjoy four-star chefs doing their best to impress him. But his tastes still tended toward very thin pizza and Cheez-its and overcooked bacon (burnt, actually), sometimes with peanut butter. When his guests came to dine at one of his many homes, they could easily find an entrée of old-fashioned basics like meat loaf or roast beef.

Bloomberg's parents, who wanted their children to fit in easily in America, also wanted them to keep a solid connection to their Jewish heritage. Religion and his Jewish history were part of his upbringing, of course, but Bloomberg's parents were not overly strict. Although his mother cooked proper Kosher food, she sometimes had a side dish for her son's Chinese favorites. They sent him to Hebrew school, strict enough to keep him in line but not strict enough for his religious grandfather Elick. And Saturdays were as much for science in Boston as religion in Medford.

As a candidate for mayor years later, he startled some members of New York's Jewish community by suggesting that he saw nothing wrong with public school children saying the Lord's Prayer the way he did when he was growing up in Massachusetts.

"Nobody was uncomfortable," Bloomberg snapped at a reporter who had asked him to elaborate. "Only people today would ask a question like that. That is the difference. You want today to find fault in everything that is good and wonderful about America."

His Jewish classmates in Medford were not surprised by the Lord's Prayer comment. Several of them said they could not remember witnessing anti-Semitism firsthand. One former classmate said that maybe it was there, certainly the Bloomberg's roundabout way of buying a house was early evidence, but as young people "we didn't feel it."

Bloomberg's mother, Lottie, tried to describe her rambunctious son as an ordinary boy who, for example, liked to scare his sister with his collection of snakes. ("Have you seen my snake?" his sister remembered with a shudder.) Even years later, he would explain to a reporter how you could trap a snake in the woods near his home by setting up a kind of cave with a piece of cardboard or metal and then catch them when they went inside to sleep. He also attempted to impress his school friends with his skills as a ham radio operator and later his expertise with a slide rule. But, more important, he wanted to take control of everything around him. As his mother explained, "He wanted to be the boss of whatever we were working on. He wanted to run everything."

What his mother once described as young Mike's unusual self-assurance, others in Medford saw as arrogance. He ran with a crowd of older boys, which did not endear him with his own age group, but he managed the bigger friends because he was supremely self-confident. He always wanted to be the one chosen to give a speech. As his mother put it, "It never seemed to bother him to get out in front of an audience and talk."

That love of being noticed did not translate into a passion for being at the top of his class. He barely passed French (his later attempts to learn Spanish made it clear that he could remember words and the grammar, but not the music). At one point he made an A in one math class and a

D in another. His version was that he did the answers in his head, and one teacher thought he cheated.

Another school would have noticed that this kid was deeply frustrated, and young Mike rocked along with half an ear tuned to school and the other half focused elsewhere. His favorite book was Johnny Tremain, the Esther Forbes novel about the poor boy who becomes a runner and spy for Paul Revere. According to his count, he read it “at least 50 times” or, later he said 100 times.

“I thought of myself as the hero patriot, sticking it to old George III—a maverick role I still try to emulate,” he recalled, not missing a chance for a little self-promotion. “I developed a sense of history and its legacy, and remain annoyed at how little people seem to learn from the past: how we fight the same battles over and over; how we can’t remember what misguided, shortsighted policies led to depression, war, oppression and division. As citizens, we continually let elected officials pander for votes with easy, flawed solutions to complex problems. As voters, we repeatedly forget the lessons of others who didn’t hold their chosen officials accountable.”

His time in public school offered different lessons—mainly how education could fail those who wanted more than rote learning. For years, some of the town regulars in Medford mumbled angrily about the way the billionaire Mike Bloomberg would describe his time at Medford High. The building housing Medford’s high school in that era was a grim-looking place, dark and institutional. The lessons were keyed to the average learner, and Bloomberg admitted that he was “totally bored until my senior year.” That was when he took two honors courses—one in history and the other in literature. If Mike is barely recalled by most of his Medford classmates, his colleagues in the honors classes remember him well, especially because of one telling incident.

“Those of us who did well followed the teachers, did everything they said,” said Dorothy Rubin Schepps, a classmate in the honors programs. “Michael riled the teachers.”

Schepps and others remembered that Miss Kathleen Sharkey, who ran the literature honors class with an iron will, required a senior thesis. When the students turned in their first drafts, they waited anxiously for a verdict from the teacher famous for terrorizing even the toughest teenagers in her class.

The prim and straitlaced Miss Sharkey could be seen coming down the rows handing back papers and saying, “Good job, Miss Rubin, good job, Miss Davis.” Then she got to Mike Bloomberg. She stopped, frowned, and threw his draft onto his desk. “I’m not even going to read this,” she announced to a stunned class. Young Bloomberg was shaken by the encounter, his mother later told friends. He had planned to be provocative, not publicly humiliated.

Bloomberg’s paper for Miss Sharkey described a widespread conspiracy theory in the 1950s that President Roosevelt knew the Japanese were about to bomb Pearl Harbor. FDR also knew war was inevitable and that it could help pull the country into World War II and out of the Depression. The theory was circulated for years by Roosevelt’s enemies, even though historians of the era have repeatedly argued that the president was caught off guard by the Japanese attack. Miss Sharkey was a fan of the mighty Roosevelt, and she would not hear of such calumny. Or even debate it.

“Miss Sharkey, she was so tough. I broke my hand before midterm exam and she made me write left-handed,” said the Reverend Richard Black, a retired Methodist minister. That blowup over Roosevelt had to happen to Bloomberg, Black said. “You get two edgy people in a room and you get edges.”

Bloomberg does not remember being humiliated by Miss Sharkey’s furious rejection of his work. He simply recalls his plan B. He passed the rejected paper over to the honors history class, where the teacher used it to create a full and exhilarating discussion of Roosevelt and the war. Other students in that class believe that he turned young Bloomberg around on Roosevelt in a way that Miss Sharkey could not.

Officially, in the Medford High yearbooks, Bloomberg barely rates a mention. He was president of the slide rule club and a member of the debating society. The yearbook staff winnowed each student’s whole personality into one adjective. Mike’s was “argumentative,” a simple description that many of his friends, colleagues, and competitors over the years would endorse as well.

Marjorie Stone Glau, one of his classmates, said, “All these girls who thought he was the biggest nerd, we missed our chance. Nobody had any interest in him.” Too smart, too self-confident, too snarky—he wasn’t a first choice for prom night. When they were seniors in high school, Dorothy Rubin Schepps remembered that Mike kept asking her out. The first time, she couldn’t go. Her maternal grandfather had died, so they set another date. Then, on that day, Dorothy’s paternal grandfather died, and she called again to reschedule.

Was he hurt? Disappointed?

“No, no,” she laughed. Instead, he quickly recovered.

“So, okay,” he said, “how many grandparents do you have left?”

“I thought of myself as the hero patriot, sticking it to old George III—a maverick role I still try to emulate.”

Raves and Reviews

“It is long overdue that a serious biographer appraises this very important and interesting man, as a political leader and administrator, too real for what the major parties today are willing to offer us. Eleanor Randolph, an authoritative, insightful and lively biographer introduces a man who, in a different political climate, might be headed for the White House.”—**Gay Talese, author of *The Kingdom and the Power***

“This masterful work not only paints a riveting portrait of a fascinating man; it is an absolutely first-rate study of leadership in business, politics and philanthropy.”—**Doris Kearns Goodwin, Pulitzer Prize-winner and author of *Leadership***

“Billionaire, New York city mayor, publisher—Michael Bloomberg has managed to be a towering figure in business, politics and journalism. How he navigated these often conflicting roles—with amazing success, even if the presidency eluded him—is a riveting tale, brought to vivid life by veteran journalist and Bloomberg observer Eleanor Randolph.—**James B. Stewart, Pulitzer Prize-winner and author of *Tangled Webs***

“Only three Mayors merit being enshrined in a mayoral Hall of Fame -- Fiorello La Guardia, Ed Koch, and Michael Bloomberg. But none had a broader impact outside the city. Eleanor Randolph's vivid biography of Bloomberg traces the impact of his Bloomberg terminals on the stock market, his much copied innovative management, the spread of his smoke-free restaurants, his early environmental and parks innovations, his fierce championing of education reform, his once lonely assault on the NRA, the deployment of his fortune to help elect a Democratic Congress in 2018, and his generous and targeted worldwide philanthropy. Bloomberg is no saint, as Randolph makes clear. His vanity can be Trumpian. But nothing about Michael Bloomberg is fake. The former Mayor and his associates opened the vault to Eleanor Randolph, and readers of this anecdote-rich book are in for a treat.”—**Ken Auletta, bestselling author and writer, *The New Yorker***

“A vivid, timely study of Bloomberg’s brand of plutocracy.”—***Publishers Weekly***

“*The Many Lives of Michael Bloomberg* is a smart and engaging book about one of the most important men in our time. Anyone interested in how to become a billionaire, how to run a major metropolis, and how to make the world a better place will want to read it.”—**Chris McNickle, urban historian, treasurer, American Historical Society and author of *Bloomberg: A Billionaire’s Ambition***