

Best-selling writer Brad Meltzer credits Miami with his literary success.

# Thrill Seeker

AUTHOR BRAD MELTZER LIVES AND BREATHEs MIAMI—AND WITH HIS NEW BOOK, HE SETS OUT TO UNCOVER ONE OF SOUTH FLORIDA'S MOST INTRIGUING CONSPIRACIES.

BY PATTY ADAMS MARTINEZ

World-renowned author Brad Meltzer could spend his days anywhere, but for him, all roads lead to Miami, where he is currently busy redefining the modern-day Renaissance man. He's an 11-time *New York Times* best-selling author with more than 10 million books in print, including both works in his wheelhouse—conspiracy thrillers—and works of nonfiction. His name is so bankable that it gets top billing in a History Channel TV series, *Brad Meltzer's Decoded*, and he's about to release his 12th book, *History Decoded: The 10 Greatest Conspiracies of All Time* (out October 20).

Although he's not one to brag, the mild-mannered 43-year-old has earned the right to. He's had private sit-downs with multiple presidents, flights on Air Force One, and meetings in the Oval Office. The history-buff-turned-Senate Judiciary Committee member-turned-writer was even recruited by Homeland Security as part of a think tank to brainstorm how terrorists might try to attack the US.

Born in Brooklyn, New York, Meltzer's whole life changed course at 13, when his father lost his job and their family moved to Miami. Meltzer's parents had no employment prospects, no place to live, and \$1,200 to their names. It was also a sweltering July.

Meltzer says he was used to being the outsider ("always have been, always will be"). While his parents got their footing, they couldn't afford to pay for babysitting, so Meltzer accompanied his

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According to Meltzer, the number-one seller of his books was a mile from where his mom worked. “That’s the power of the Jewish mother,” he says, here with his late mother, Teri, in Sunny Isles, 2008.

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dad to job interviews—like one at Wendy’s. “I remember pretending not to know my dad,” he says. “But as he’s doing his interview, I’m picking up a french fry and thinking, My life is being determined by what’s going on at the opposite side of a fast-food restaurant.... surreal.”

The family squeezed into a one-bedroom apartment with Meltzer’s grandparents, which one might expect would pretty much kill any teenager’s chances with the head cheerleader at a new school—or would it? Meltzer met two of the most important women in his life at Miami’s Highland Oaks Middle School: his wife, Cori, the cheer captain and now attorney and mother of three; and Sheila Spicer, whom he had the good fortune of having for his English teacher that same year.

“Ms. Spicer told me I could write, but couldn’t get me moved into the honors class,” Meltzer recalls. “She said, ‘You

have a gift. I’m going to nurture it. You’re going to sit in this corner the entire year. Ignore everything. Ignore every homework assignment I give. What you’re going to do is the honors work.’ That woman changed my life.”

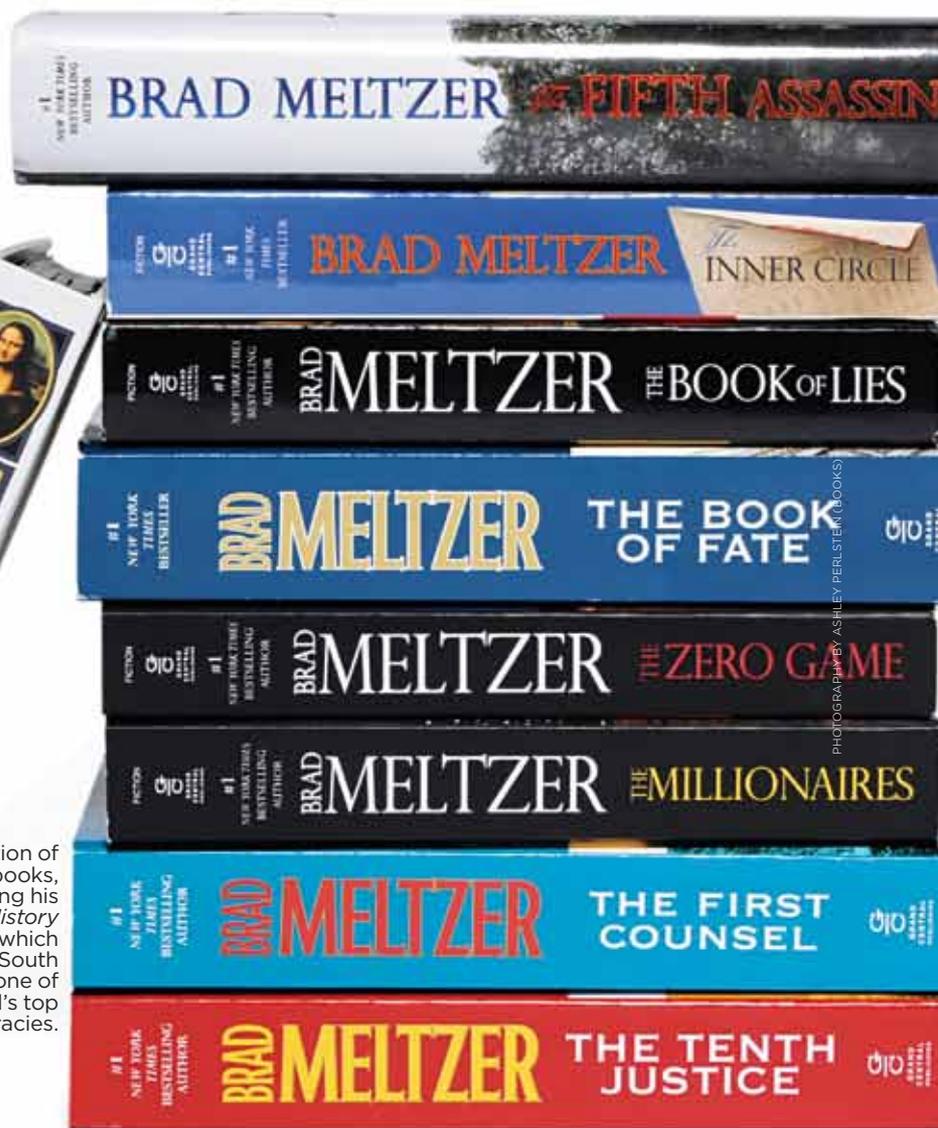
A graduate of the University of Michigan and Columbia Law School, Meltzer moved to Boston to work for *Game* magazine, but the job offer crumbled, so he took a chance to write his first novel, the still unpublished *Fraternity*, which received 24 rejection letters. But his second, *The Tenth Justice*, was a *New York Times* best seller and set off a frenzy of readers scrambling to uncover Meltzer’s many fascinating mysteries. He looks to write about the people you might not even notice. “I spend a lot of time writing about the White House,” Meltzer explains. “But I don’t write about the president. I write about the kid in the corner, the guy who gives the president his water and then takes it away. I want to know where he goes and what he does with it.”

Meltzer knew he would always make his way back to the Sunshine State. He quips that his goal in life is to “work Miami into anything I write.” Even at a young age, Florida fueled his imagination. “I used to ride my bike everywhere. But on my rides, I’d pretend someone was chasing me. Every thriller writer is paranoid. And anyone who says they’re not is lying, which is kind of paranoid, too.” Though he pens his novels in a home office rather than “lying on a beach with my toes in the sand and a cocktail in hand,” the essence

of South Florida still seeps into every one of Meltzer’s thrillers—from his “research” on South Beach for his book *The Millionaires* to a character in the *Book of Lies*, based on a real Fort Lauderdale resident who picks up homeless people off the street.

His latest work, *History Decoded*, manages to land Miami in the top 10 conspiracies of all time. The Spear of Destiny—“which is said to have pierced Christ’s chest when he was on the cross, and then gave magic powers to all that possessed it, including everyone from Napoleon Bonaparte to Adolf Hitler”—was supposedly found in a sunken submarine off the coast of South Florida. “The story, of course, was complete nonsense. I don’t believe for one second that spears have magic powers. But if you told me that Adolf Hitler wanted the spear, then I want to know about the spear.” So Meltzer basically followed the mystery’s trail to his city’s backyard. “It’s plain and simple: I owe this town my existence,” he says. “Without Miami, I would not have met my wife and had my kids, and I would not have met Ms. Spicer, so I most likely wouldn’t have become a writer. I’d be nothing without this place.” **OD**

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A selection of Meltzer’s books, including his latest, *History Decoded*, which links South Florida to one of the world’s top conspiracies.