

The Audacious Adventures of **ZAZOO FLAZZ**

Part-time
Superhero,
Full-time Mom



By Leslie B. Placzek

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The
Audacious
Adventures of
Zazoo
Plazz

*Part-time Superhero,
Full-time Mom*

By Leslie B. Placzek

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All photographs are from the author's collection. Some names and identifying details of people and places described in this book have been altered to protect their privacy. Though all events recounted in this book actually occurred, the author assumes all responsibility for exaggerations and aggrandizements.

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1. "The Real Steele," by Leslie Bilodeau, published in the December 19, 1980 edition of the *ECHO*, student newspaper of East Catholic High School, 115 New State Road, Manchester, Connecticut 06042
2. "The Real Steele," by Leslie Bilodeau, published in the 1981 *ECLAT*, the student literary arts magazine of East

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3. Note: The author refers to this book in a story (but doesn't quote from it): *Bob Steele, A Man and His Humor*, Copyright 1980 by Spoonwood Press, P. O. Box 3153 Hartford, Connecticut 06103.

DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to my fellow
Part-time Superheroes and Full-time Moms.

To all of you bright lights
Stuck in the middle
Tending the fires, minding the griddle
Waiting in minivans, eyes on your phone
Socially networked, yet oh, so alone
Saving the world one day at a time
The paycheck too small to save but a dime
Midafternoon you stifle a yawn,
Sleepless at midnight, but up with the dawn
This is the time, though it all seems so wild
To go back, reclaim the lost, lovely child
Who's waiting to whisper into your ear
The thing you've forgotten but once held so dear.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Stretched across my computer's home screen is a scene from Matthew's gospel (Chapter 14, verses 22-33), in the New Testament of the Bible. A thunderstorm rages on the sea, rocking the apostles' fishing boat, as Peter sinks to his knees in the water. He seems oblivious to Jesus—perched on a wave two feet away—who extends his hand calmly in Peter's direction. Gazing at the scene, I thank Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and my angels and wise spirit guides for supporting and inspiring me on my journey to fulfill God's plan for my life, especially when I begin to question why I left the comfort of my nice, dry boat.

God's support comes in many forms, including the people who've popped up in my life to steer me in the right direction at the right time, or to teach me a lesson. Some of those people appear in this book (in disguise), and a few guided me from behind the scenes. Other folks may turn up in my next book, the third, or fourth. Thanks to my husband (GP)--my three-legged race partner--for your support, precise and heartfelt feedback, and patience, which made it possible for me to fulfill my dream of bringing Zazoo Plazz to life on the page—and in person.

To my sons (BP and ZP), I offer this bit of advice I got from a fortune cookie (which I taped to my primitive design of a pot of gold at the end of a rainbow): “Be Brave Enough to Live Creatively.” In other words, fight to keep your “sacred space,” even when people make fun of your white sage “aura smudge” purifying room spray.

I give a high five paw to Bebe, my Devoted Dog, for staying close by my side at those times when you have nothing to gain but a rub behind the ears or a kiss on the nose, and for having the decency to leave me the last slice of pizza.

I am eternally grateful to Julie Ann Turner¹ (my creative guide and Mama Bear at the top of the cliff), without whom this book--and Zazoo herself-- would still be a jumble of memories in my heart, and the legions of butterflies in my head would be crashing into my ears instead of spiraling upward infinitely in perfect unison. Finding you was *my* epiphany.

To Robin Tatlow-Lord, my creative colleague from Down Under, for her brilliant cover illustration, her willingness to adapt her own “Bobby Dazzler” roller derby superhero and dog into Zazoo Plazz and “DD,” and for adding the “extras.” I am so glad the stars aligned for us to work together, and I’m excited to collaborate with you again soon on the next Zazoo project!

This book went from “rough” to “ready” thanks to the patience, expertise, and loving critique of my editor, Kathryn Cartwright, and the formatting flair of her Australian colleague, author Karen Tants at Healing Pen Publishing.

Special thanks to Arti Roots Ross at Chrysalis Springs in Richmond, Massachusetts, for hosting a glorious autumn weekend retreat. Meeting you and our fellow “pilgrims” sparked an idea for the second *Zazoo*

¹ Julie Ann Turner is the bestselling author of the book *Genesis of Genius* and one of the world’s leading authorities on the creative process.

book and led me to consider starting an annual tradition of pre-birthday adventure weekends!

Heartfelt thanks to my fellow visionaries throughout the world, connected through technology. Though we've never met, I feel like you are family. You lift me up when the crabs are trying to pull me back down into the bucket.

I am grateful to my parents and extended family, for establishing the perfect environment for little Zazoo, the budding writer, to flourish, and also for providing me with so much wonderful material.

Thanks to my mother-in-law (IP), with permission--finally--to show this book to everyone in your town.

To my friends, neighbors, co-workers, and acquaintances, for being my sounding board, even when I had no wine to offer in return. Special gratitude goes out to my dental hygienist, who typically spends an hour and a half cleaning my teeth while allowing for my random rants and asides--like my unhealthy obsession with those little green dental picks that regularly spill out of their zipper pouch and into the abyss of my handbag, never to be seen again.

With love to "All the Souls" of those who have guided me on my path and continue to inspire me today, especially: Memere and Pepere Belanger; Granny and Grandpa Bilodeau; Uncle Maurice "Moe" Belanger; and Mr. H. Allen Greer, my high school English teacher and mentor.

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PROLOGUE

A Day in the Life of Zazoo Plazz, *Part-time Superhero, Full-time Mom*

In January 2018, I made a commitment to myself to assemble my stories into this book and release it into the world within a year. Everything was on schedule, planets aligned, the universe providing, creative ideas like butterflies fluttering into formation, and then, in mid-April, I hit a couple of bumps in the road. The following account is an accurate depiction of how my “expressing my gifts in the world” train easily derailed over my sons’ spring school vacation week.

That Wednesday, I had envisioned getting up at four thirty to meditate, exercise, shower, and have a nice, relaxing breakfast, settling in at my desk to write by seven with a hot cup of tea. Ha!

Here’s what really happened:

With my husband, Gray, up half the night preparing for a business trip, and son, Brenin, up until four playing

computer games, I slept fitfully, waking with a start at six thirty (Mercury retrograde messed with my alarm, or I sleepwalked and slammed it against the wall). Sprang out of bed like a rocket and threw on workout clothes. Once down in basement workout corner, overpowered by chocolate smell emanating from empty bag of crunchy chocolate Easter eggs in 'man cave' trash can. I removed the bag in order to focus on exercise.

Breakfast was delayed until nine, after cleaning up a sink of dishes dirtied by sons making and eating brownies the night before. Cleaned bathroom before showering at ten thirty. Finally, at desk by eleven with tea and journal, breathing once or twice. At 11:05, Gray popped into my office to say goodbye before leaving for airport—a quick kiss, a “see ya, have fun,” and he’s gone. Worked half an hour until a robocaller shattered my concentration at noon. Since I was up, I grabbed a ten-minute lunch in the sunny kitchen. Ahhh. Uh oh, time to walk my dog, Bebe. Then, I figured I should assemble the chicken pot pie for dinner tonight. Ah, quiet! One boy is still sleeping, the other eating. I settle in at 2 p.m. for some serious writing. Where was I...?

Two minutes later, my cell phone rings. It's my mother, calling from McDonald's twenty minutes away.

She and Dad are waiting for the road repair guy to arrive and jump-start their car. It could take 90 minutes--could I come pick her up? Of *course* I will. I hop in my trusty blue minivan, arrive at 2:25, just as the repairman is leaving. She takes the opportunity of the ride to my house to discuss what she wants to happen when she dies someday (though she is pretty hale at the moment). Apparently, she has decided to “visit” me often once settled on the “other side.” “Don’t worry,” she says, “I won’t be hanging out at the cemetery.”

Home again, I struggle with the dog, put the TV on “*Dr. Oz*” and give Mom a magazine to read. My son Jack, 15, cooking buffalo chicken snacks in the oven, lets me know there is an annoying pop-up on TV he and Grandma can't dismiss. OK, back to my office. I grab a snack while catching up on *Late Show with Stephen Colbert* videos on YouTube. Brenin, 17, sneaks up on me, watches over my shoulder, yanks on the red curtains I use for “privacy” in my “dining room/office,” puts my sticky notes on the ceiling. “Why don’t I ever see you writing anything, Mom? You should get a real job.”

Then Dad shows up, having bought his battery at the dealer. Defiant Dog jumps up, but Dad holds her back. My folks leave, I clean up, work for five more

minutes. Then it's time to take Jack to school to pick up his tuba and suitcase from the band's Disney World trip. The sun breaks through the clouds, but rain continues to fall. I run to help, but my "little guy" has already hoisted everything into the back of the minivan.

A beautiful rainbow appears in the sky, guiding us home. Hallelujah moment!! Aaaahhh. "Mom! Eyes on the road!" Jack says. "Look at it later!"

As the pot pie cooks, Jack plays his tuba for 20 minutes—the entire repertoire, from *Tarzan* to *Star Wars*—and shows me his straw conical hat from China Pavilion at Epcot. At this point, after 6 p.m., I return to my desk and try to summon the joy I had felt that morning, the anticipation of a day of creation. It was gone. I give up and turn the computer off. It is not going to happen today.

I eat dinner, watch the college *Jeopardy* tournament with Brenin, and take the dog out. All ready for bed, I lie awake, the day's stories buzzing around in my head like flies at the screen window, straining to be let out. So, I grab my notebook and a pen, lock the bedroom door, and start writing. Hopefully, if I get it all out, I won't have that dream again where I desperately need to find the

ladies' restroom but there are no stall doors, or they're all occupied.

I sense these stories may seem humorous in the future, but at this moment, I'm not laughing. It feels like my dreams are farther away than ever.

But are they, really? Who says?

PREFACE

Why do we women (especially in our middle years) put ourselves last so often?

Excuses abound. Yes, sometimes others really need our help. There will be a day when we miss these messy kids, once they have moved out, gone to college. Our parents won't live forever. The dog, too, has a limited life span (already 56 in people years). You always hear, "put yourself first." Yes, in terms of self-care that is essential. We need to be healthy and strong to be of any use to others. So, we eat right, hit the gym, sleep when we can, breathe. We do our hair and makeup, wear the right colors and accessories, and try to avoid looking like we belong in the three-way mirror on *What Not to Wear* with Clinton and Stacy shaking their heads and shouting, "Leslie, it's time to surrender the 'Mom jeans'!"

But what about shaking the dust from the wings of your dreams? You know those dreams--what you think about when you're ironing shirts and cleaning sinks, chauffeuring your kids, and walking the dog.

Dreams sneak up on you sometimes when you're listening to your husband talk excitedly about a new project at work, or your son tell you about the website he's

creating for a class. It is a longing to create, to lose yourself in the “zone,” like when Abba's “Dancing Queen” comes on and you're 11 again, disco roller skating with your friends. Then the song ends and you're standing in the middle of the kitchen floor covered in sweat, and the dog is tilting her head at you.

In my late thirties, I once told a “mom friend” after our sons’ playdate, “You can have it all, maybe just not at the same time.” At that moment, a little bell went off in my head. I think I had zeroed in on one of my life challenges, or lessons. And that, I think, was the moment I realized I *was* Zazoo Plazz, part-time superhero, full-time mom. She always lived in me, from birth, but this was an epiphany. It would take 10 to 12 more years for me to fully embrace her identity, but that was the start of my journey to create a successful life on my terms and define what *I* thought “having it all” meant.

Certainly, it didn't mean reaching some kind of perfection or world where nothing ever changed. I learned the hard way--that kind of idealism set me up for failure many times! I learned to embrace my quirksiness, laugh a bit more on the days when the planets clearly were not aligned in my favor. I began to collect my

stories, and as I organized them, I started to see some patterns.

The funniest stories were the result of the times I took myself the most seriously and tried to do what I thought other people expected me to do or be who I thought I “should” be. In other words, the times when my expectations were through the roof, I set myself up for an “epic fail,” as my kids used to say (“like, 5 years ago, Mom”). For example, rather than buy a small bag of crunchy kale chips for four dollars, I decided to devote an hour of my precious time to making three trays of kale chips from scratch. Is there any wonder they looked like the lawn after a hard rain and had the consistency of a rubber band?

If you are still reading this, I hope I've struck a chord (organ lesson stories to follow) and you realize we have something in common. At a minimum, I hope reading my stories will put a goofy smile on your face. But I *really* hope that you will read a passage that makes a little bell go off in your head and reminds you of your Dharma--what you are here to do. And you do it, bringing joy to yourself *and* the world. Then, you can check it off your soul's to-do list! Skip ahead two spaces and pick a card!

Now is the ideal time for all of us to rise to the challenge of feeling that familiar tug of war over our time, but forging ahead anyway, with baby steps. Communicating this message might be *my* divine purpose, since the sum of the letters in my name—Zazoo Plazz—is the Master Number ‘11,’ the double ‘masculine’ one, referring to the self, creativity, and independence. Reduced to the ‘feminine’ two, this number finds purpose in nurturing and supporting people, and working together. I feel this pull constantly, and I suspect others—especially women—may feel it, as well.

There is a Zambian proverb that the “peeps” in my running club like to quote: “If you want to go fast, run alone; if you want to go far, run together.” I love running a personal best time, shiny medals, and race shirts, as well as the adrenaline rush of crossing the finish line. But my best memories—and motivation—have come from running with, and in support of, other people. This is our time, our moment, to lace up our sneakers (unless you have those “no tie” performance laces, which save lots of time) and head off down our paths.

Hey, What's So Funny?

It must have been 1968 or 1969. I remember being about three or four, lying in my bed in the dark, listening to my parents laughing their heads off watching *Laugh-In* on a Friday night. My Dad has always had a hearty, unselfconscious cackle, which for the funniest skits would lead to guffawing and knee slapping. Is it any wonder I was curious? Eventually, they let me come in the den and squeeze onto the loveseat with them to watch a few minutes. The show was so colorful! The clothes, the set, and the jokes—the majority of which sailed over my head—were lively, fast-paced, and irreverent.

I was hooked. But the physical gags were the best!

To this day, I feel empowered remembering how Ruth Buzzi hit that white-haired guy with her big purse when he made lewd remarks to her.

But I think if my mother-in-law, with her ever-expanding collection of HUGE purses, ever hit a guy like that she might put him in the intensive care ward for a month.

In my black-and-white baby photo, I'm flashing a big toothless grin, my dark eyes glittering as if I am bursting to tell the punch lines to some great jokes you haven't yet heard. Maybe I was looking at Dad, because he always made me laugh. Freed from most of the mundane responsibilities shouldered by Mom—feeding, diapering, bathing, and educating—he happily spent his time with me goofing off in the most splendid ways.

I have a photo gallery in my mind of Dad sporting candy corn vampire teeth or orange slice grins, reading me the Sunday comics in the newspaper, vacuuming my orange bedroom carpet while wearing my blue high school cowboy hat, his lower lip twisted to the right and his brown glasses askew. He'd submerge in our above-ground pool and jump up like a swamp monster to make me squeal.

But as I grew older, I found that Dad was most skilled at puns—groan-worthy, perfectly timed phrases designed to

Hey, What's So Funny?

boost the mood of any gathering (or send people running to their cars). Because he was so easygoing and mild-mannered, no one expected him to come out with some of these zingers. He listened, watched, and waited. We'd be listening to Mom's older brother, Uncle Moe, regale an audience with a story of a business conference he'd orchestrated in an exotic locale, and suddenly I'd see a sly grin creep across Dad's face. "Uh oh," I'd think, just before Dad would tiptoe into the conversation with a barb so brilliantly sarcastic it caused Moe to lose his place for a second while Dad smiled and absorbed the laughter.

In the 1970s, Dad let me watch some British comedy shows featuring "proper gentlemen" behaving in mischievous ways. Mom didn't care for the *Benny Hill Show*, maybe because it always ended with Benny playing tag around town with a bunch of scantily clad young women. I thought Dad liked hearing the show's theme song, because *he* played the saxophone, too. To this day, it's my "running around like a chicken with its head cut off" song when I have too much to do and not enough time, which is very often.

Far from corrupting me for life, Dad taught me how to relax and not take myself—or life—so seriously. More importantly, he taught me that laughing—and making others laugh—is healthy and noble, as long as no one gets hurt. And

you can't please everyone. What is funny to one person might not be funny to someone else, and that's OK.

In second grade, I had a chirpy teacher who laughed from first thing in the morning until it was time to go home. To this day, I think of her only as "Laughing Lady." I love a good laugh, but learning is serious business. Some days "LL" was just too much for me (like the guy who worked out at my gym at six in the morning with cologne so strong I had to wear eucalyptus-scented ear buds up my nose just to get through my workout). One such day, I decided I needed a little break, so I wrote a note on my lunch napkin (in crayon) to excuse myself, to this effect: "Dear Mrs. X., please let Leslie go home. Love, Mommy." Is it any wonder she ever stopped laughing after she read my note long enough to call the principal (and my mother)?

Ultimately, I got permission to leave early that day, only because I was running a fever and shortly after came down with chicken pox--definitely *not* a laughing matter!

Hope you've enjoyed your sneak peek!

Buy the full book here:



What Others Are Saying:



[Leslie truly has a gift for helping you to laugh at the perplexities of life that many of us experience. – Amazon Reviewer](#)

What's next?

Join the party at zazooplazz.com!