

Who Is Ralph Lauren?

- A child of a Jewish immigrant family
- A boy who loved movies, baseball, and basketball
- A world-famous fashion designer
- ✓ **All of the above!**

Find out more in this illustrated book!

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Who Is Ralph Lauren?



by Jane O'Connor
illustrated by Stephen Marchesi

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For Stephanie Spinner, a classic dresser—JOC

For Bernadette, valued friendships endure—SM

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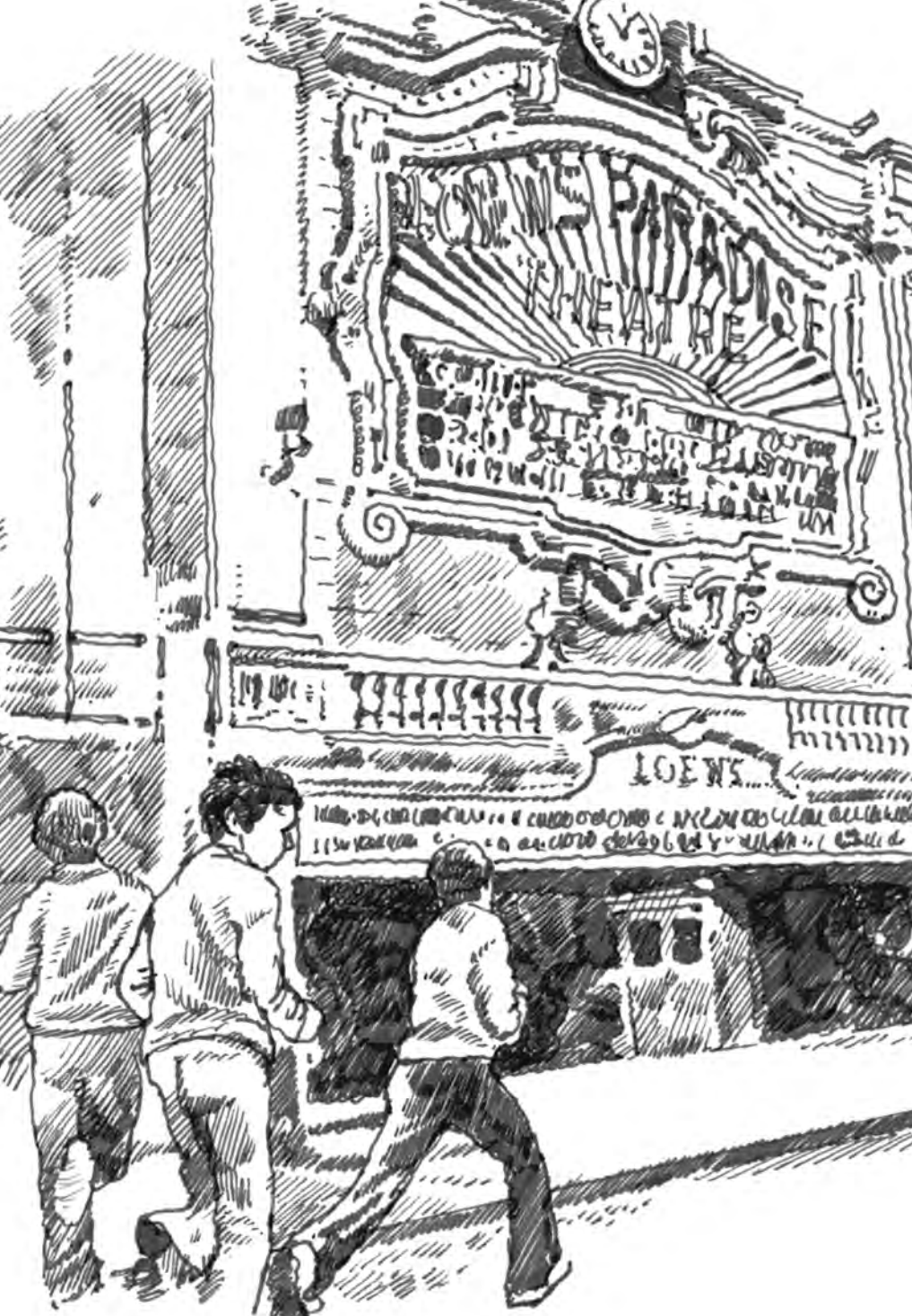
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Who Is Ralph Lauren?

Growing up in the 1950s, Ralph loved going to the movies. For him, it was like entering another world, one that was completely different from the Bronx neighborhood in New York City where he lived.

When they were old enough, Ralph and his friends would go by themselves to the Paradise Theatre. It seemed like a palace, with seats for four thousand people, marble columns, statues everywhere, a grand staircase, and even a fountain with goldfish swimming in it.

The movies were often action-packed war stories, or Westerns with famous stars like John Wayne. For Ralph, seeing a movie wasn't just about watching an exciting story unfold on a big screen. He could actually picture himself *in* the movie.



He *was* John Wayne, riding off to catch the bad guys, wearing a cowboy hat, chaps, and dust-covered boots.

Although Ralph's family wasn't poor, his parents didn't have a lot of money to buy their kids new clothes. The youngest of four children, Ralph often wore hand-me-downs from his older brother Jerry. Jerry was Ralph's idol and best friend. So Ralph didn't mind. He felt comfortable in clothes that already had been broken in for him. It made him feel cool to put on something like an old team jacket of Jerry's.



Of course, Ralph also wanted to choose his own clothes. And by the time he was a teenager, he already had a clear sense of his own style.

He didn't dress like his friends. Most of them wore white T-shirts and jeans. They wanted to look like Elvis Presley, who was the hottest rock star of the 1950s. Not Ralph. He'd save up for a V-necked tennis sweater or a pair of tweed shorts. He looked like he belonged on the campus of Harvard or Yale rather than in the school yard.

Did other kids think this was weird?

No. In fact, just the opposite. They thought Ralph was cool.

As he grew older, Ralph began to think that a lot of other guys might want to dress the way he did. So in his late twenties, he began designing ties. They were wider and cooler than the drab ties men wore in the mid-1960s. Ralph had the ties made by hand. Then he went around with a box of ties, trying to get stores to sell them.

Have you heard of Ralph Lauren (say: LOR-en)? Even if you don't recognize his name, certainly you know his company. The logo is a polo player

on horseback, holding a raised mallet. Ralph started with ties, but fifty years later, his company designs much more than clothes for men, women, and children. There are Ralph Lauren sheets and towels, furniture, and fragrances. You can buy Ralph Lauren watches, sunglasses, handbags, underwear, suitcases, chocolate bars, and coffee. There is even a line of Ralph Lauren house paint, which offers thousands of colors, including fifty-one shades of white.



What do all these different things have in common?

They share Ralph Lauren's unique sense of taste *and style*.

Everything he designs is something he would want to own himself.

Through hard work, lots of imagination, and a strong belief in himself, Ralph Lauren has created a multibillion-dollar fashion empire. His story is a very American story. It stands as proof that someone can start out with little, follow a dream, and end up doing something amazing with their life.

CHAPTER 1

A Boy from the Bronx

Ralph was born on October 14, 1939, in the Bronx, one of New York City's five boroughs. His family's last name was Lifshitz. (Like many children of immigrants with hard-to-pronounce last names, Ralph and his brother Jerry later changed theirs—in this case from Lifshitz to Lauren.)

Ralph's parents, Frieda and Frank, had each come to the United States from Russia. They were both Jewish. In Russia in the early 1900s, Jewish people were the frequent targets of *pogroms*—violent attacks supported by the government.

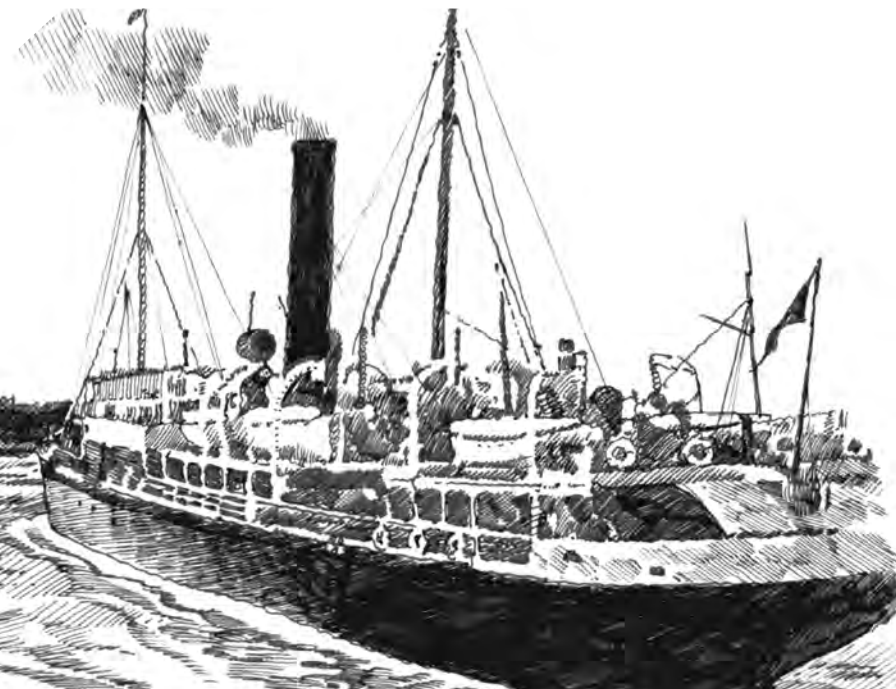
As a child, Ralph watched his parents studying for the test to become citizens. That was very important. In the United States, Frieda and Frank

Coming to America

From 1880 to the early 1920s, a great wave of immigrants came to the United States—a total of twenty-three million people. Ralph's parents were among them. His father, Frank, arrived in 1920; his mother, Frieda, came in 1921. Most immigrants at that time had been born in eastern Europe. Many were Jewish people who settled in New York City in



neighborhoods like the one Ralph Lauren grew up in. Newly arrived immigrants hoped for better lives than the ones they had left behind. For them, a better life meant more than finding a decent job. They now were free to follow their religious beliefs. This is the same reason the Pilgrims came to America in the 1600s.



had found a better future where they could raise a family safely and freely. First came their daughter, Thelma, born in 1929, followed by three sons: Lenny, Jerry, and the baby, Ralph.



The family lived in a brick building across from a park. Their two-bedroom apartment was tight quarters for six people—Thelma had to sleep on a pullout sofa. But it was a lively, happy home where there was almost always the smell of something good cooking.

Ralph was a playful, imaginative kid. When he pretended to be Superman, he didn't just pin on a towel for a cape. Oh no. He'd put on glasses and wear Superman pj's under his clothes so he could "transform" himself from wimpy Clark Kent into the Man of Steel.

All four of the Lifshitz siblings were artistic. (Ralph has always insisted

