

# *The Jerusalem Post Magazine:* **Keeping the moneyball in her court**

**Visiting Tel Aviv as part of a UNICEF delegation, Jamie McCourt opens up.**



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02/11/2016 18:42

Jamie McCourt hasn't been to Israel since July 2014, but she pitched a Zionist perfect strike in 2009 when she threw out the first ball of the Maccabiah Games baseball tournament as CEO of the Dodgers when the beloved Los Angeles baseball team served as a sponsor of the games.

She hasn't been actively involved with the Maccabiah since her separation from her husband of 40 years, Frank McCourt (owner and chairman of the Los Angeles Dodgers and Dodger Stadium from 2004 to 2012) in one of the most highly publicized, expensive divorces in American history. A dispute as to whether the Dodgers assets were community property or wholly owned by her husband ended with Frank firing her from her dream job.

Sitting at the Vista Lounge on the 17th floor of the Tel Aviv Hilton, sporting a simple white V-neck over a petite frame that stays fit from her oft-reported swimming regimen – and diamond earrings as the only clue to her wealth – McCourt appears refreshed. Overlooking the skyscrapers of Tel Aviv, surrounded by the ocean and a city that keeps rising, she's in her element.

“I love Tel Aviv,” she told the *Magazine*.

“I think it's one of the greatest cities of the world because there's so much action, and it's on the ocean, and I'm a water person, and there's nightlife, and the food is fantastic. I just wrote a cookbook and bought a vineyard so it's shocking to me how it's come so far.”

BORN JAMIE Luskin, McCourt calls herself a “total Zionist.” She first fell in love with Israel in 1968, and came back periodically – for a semester at Hebrew University during law school; for the bar mitzva of her eldest son; to receive the Scopus Award from the Hebrew University; and to teach leadership and marketing at IDC Herzliya. She is a supporter of AIPAC, believing that American Jewry wouldn’t exist without Israel. Intent on learning Hebrew, Mc- Court had planned to come to Israel in the summer of 2014 for ulpan, but then “Iron Dome” (as she dubbed Operation Protective Edge) erupted.

“It’s such a vibrant place,” she said. “Everyone is so committed. Everybody’s so engaged and alive.”

McCourt arrived in the country last week as part of a UNICEF delegation to Israel and to a Syrian refugee camp in Jordan. This visit provides her with the opportunity to deepen her work in a venture that has been solely her own - one she said she never shared with her former husband – investments in Israeli technology. Among her investments are Kite Pharma, a clinical-stage pharmaceutical company that specializes in targeted immunotherapy for cancer, and a start-up dealing with 3D printing technology.

An alumna of MIT Sloan School of Management, she was one of the original supporters of Zipcar along with other members of the MIT community, including her good friend Jonathan Seelig, who has Israeli roots and many ties to the country.

“What’s so interesting about it is roll the clock forward,” McCourt said. “I’m now doing a start-up all these years later, with the same guy, and the lawyer is here in Israel, and the lawyer’s parents grew up with my friends’ parents – you know how that works – so it’s such a small world. It’s great. You feel like it’s family. Like you’re family investing.”

Family investing has been the hallmark of McCourt’s career. Her matrimonial real estate investments, including a Boston seaport property that the former power-couple had leveraged for the 2004 Dodgers purchase, eventually amounted to a turbulent family empire.

She said that her father, the owner of a successful appliance chain, had provided the \$1,000 seed money for their early investments.

THE LUSKIN household was a secular Zionist and entrepreneurial one. The child of Russian immigrants, her father started out with the family kosher grocery store, but feeling unfulfilled by kosher chicken slaughter, he conjured up a plan: He followed an ice truck and offered to sell its customers freezers for the monthly cost of ice delivery, until the freezer was paid off. McCourt went her own way when she married Frank – of Irish

Catholic roots; her parents boycotted the wedding, to her deep dismay, but she insisted on raising her children Jewish.

Their divorce was like the “Arab-Israel” conflict of American matrimonial conflicts, filled with prolonged, bitter disputes over territory under relentless scrutiny of the media, social media trolls, and “pro” and “anti” camps. In 2011, she and Frank reached a historic “peace deal” in a conflict that reportedly cost some \$20 million in lawyers’ fees. The settlement gave Jamie \$131m. and family property, but the deal went sour for Jamie when three months later Frank sold his spoils – ownership of the Dodgers, previously on the verge of bankruptcy – for over \$2 billion. The conflict came to its final end last year when the courts rejected Jamie’s appeal for close to half of the amount of the sale.

But she calls her divorce “yesterday’s news” even as her eyes slightly water when she discusses her marriage. The divorce is certainly not the legacy she wants to leave, and she’s since been invested in building a legacy of her own.

McCourt has thrived in a man’s world – she grew up with brothers, and raised four sons (ranging in age from 24 to 35), but now she’s on a mission to cultivate more of a “woman’s world.” Her divorce taught her that female shyness and embarrassment in talking about, inquiring about, and even desiring money is often a woman’s Achilles heel.

“My hypothesis is that we’re taught – American Jewish women – not to talk about money. It’s not polite. It’s not nice. You don’t talk about the prices of things. You don’t ask what things cost. And it becomes ingrained. Whereas I’d look at my brothers and they would talk about it all the time, and my father would talk to them all the time about it. I only have four boys, so I don’t know what would have happened had I raised a daughter.”

ALTHOUGH SHE seems, now, to be vicariously raising a slew of daughters: She’s embarking on building a national curriculum to teach financial literacy to girls in junior high school. She’s preparing for an upcoming speaking tour at Ivy League colleges aimed at empowering women towards financial self-sufficiency.

Her life lessons are inspired by her personal experience. She says that if she – a savvy and experienced attorney and businesswoman – could have been defrauded by a spouse, all the more can women without her legal and business experience.

“I have more money than I ever would have in my life, but that’s not the point,” she said. “I don’t have half of what I earned with my spouse, and I just assumed we were in it together. I never asked ‘what did you do with the money?’ because I didn’t care. It was ours. You need to care.”

McCourt insists that greed and materialism are not what drive her mission; it's a matter of justice – and changing the world. It's those with the money who control the global conversation.

“I don't want women to fool themselves anymore. I want them to understand why it's important and why it's not embarrassing. It's important because we have important things to say. The world is a mess. We don't control this world. I posit we may not do better but we're sure not going to do worse. Maybe it would be a better place if women had something to say, because as mothers we want our children to live.”

McCourt imagines how much more she could give to her favorite causes – education, the arts, and Israel – if she ultimately received what she believes is her fair share.

Towards the end of her trip to Israel, she had dinner with the director of the Maccabiah Games, to re-engage with the “Jewish Olympics”; and with Saul Singer, co-author of Start-up Nation, to revel in the entrepreneurial spirit of Israel.

As a woman who has reinvented herself all the way from attorney to real-estate mogul to the highest ranking woman in Major League Baseball to an investor, and now a wine-maker, the idea of the start-up inspires her professionally and personally, and that's her latest pitch as a one-woman, multimillion-dollar enterprise.

“The point is – you deserve it. And that's sort of my message to these women. You deserve to be self-sufficient. You deserve to keep what's yours. You deserve to invest in yourself. That's my final message to the people. You're your own start up. Treat it like that.”

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