



## JDAIM Reads!

# The Little Gate Crasher The Life and Photos of Mace Bugen

Gabrielle Kaplan-Mayer

## Readers Guide

### Book Summary

Gabrielle Kaplan-Mayer's [The Little Gate Crasher](#) is a memoir of her amazing Great-Uncle Mace Bugen--an unstoppable spirit, first generation Jewish American, self-made millionaire, celebrity gate-crasher--who was 43 inches tall. Mace's unstoppable spirit defied the challenges of his own physical limitations and society's prejudices towards people with dwarfism.

Dr. Dan Gottlieb of NPR's "Voices in the Family" captured the essence of the book in his review: "Many begin their journeys by saying, 'Why me?' But healing begins when they say, 'Okay, what now?' Part history and part biography, *The Little Gate-Crasher* is inspirational— and damn fun to read."

## Jewish Values in *The Little Gatecrasher*

*Ometz Lev (Courage)*: Throughout the book, Mace shows many moments of courage. For people with dwarfism in his time and even now, simply doing the mundane tasks of daily life while facing taunts and stares took tremendous courage. Name a moment in the book that stands out as one of Mace's most courageous moments.

*Bitachon (Confidence)*: Mace is not only courageous, he is also confident--in his ability to start his own business, get a driver's license and pursue his celebrity-photo hobby. Where do you imagine his self-confidence stems from?

*Samechah (Joy)*: Mace celebrates every simcha in his community and lives his life with a sense of purpose and with joy. Could you imagine him instead being a primarily bitter, angry person? Why do you think he chooses joy and what does he receive as a result?

*Sever Panim Yafot (Cheerfulness)*: Mace was known for being outgoing, greeting everyone and shmoozing--he was a fun person to be around. How did being cheerful serve him?

*Kehillah (Community)*: Mace is an integral part of his local community and especially active in Jewish community. What do you imagine he gets out of being so close to his community? What does his community learn from him?

*Btzelem Elohim (Created in God's image)*: In the creation story in Genesis, we learn that every human being is created in God's image. Who do you think looked at Mace and saw a holy being? Who did not? How does viewing every human being as being created in God's image impact the way we regard each other?

*Adam Yehidi Nivrah (Every person is unique/respecting differences)*: Throughout the book, we learn the ways that Mace was a truly unique human being and that his disability was only one defining aspect of who he was in the world. What lesson do you take away from Mace about regarding every human being as unique?

# Discussion Questions

## *Mace, Disability and Accommodations*

1. Mace Bugen was born in 1915 and was diagnosed as an achondroplasiac dwarf. How does his family react to the news of his difference? Describe his family member's relationships with Mace.
2. How did the public school system treat Mace? Why was he allowed special help from his sister at school when his disability was not related to learning? What kind of support might have been helpful from the school system?
3. Describe Mace's meeting with the lawyer. Why does Mace give up on his dream of going to law school? What kind of accommodations could have helped him?
4. Why was it so important to Mace to get a driver's license? What does driving enable him to do? How would his life been different without a vehicle?
5. The Americans With Disabilities Act, providing accommodations in transportation, parking, and access to public spaces, wasn't passed until 1990. How does Mace, whose mobility becomes more limited as he ages, manage to access public venues?
6. Mace has a drive to live life not as someone with a disability, but as a human being. In what ways does Mace have to struggle to be treated as a whole person? Give an example of ways that people who have disabilities today continue to face that same struggle. Why is it difficult to see the person, not the difference?

## *Mace and Celebrities*

1. Describe Mace's encounter with boxer Joe Louis. What does Mace take away from the experience? What do you imagine Louis makes of the encounter?
2. Mace said, "I gotta do something special to let 'em know I'm me." Why does he feel the need to "do something special"? What is special/noteworthy about his hobby of celebrity selfies?
3. Mace spent his entire life being stared at. What would that experience feel like? How do you imagine that experience fueled his desire to be photographed with celebrities.
4. Mace, like many people, was star-struck. From your observations, how do the celebrities in his photos feel about him?
5. Pick one of your favorite photos of Mace and a celebrity. What strikes you about the photo--the mood, the setting, the light? What do you imagine Mace and the celebrity are feeling?

### *Jewish identity and Leadership*

1. Mace is described as a “one-man Jewish pride parade.” How does he show his Jewish pride? What is notable about his expression of pride?
2. Mace visits Israel in 1950, when the modern state has been in existence for two years. Why do you think he traveled there? What makes his visit an experience that only Mace Bugen could have?
3. Mace takes on a leadership role with boys at his synagogue. Is he an effective leader? Why or why not? Would you let your teenager go on an adventure with Mace?

### *Chutzpah*

1. Merriam-Webster dictionary defines “chutzpah” as ‘personal confidence or courage that allows someone to do or say things that may seem shocking to others.’ How does that definition relate to Mace’s personal chutzpah?
2. Mace has been described as “unstoppable” and “larger than life” in spirit. What do you think contributed to his energy and outlook on life?
3. Mace not only had chutzpah, but he had personal courage to defy society’s expectations. Share a moment from the book that expresses Mace’s courage.

### *Life Lessons*

1. Mace valued family over everything. How did his family members express the way that they valued him?
2. Mace had street smarts, emotional intelligence and business smarts--even though he struggled through public school and never went on to college. What does he educational and professional experience teach us about intelligence?
3. In the book, there is only one experience of Mace’s frustration with being stared at: when he does on a date with another dwarf. Why is that experience more painful than being stared at on his own? How do you think society has changed in terms of dating for dwarfs and little people since Mace’s time?
4. What lessons do you take away from Mace’s life story? What will you most remember about his unique life?