



WHO IS DENNIS PRAGER?

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Who is Dennis Prager? And why do so many people love him?

As the producer of the Dennis Prager radio show and the co-founder and executive director of Prager University, I have given this second question a lot of thought. Here is my answer:

Luck. Unadulterated good fortune.

Or...It could be this:

Through his radio show, his writing, and now PragerU, he changes the way you live – for the better. He makes you a better a person – a better father, a better son, a better mother, a better daughter. Name another public figure who does that.

So, let's return to the first question: Who is Dennis Prager?

Born in Brooklyn, New York on August 2, 1948, he is the second son of Max and Hilda Prager, two worldly Orthodox Jews. Max, a World War Two vet, was an accountant, and Hilda, a nursing home administrator. Both were movie-star handsome. In fact, if the stars had been differently aligned, Hilda could have been an actress. She had the looks and the personality. Speaking of stars, Dennis's sign is Leo. Which makes you want to believe in astrology.

It's one of those little ironies that Dennis barely spoke a word until he was almost four. But, of course, once he started, he never stopped.

He didn't like school. To keep himself from being bored he learned to spell – backwards. He was the class clown. He was sent to the principal's office so often the secretary named a chair after him. He did the minimum amount of homework. In his case, this meant zero. In a class of 110 high school students, he graduated number 82.

But he was always scrupulously ethical and honest. Cheating was rampant at the religious school he attended. He mounted a campaign against it. You'd think everybody would hate him for that. But they didn't. He was too charming, too charismatic, too principled. No one could, no one can, remain mad at Dennis for long.

When he was a sophomore, Max and Hilda made a bold decision. The traditional parenting model clearly wasn't working. So, they offered their second son a deal: he had to be at the Shabbat dinner table every Friday, but otherwise, he was on his own. They gave him a modest allowance and set him loose. Manhattan became his playground. Classical music became his

passion. That and all things Russian. He studied them both... on his own.

That same sophomore year, he met his lifelong friend Joseph Telushkin. Their endless religious discussions eventually became a book, *The Nine Questions People Ask about Judaism*, still the standard text for those who want to learn the basic principles of the faith. Remarkably every book Dennis has written is still in print and still selling.

At the time, though, the future didn't look promising. Dennis' grades were so bad that his only college option was Brooklyn College simply because Brooklyn would take anybody. But it turned out to be the perfect choice. He won an essay contest. The prize was a scholarship to study abroad at Leeds College in England. While there, he was contacted by the Israeli government. They needed someone to smuggle Jewish artifacts into the Soviet Union and smuggle out names of those Jews who wanted to emigrate to Israel.

It wasn't John LeCarre dangerous, but real risk was involved. Dennis accepted the mission. When he returned to the US, he was asked by various Jewish groups to talk about his experience.

He's been traveling – 131 countries and counting – and lecturing ever since. Now living in Los Angeles, his public speaking and deep involvement in Jewish life led to an offer to host a Sunday-night radio show called "Religion on the Line." Radio was perfect medium for a non-stop thinker, non-stop talker with a theory on everything from baseball to Beethoven. That he had a perfect radio voice makes the whole thing seem part of a divine plan.

The Sunday night show quickly became a Saturday and Sunday Night show which soon became a Monday thru Friday show.

Among Dennis's fans was Hollywood writer/director, David Zucker, of *Airplane* and *Naked Gun* fame. He had the idea for a sketch comedy about Dennis's ideas about goodness. But he needed someone to work with Dennis on the script. I turned out be that someone. Working on what became, *For Goodness Sake*, changed my life.

Ten years later, I began producing Dennis's now nationally syndicated radio show. Dennis already had a large audience, but the goal has always been to make it larger. And younger. Because that's the future. It was from this thought that Prager University was born. An Internet phenomenon, it has vastly expanded Dennis's reach – both geographically and demographically. Over 300 videos from over 100 presenters and over 1 billion views later with an audience that is mostly under 35, PragerU has changed a lot of minds.

But there are many we still need to get to. Enough to change the country. Maybe the world. For the better. One person at a time. Five minutes at a time.

Think about it: At age 70, Dennis's career is on the ascendant! Pure luck.

I'm Allen Estrin for Prager University.