

PROLOGUE





From the outside, mine is an unlikely story. I'm a Somali-born, working-class black Muslim immigrant, who fled conflict as a small child and ended up in Sheffield. I grew up being told that people like me weren't made for political office and that I couldn't make a real difference.



Like many people, I grew up in a socially deprived, neglected community that was rife with criminal activity and a lack of opportunities. Not having many role models growing up, the only two posters on my bedroom wall were of Buffy the Vampire Slayer and The Rock. My mum has never really grasped the Western cultural trend of displaying pictures of people you've never met, especially when they're a woman brandishing a sharpened wooden stake and a well-built man standing in his underwear with one eyebrow raised.



With a desire to see, feel and experience things beyond my neighbourhood and the city that was now my home, I became fascinated by travel. My wanderlust led me to order boxloads of holiday brochures from the internet. Finally, after finishing my A-levels and slaving away for six months in factories, working 12-hour shifts, I'd cobbled together enough cash to travel to some incredible places.

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I thought that I might work out what I wanted to study at university while I was travelling, but it just didn't happen. What I did know, and what my mum had taught me, was that if I went to uni it would provide me with some amazing opportunities. To cut a long story short, I ended up studying aquatic zoology at Hull University. Admittedly, this was a course I had no interest in pursuing as a career, in a city I knew nothing about, other than the fact I had it on good authority from my mate's dad that it was "an absolute shit-hole", but I took my chances and decided to see the good in the situation. To this date, it's one of the best decisions I've ever made.

After a brief stint starting up a business that ended up in failure, I fell into depression. Hope arrived in the unusual form of an advert for a 32-day medical trial, during which time I made some lifelong friends, as well as discovering my resilience and campaigning ability. At around this point, something in me changed: I just got tired of complaining. And then the rhetoric of hate, fear and division frogmarched UKIP to victory in the 2014 European elections, and I realised that I wanted to do something about it. I decided to stand up for what I believed was right and began to play an active role in my community.



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I thought that if I could make my little part of the world in Sheffield a bit better and make a small difference to people's lives, I would have played my part. So I joined the Green Party. I knocked on people's doors. I went to every community event going. And I got elected as a local councillor. Two years later, I became the youngest ever Lord Mayor of Sheffield. I've spent much of the last year as a Green MEP representing God's own country, Yorkshire and the Humber. I still pinch myself every time someone on a stage reads out my name.

But things have not always been smooth sailing. There have been countless people and groups who have tried to put barriers in my way and make life difficult for me. And at times I still get imposter syndrome and find myself thinking, 'They're going to catch me out any moment and realise I'm a fraud!'

From banning Donald Trump from Sheffield and creating a UK-wide suicide prevention charter, to walking someone I've never met before down the aisle at their wedding and having to stick something up my bum on Mount Kilimanjaro (you'll find out what and why later), I've had a lot of weird and wonderful experiences that have shaped who I am today.





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During my year as lord mayor, the Sheffield music festival Tramlines asked if I wanted to design a poster with a message to the people of Sheffield that would be displayed around the festival. Not having much time to spare, I quickly came up with something. It was the festival's tenth anniversary and I wanted to create a message of hope. I came up with a series of universal principles that people would relate to, remember and subscribe to. And so Sheffield's Ten Commandments was born. The poster ended up being 12 feet tall and a massive hit. It seemed to resonate with people so much that they started creating their own versions of it and sticking them up on their bedroom walls. Little did I know then that these commandments would later become the template for this book.

I want everyday people to reject the status quo that is failing people like them. Our system is broken, and the establishment is out of touch and out of ideas. Politics shouldn't just belong to the moneyed elite who sit comfortably in lavish offices at the top of ivory towers. It must be made accessible for absolutely everyone, and I try to live that belief every day and in everything I do. Poor representation in politics breeds mistrust and disrespect, and diverse representation builds tolerance and understanding. I



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know first-hand that coming together and finding a sense of belonging are better than isolation and fear.

If you ever find yourself in a similar position, remember that we cannot afford to bury our heads in the sand. We need to speak out, because staying silent is siding with the oppressor. Every single one of us has a social circle, some form of platform and some degree of influence, even if it's just to our friends, or our parents, or our work colleagues. Speaking truth to power, acting according to our capability and opportunity, whatever that may be, is our collective responsibility. So go out and ruffle the right feathers, ask difficult questions and remind the establishment of your own radical and disruptive power for positive change, whether that's in work, life or politics. Change for the better is not only possible but probable when we come together for the sake of our common values. With conviction in our beliefs and committed action, with unity, strength and compassion, we will build a world that truly works for us all. And there is hope ahead. I'm living proof that even in the most difficult of circumstances, there is hope!

I'm sick to the back teeth of being told not to be 'too political', that I should 'tone it down a bit' or that



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it's best I don't speak on this or that issue. I don't have the privilege to sit in silence. Have you seen me? I am a black, Muslim immigrant. Have you seen the racism and injustice happening all around us and at the heart of this government, from child poverty and the hostile environment policy to the inaction on climate change? Do you think I could just opt out of being 'too political'? Would my silence, in spite of my platform and opportunity, be fair on people like my mother, my neighbours, my colleagues and everyone else that has faced and continues to face suffering, alienation and marginalisation? No!

Anyone can be an activist, and this book will show you how. When inspirational, decent people combine, the seeds of change begin within society to sprout. In a world that's driving us apart, we need to bring people together with a common purpose. We must work to build a new world, rooted in the aspirations of the young and able to deliver lasting change for all. We must address the defining, unresolved problems of our era and demand urgent change to ensure the future of our planet, whether that means calling for action on climate change, taking Trump to task, combating austerity or defending migrants. We must speak out against injustice,





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stand up to racism, hate and intolerance and defend the powerless, disenfranchised and voiceless sections of our society. To achieve all this, we need to do things differently, reach out rather than turn away and choose hope over fear. That is what this book is all about.

MAGID X

