



Photo by Gideon Levin

Mortimer Zuckerman

let my people know

by Aliza Davidovitz

There are some things, like class and charm, that even billionaires can't buy. But, good thing for Mortimer Zuckerman, who ranks as number 211 on *Forbes'* list of richest Americans, he has those qualities in natural abundance—so much so that he can de-claw the most jeering of journalists. And this “man of plenty” has not lacked his share of pouncing reporters, a pack of wage earners who can't help but gibe and jab at a man who is worth approximately 1 billion, one hundred million. Zuckerman himself is reportedly reserved and tight lipped when it comes to talking about his money, finding it a crass subject, but he doesn't have to talk about it, there are enough “yakkers” out there estimating what he's worth.

The bottom line is that Mortimer Benjamin Zuckerman, real estate mogul and publisher, is “worth” much more than *Forbes* could ever figure. As a *mensh*, as a philanthropist, as a profound thinker, as a lover of Judaism and the State of Israel, as a devoted father, Zuckerman adds up to be quite a remarkable human being. It is not because Zuckerman is rich that he merits laudatory labels; it is because he is exemplary that he is rich and successful. But at the age of 64, Zuckerman looks back and tells *Lifestyles* that he never thought in terms of being a millionaire and that much of his success was simply luck. “I had a wonderful career opportunity early in life, not just to learn a craft but to become a partner,” Zuckerman says. “I did much better than I had any reason to expect.”

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Great expectations must have been implausible for a young Zuckerman, born and raised in Montreal, Canada, when his Russian-born father, Abraham, died of protracted heart problems when Zuckerman was just 17 years old. Zuckerman says that he still has pain in his heart that his father did not live to see his success. “It’s always very sad when your parents aren’t around to share more with you,” Zuckerman says. His mother Esther, who was also born in the old country, died in 1976—one year after Zuckerman had made his first few millions at the age of 29. “My mother was thrilled by what my [three older] sisters and me were able to do,” he relates.

But if Zuckerman was able to look beyond his grief and heartache, and move forward and upward, it was because of one person whom he calls the “greatest man he has ever known”—his paternal grandfather, an Orthodox rabbi who immigrated from Russia in 1921 with the two things Zuckerman says he cherished most: his faith and his family. He tells how his grandfather, who was the *rebbe* of a town and quite well-to-do by the standards of that time, had given it all up to come to North America. “My grandfather was a very forward looking and optimistic person,” Zuckerman recalls. “He never looked back and never regretted what he did or did not do.”

Zuckerman was not only inspired by his grandfather’s positive outlook on life, but also by the hopefulness of immigrants in general, especially Jewish immigrants, who left their old familiar lives behind and came to America to build new ones, better ones—and did so successfully. With the “new world” came new values, and so



Mortimer Zuckerman with former Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

even though Zuckerman’s grandfather was Orthodox, all of his children were Conservative. Zuckerman remembers that during his bar mitzvah, his grandfather conducted his own separate service according to Orthodox procedure. But, he says his grandfather, remarkably, never displayed resentment toward his family’s form of observance. “He realized it was a new world and that his kids would make their own choices.”

Mortimer Zuckerman was thus brought up knowing that each man has options. And so, even though he was raised in a kosher home and attended Hebrew school, he opted to live a more secular life; even though he had a Bachelor’s degree in law from McGill University and a Master’s in Law from Harvard, he chose never to practice law; and even though his family and friends all lived in Montreal, he decided to move to Boston. It was there and then that the choices he made flourished into success and were further cultivated into what was yet to come.

Perhaps relying more on his Bachelor’s in public policy and economics and his Master’s from the Wharton School of

Business, in 1965 Zuckerman took a job at the prestigious real estate firm of Cabot Cabot & Forbes, headquartered in Boston. He was reportedly labeled by one of the firm’s principal partners, “my private genius.” At the age of 25 he became the CFO; by 29 he was a partner. By 1970, he took his money, his expertise, and one of Cabot’s treasured partners, Ed Linde—now Zuckerman’s treasured partner of 31 years—and started his own company, Boston Properties.

Zuckerman says that he’s been comfortable with risk since he was 7 years old. He tells how at that young age he took his bicycle on a 20-mile trip across Montreal to a place called Verdun, reputed in Montreal as a crazy part of town. But he explains that he took that “risk” for a very compelling reason: he wanted to see a “Lassie” movie. Verdun was the only place in the city that admitted kids under 16 into flicks. “I was scared out of my mind,” he remembers. Since then, risk has been increasingly rewarding for him. But his company, Boston Properties, does define itself as being conservative about initiating new projects on a speculative basis.

Boston Properties was launched into success in the mid-’70s when Zuckerman and his partner capitalized on the plummeting real estate values of the time. His real estate investment trust company eventually penetrated core U.S. markets such as Washington, D.C., midtown Manhattan and San Francisco. Today they are one of the largest developers of first-class office properties in the United States. As of September 2001, the Company’s portfolio consisted of 147 properties comprising more than 40.9 million square feet with many new properties currently under

development. Accounting firms Ernst & Young and Arthur Anderson are but two of Boston Properties' prestigious tenants. The company now trades on the New York Stock Exchange under the symbol EXP after going public in June of '97.

But Zuckerman had "gone public" in another way several years prior. In addition to playing a life-size game of "Monopoly" with real money, he also went into the publishing business which created a public persona for him. In 1980 he purchased the *Atlantic Monthly* for \$3.6 million; in 1984, *US News and World Report* for \$163 million, a record high purchase price for a magazine; in 1993, the bankrupt *Daily News* for \$36 million, and in 1995, he started Fast Company. He sold two of his publications, hanging on to the *Daily News* and *US News*.

Zuckerman became a familiar face in 1986 when he came to the defense of one of his reporters from *US News* who was accused of being a spy and was arrested and imprisoned by the KGB while on assignment in the then-Soviet Union. Zuckerman's face was all over the media. He appeared on news broadcasts and on the front page of major international and local newspapers claiming that his reporter was no more a spy than Gidget. He even flew to Moscow and persisted in supporting his reporter until he was released.

Still many believed that although as a real estate maven Zuckerman could be put on a sky-scraping pedestal, as a publisher he didn't stack up. His publications just didn't bring in a substantial net gain. But when he sold Fast Company for \$385 million, detractors were silenced, and Zuckerman had



Zuckerman with former President Bill Clinton.

triumphed once again. Nonetheless, not everything is about money for Zuckerman. "I took up two professions I loved but didn't know anything about: real estate and publishing," he says. "I never thought about the money. I thought about doing interesting work."

Zuckerman actually loved journalism since he was a young boy, since the days his father would encourage him to read *The New York Times*. When he attended McGill in his earlier years, he had covered the sports beat for the school newspaper. Anyone who has ever read his weekly editorials in *US News and World Report* knows that he can turn a phrase as well as he can turn a profit. In one of his past New Years' columns entitled "Loose Lips, Fast Quips" (a title that really pegs the man himself), Zuckerman defines a journalist through the eyes of politicians and businessmen: "A journalist is someone whose business it is to explain to



Zuckerman with the late French President Francois Mitterrand.

others what he personally doesn't understand."

It is partly because Zuckerman loves to educate himself that he pursued journalism. "Learning to me is still the greatest joy I know," he reveals. "I enjoy the publishing world because it forces me to constantly learn about so many different subjects."

There is one particular subject close to his heart, however, that most people can look to him to learn a

thing or two: Israel and the state of affairs in the Middle East. Zuckerman, a strong supporter of the Jewish State, frequently writes about that part of the world in his weekly columns in *US News* and brings to the fore facts that too often get lost in the media's biased anti-Israel reporting. One of those unreported facts is that since 1967 the Jews have built 144 Jewish settlements, while the Arabs have built 261, almost double.

Back in June of 1994, when faith in the Oslo accord was still blinding many to the truth, Zuckerman's eyes were wide open and far seeing. He wrote: '[T]he chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization let the mask slip in a speech in Johannesburg. Arafat was secretly recorded when he told a mosque audience: 'You have to come and to fight a *jihad* [holy war] to liberate Jerusalem, your precious shrine.' Then he likened the Oslo and Cairo agreements with Israel to the prophet Muhammad's agreement with the Quraysh tribe in 628. Unable to conquer

Holy Mecca with his army, Muhammad adopted the stratagem of agreeing to a 10-year peace to lull the Meccans into a false sense of security while building up his own forces. He had no intention of keeping this agreement, and two years later he fell on the city when he felt strong enough to conquer it. Arafat's implication was clear: If Muhammad could violate such a pact with the Meccans, as Arafat described it, so could Arafat violate his pact with the Jews."

Photos courtesy of Mortimer Zuckerman

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But as Zuckerman often says, “Hell is truth seen too late!” Seven years after the famous handshake for peace, Israel is being shaken by a slew of violence and terrorism. Israeli citizens are being killed on a near daily basis. In another article, he points out that Arafat has 30,000 policemen and a dozen security services under his control, seven times the number of Hamas and Islamic Jihad members, and could therefore end the violence if he wanted to! Citing a leading Israeli defense analyst, Zuckerman wrote: “[Arafat is attempting] to bring Israel to its knees through an ‘ongoing’ low-level war that combines massive terrorism, guerrilla warfare, and the international media.”

Arafat’s mask completely dropped, according to Zuckerman, after Barak offered him 97% of what he wanted and Arafat not only rejected it, but introduced something new: Resolution 194, the “right of return.” Zuckerman acknowledges that the “right of return” is decisively the end of Israel as a Jewish state. Interestingly, a poll of 1,600 people in the Arab world taken in 1999, showed that 54% of the respondents believed that Israel would eventually disappear as a sovereign state. In a past article entitled “A Failed Peace Process,” Zuckerman wrote: “[Arafat] has betrayed the peace. No person in business, personal, or public life would rely on a piece of paper whose signatory has demonstrated a record of such mendacity.”

Yet Arafat is not the only one to blame for the tattered Oslo peace plan, as per Zuckerman. He also faults the former U.S. Commander-in-Chief, who was sometimes called “the best friend Israel ever had.” Although Zuckerman had a good personal relationship with President Clinton and actually flew on Air Force One with him to attend Israeli Prime Minister Rabin’s funeral, he does not feel Clinton merited that generous appellation.

“Clinton’s administration made a huge mistake by not making Arafat or

only be managed. Now, he says, it is not even manageable. But as Zuckerman wrote in 1995, using his oft-repeated metaphor, “The Israelis and Palestinians are so closely intertwined in such a small area that after the divorce, they will still have to wake up everyday in the same bed.”

A handsome Zuckerman has himself woken up to much more attractive faces throughout the years. His gal pals were many and often well known, including author and feminist, Gloria Steinem; journalist, Diane Sawyer; designer, Diane von Furstenberg, and playwright, Nora Ephron. To be certain, Zuckerman, who was a bachelor in high demand until the age of 59, never dated ditzy 20-year-olds. His women were bright and ambitious, just like him. He said that he does not believe there is such a thing as an ideal woman. “I believe there is a chemistry and quality that



Zuckerman with President Jiang Zemin of China.

Photos courtesy of Mordechai Zuckerman

enables two people to become soul mates,” Zuckerman says. “I’ve occasionally had relationships like that.” He also admits that he has had his heart broken.

But broken hearts mend, and in September of 1996 Zuckerman married the lovely Marla Prather, then a curator at the National Gallery of Art. Prather, an expert on the works of Abstract Expressionist Willem de Kooning, met Zuckerman at an exhibition she had organized. They were married by a Supreme Court Justice. Some were shocked that Zuckerman finally mar-

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ried; some were disappointed that the rich bachelor was nabbed, and others were surprised that this lover of Israel, the grandson of a *rebbe*, a generous activist of Jewish causes, married a gentile woman. Zuckerman makes no excuses saying simply that he married a woman that he really loved. He and his wife are now divorced, but nonetheless he does have an opinion on intermarriage. “I’m in favor of whatever it takes to perpetuate Jewish values, Jewish traditions, and the Jewish community,” he affirms. “Obviously I don’t have a one-size-fits-all view.”

Right now the most important view for Zuckerman is not the one from his 18th floor office, or of the Joán Miro painting hanging on his wall, but rather the photograph of his 4-year-old daughter Abigail. Her biblical name is Hebrew and means “joy of a father,” which is exactly what she is for Zuckerman. Dropping his daughter off and picking her up from school every day, are the most important appointments on his schedule. Zuckerman, who says that he still feels like he’s 27, appears to have the stamina to keep up with the energy of a young daughter. He says that he has a wonderful relationship with his little girl and is determined to bring her up with strong Jewish tradition and values.

Zuckerman will not only champion the perpetuation of his daughter’s Jewish heritage, but that of Jews all over the world. This past May, he was elected chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, an umbrella organization representing 54 of the most powerful Jewish agencies. The mandate of the nearly 50-year-old Conference of



Zuckerman with former President of the USSR Mikhail Gorbachev.

Presidents is to strengthen the relationship between Israel and the United States, and also to safeguard the security and dignity of Jews abroad. He had been involved with the Conference for 10 years prior to being elected; he has also served as president of the America-Israel Friendship League for more than 5 years, and he was chairman of the board of the Soviet Jewish Zionist Forum. In fact he is involved in too many Jewish causes to list here.

With such a track record, it came as a surprise when six left-leaning members of the Conference of Presidents opposed Zuckerman’s nomination, with one Reform Rabbi saying that he did not consider Zuckerman to be a serious Jew. “Everyone is entitled to their opinion,” Zuckerman told *Lifestyles*, commenting on the rabbi’s statement. “That’s his opinion, not mine.” Another concern raised by his detractors was his weekly editorial in *US News & World Report* which they felt might express views that were not consistent with the organization’s consensus. “Consensus is very different than unanimity,” Zuckerman adds. “You can never put together 54 Jewish organizations and have unanimity.” So by consensus—in this great democracy where majority rules—he

Photos courtesy of Mortimer Zuckerman

was voted in with a decisive margin of 46 to 6 (two absent groups did not vote). He also received support from former Prime Ministers Binyamin Netanyahu and Ehud Barak.

In a compelling acceptance speech, this 23rd chairman of the Conference said that he is aware that he is assuming the post at a very difficult time. He pointed out that the demands placed on Israel are greater than those imposed on any country.

“But Israel is entitled, as a nation, to the same self-defense that an individual or any other state would be entitled to,” Zuckerman declared. He has also said in the past that Israel will not survive in its rough neighborhood by superior morality in the absence of superior strength and that Arab moderation is in direct proportion to Israeli strength. He insists that Israel must be allowed to take preemptive actions. “[Israel] cannot wait for rescue from the outside,” he once wrote. “As Golda Meir once said to Richard Nixon, ‘By the time you get here, we won’t be here.’”

Zuckerman says that Israel has to find a way to deal with an enemy that uses human lives, even children as its shield. Quoting Golda Meir once again he comments, “‘We will have peace with the Arabs when they love their children more than they hate us.’ That time has not come.” Although the enemies of Israel teach their children to hate, Zuckerman says we must teach our children to remember—to remember their traditions, their history, their suffering, and their triumphs. Perhaps inspired by his Hebrew namesake, Moses, Zuckerman says, “We cannot just say, ‘Let my people go’; we must also say, ‘Let my people know!’” lifestyles