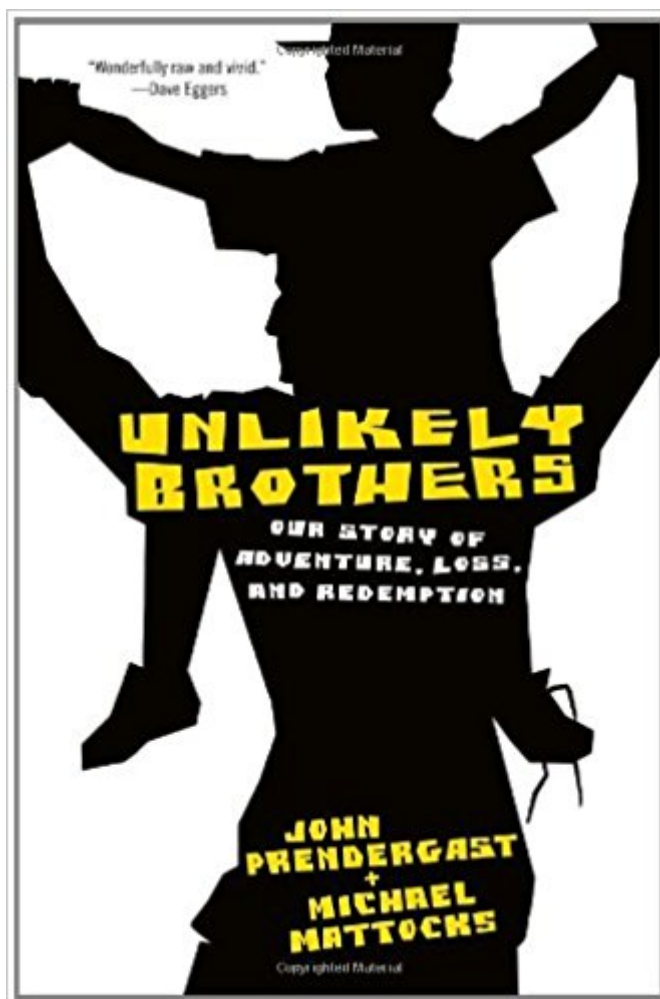


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Unlikely Brothers: Our Story Of Adventure, Loss, And Redemption



Synopsis

“You don’t look like brothers . . .” Peace activist and cofounder of the Enough Project, John Prendergast is known as a champion of human rights in Africa. But the not-so-public face of J.P. is the life he’s led as a Big Brother to Michael Mattocks. As a curious, driven, and emotionally wounded twenty-year-old, J.P. made the life-changing decision to form a “Big Brother/Little Brother” relationship with then seven-year-old Michael, who was living out of plastic bags and drifting from one homeless shelter to the next with his mother and siblings. Lacking a connection with his own brother and distancing himself from a disastrous relationship with his father, J.P. formed a unique bond with Michael the moment they met. Michael and J.P. became like family, with Michael and some of his siblings even living with J.P. one summer. In the years that followed, J.P. took Michael and his brothers on outings, whether it was fishing, playing basketball, patronizing cheap restaurants, or going on road trips. This friendship would continue for over twenty-five years as the two coped with varying degrees of violence, instability, and trauma in their own lives. Told in duet, *Unlikely Brothers* follows Michael as he grows up on the tough streets of Washington, D.C., where as a young teenager he watched his best friend get shot, dropped out of school, and started dealing crack cocaine shortly thereafter. By sixteen, Michael had become the kingpin of his neighborhood, guns and drugs always close at hand. Meanwhile, J.P. was traveling to and from African war zones. J.P. offered Michael a refuge from the streets, never really confronting the gravity of what Michael was going through in his adolescence. In turn, Michael afforded J.P. an escape from his own turbulent personal and professional life. As the years go by, the two swoop in and out of each other’s lives, slowly disconnecting as they disappear into their respective worlds, but making their way back to each other at a critical moment for both of them. The effect the two have on each other is extremely significant to both of their paths to redemption. Inspirational and deeply moving, *Unlikely Brothers* beautifully showcases how life’s most random moments can often be the most profound.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"A book like *Unlikely Brothers* could have been a slog. It could have been gauzy and preachy. But what John and Michael have pulled off is something as unlikely as their brotherhood. A memoir wonderfully raw and vivid that manages to tell us something new about poverty and struggle and humility and hope. You'll read this in one sitting."

—Dave Eggers, author of *Zeitoun* and *What Is the What*

"Read this book, and learn more about our common humanity like I did. This inspiring story will touch your heart and have you believing we are our brother's keeper all over again."

—Wes Moore, New York Times bestselling author of *The Other Wes Moore*

"This is no ordinary memoir. It is an inspiring, important and utterly unforgettable saga. Every American should read it and any who do will be moved--moved to change and moved to act. John and Michael have opened up their innards, probing their friendship, their adventures, their disappointments and their demons so as to light a spark in all of us."

—Samantha Power, Pulitzer Prize winning author of *A Problem from Hell*

"*Unlikely Brothers* is an unlikely book, two interweaving stories filled with loss, tenderness and hope. John Prendergast's and Michael Mattocks's journeys - together and apart - should resonate for all of us, a searching for our place in the world, a yearning for friendship and connections."

—Alex Kotlowitz, author of *There Are No Children Here* and *Never a City So Real*

"A fascinating account of a long-standing friendship."

—Publishers Weekly

"Despite their contrasting perspectives, Prendergast and Mattocks illustrate that when it comes to the human condition, attitudes trump platitudes and actions outweigh promises."

—Booklist

"A feel-good narrative that underscores the brutal effects of poverty at home and injustice abroad."

—Kirkus

JOHN PRENDERGAST is a human rights activist and author. He is cofounder of the Enough Project (enoughproject.org), an initiative to end genocide and crimes against humanity. Working for the Clinton administration, he was directly involved in a number of peace processes in Africa. John helped create the Satellite Sentinel Project with George Clooney; coauthored two books with Don

Cheadle; and worked on films with Ryan Gosling. He traveled to Africa with 60 Minutes for four different episodes. He has been a Big Brother since 1983. Â MICHAEL MATTOCKS lived in homeless shelters as a child and began dealing drugs as a teenager. He is now a husband and father of five boys, working two jobs in order to support his family. He helps coach his sons's football teams.

This autobiography of two very unlikely brothers, as the title proclaims, is a very well written and informative book which can give the reader an understanding of the very different situations and choices available to people (one a young child and the other a young adult) who meet in a mentoring relationship, which, in one way or another, lasted for close to 30 years. The structure of the book gives the reader a close look at these differences since each writes from his perspective alternatively as they grow older and have such different experiences that they can't understand or communicate with each other during most years of this "mentorship," and their lives go on with their mostly growing farther apart. Michael Mattocks, the charming and bright seven year old black child who is living in a homeless shelter is mentored by John at the suggestion of a friend. Michael's greatest wish is to help his barely surviving family, and John's greatest wish is to help the people in Darfur and elsewhere in Africa to fight against genocide and other kinds of oppression. John (J.P. in the book) becomes very well educated and influential in his field of endeavor and Michael becomes a drug dealer when he is about eleven years old and he is then able to help his mother and siblings and other relatives, many of whom are living with them. Except for JP and his family and the family of the woman who later becomes his wife, Michael doesn't see any other role models in his immediate environment of one of the worst housing projects in the country, who aren't either using drugs or selling drugs or engaging in other destructive behavior. The story of how Michael manages to overcome the limitations of his environment is most moving. I had already known of John Prendergast and his accomplishments and I only discovered his mentorship of Michael by accident since this wonderful book hasn't been well publicized. Michael's sections of the book are brief, but eye-opening. While John did much great work, his sections of the book are a bit long-winded, especially when he discusses his problems with his father - who Michael absolutely adored. Class and racial differences are very clearly illustrated in this book, and readers are invited to ask each of these authors to make arrangements for them to speak at the end of the book.

I purchased the book after seeing the authors on C-SPAN Book TV online. I was interested in the story because I grew up in northeast Washington, DC and I was familiar with the locations

mentioned by Michael and JP. I also wanted to learn what Michael thought about being a homeless child. It turns out children have this great ability to find adventure in whatever environments they find themselves in. This is a great story and I highly recommend the book. JP's experience in the social justice arena was enlightening and some of the situations were scary. The book started out slow but picked up very quickly and became a page turner. This book reveals the capacity of human beings to grow and change into healthy responsible individuals. The book also reveals the PTSD issues experienced by young people who witness gun violence and how young people become numb to that violence. Thanks Michael and JP for telling your stories.

Read for Book Club, hard to read after having read *Something Borrowed* by Emily Giffin which was a light woman without self esteem and romance. *Unlikely Brothers* dealt with poverty, interaction of nonfamily members considering each other family and their success. Reflecting on it now It was a good read.

Very thought provoking and informative. As a public health nurse and former Big Sister, reading this has caused me to look at some things in a different light. I appreciate both men for being so open and honest about their lives.

Unlikely Brothers is a deeply moving, beautifully, soulfully written, important book. I am on my second reading, doing so slowly, as I don't want it to end, again.

This is the most self-indulgent narcissistic novel I've ever read. What a boring load of crap. And I LIKE feel good real life stories such as this. But this is such crap that I stopped reading halfway through. Please, do not purchase, just watch some Oprah instead.

We all come from diverse backgrounds. We all have things in our past that can destroy us. How we deal with these things determines what kind of life we will have. *Unlikely Brothers* follows the lives of two men who were inextricably bound by Big Brother Big Sister. One came from a life of extreme poverty and extreme disfunction but was upbeat and happy. The other came from a life of at least some privilege with a nuclear family intact who suffered from a dysfunctional upbringing and was inwardly miserable. One went down hill to a life of crime and violence. The other soared to a place of national prominence in his field. Yet they both found that their relationship grounded themselves in their better part. This is a story of redemption from the devils that we face in life. It is an inspiring

read and reminds us that our background, although it shapes us, does not need to define who we are. We are all able to rise above our circumstances and become fully human.

I loved this book. My son loved this book. My best friend loved this book. It is so good it should be on the must read list. It was truthfully raw full of emotion and ended positively. Although I read it over a year ago I never forgot about the story. Loved it.

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