

By the Grace of the Game: The Holocaust, a Basketball Legacy, and an Unprecedented American Dream

Dan Grunfeld

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Dan Grunfeld's moving memoir covers sports and family, as both he and his father had successful basketball careers. What makes Grunfeld's story all the more compelling, though, is the fact that his grandmother narrowly survived the Holocaust.

A story of contrasts between his life and his grandmother's, the book details her crushing loss and his privileges well. While the book centers these contrasts, it's grounded by Grunfeld's father's life and the joy that holds three generations of their family together. It alternates between their stories, moving between his grandmother's life and Grunfeld's youth, beginning with his birth, which was scheduled around his father's Knicks games; the book finishes with the birth of his son, covering the traditions and values he's expected to carry on.

With chapter titles like "Soup & Nazis" and "Seeds & the Farm," the book hints at coming imagery with humor. At times, it inches toward sentimentality; still, its narration is always concerned with honesty. Each family member's flaws are named, but with love for them and their imperfections. While Grunfeld is the easiest to connect with, he draws his family's mannerisms, speech patterns, and values in a realistic way.

Multisensory descriptions, as of the pain of torn ligaments, the sound of fans yelling, and the all-encompassing delight of Grunfeld's grandmother's Hungarian food, help to make the prose beautiful and nuanced. Grunfeld weaves his Jewish heritage and linguistic understanding into the book with a strong grasp of historical context. The basketball knowledge and lore he includes is similarly engaging.

By the Grace of the Game is a multigenerational memoir about basketball, survival, and love.

MELISSA WUSKE (November / December 2021)

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