



Dr. Mehmet Oz

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My mother had just arrived in Cleveland when I was born. She had met my father under unusual circumstances, but their desire to migrate to the US was a very usual route for educated Turks trying to improve their lots in the 1960s. But let's not rush the story.

My father grew up in a poor village in central Anatolia, the son of a farmer in a worldwide depression that hit Turkey harder than the US. He was educated completely on scholarships, starting in middle and high school in Konya, which is the Nashville of Turkey. The whirling dervishes dance in their mosques in a very conservative community. He won a competition to enter medical school that was granted to a precious few and spent the Second World War learning medicine from brilliant Jewish physicians who were fleeing Europe.

He graduated first in his medical school class and won a funded position at Western Reserve Hospital, located seemingly a galaxy away in Ohio. His family took him to the airport, and his mother, who had never seen an airplane, insisted on meeting the captain. He kindly obliged and was handed a bagged lunch to serve my father and told to keep his flying mechanical bird low to the ground and avoid high speeds. Ironically, immigrants instinctively know that this is bad advice. To leave their homelands and thrive in our land of opportunity, they learn to take risks as they soar to the heavens.

My mother comes from a wealthy family and would have her dresses hand made. Their trusted seamstress was my aunt Ayse, who let slip

(knowing her, on purpose) that her brother was in the States making his name as a young surgical resident. But he was coming home for the holidays and perhaps a meeting could be arranged. Despite their reservations, my mother's parents permitted the meeting, because, as I have been reminded throughout my life, my mother is stubborn, tenacious, determined, and dogged. This part of the story is always vague in my parents' usually sharp minds, but they appear to have met and married faster than Amazon Prime delivers my socks. I was born a year later and witnessed their absorption in the American melting pot.



Me with my parents while my father was training in Atlanta (1961).

They started with little and often remind me that they would collect cans on the shoreline for the deposit money. Despite these modest beginnings, my father rapidly progressed through a training facilitated by other recent immigrants who felt expatriate camaraderie. Their names sounded like a UN roll call, and their customs merged into ours for social events. Pig roasts with Philippine physicians at picnics with Turkish baklava, elevated by US music. But the real recipe for success was the kindness of Americans who respected the bravery needed to leave one's homeland and respected this nation's need to attract the brightest minds on the planet. Mr. Slobody, who ran the local car dealership, held a welcome-back party when my father returned with

his new bride. Mrs. Slobody advised my mother on caring for her first child, since she was five thousand miles away from her mother. I grew up hearing these names uttered with great reverence and even called their children a few years ago to personally thank them for creating a new family for my parents upon their arrival.



At Harvard with Mom. She seems relieved that I was finally out of the house (1980).

Many speak of the melting pot of America. I think we are even better than that metaphor. Our nation has always reinvented itself by making immigrants part of the family. You don't always like your family. In fact, many joke that we fight so much with our families because if we were not related, we would not be friends. But family ties are thick and weave us into a quilt of community. They force us to deal with uncomfortable realities, while comforting us that tomorrow brings hope, because family members never abandon each other. My parents appreciated this tug to join the American family and shared these values with all the kids they raised, students they mentored, and other immigrants they met. These ideals are in our DNA, which, as the blueprint of life, is supposed to be passed along and is my defense for frequently regaling my kids with the stories above.

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