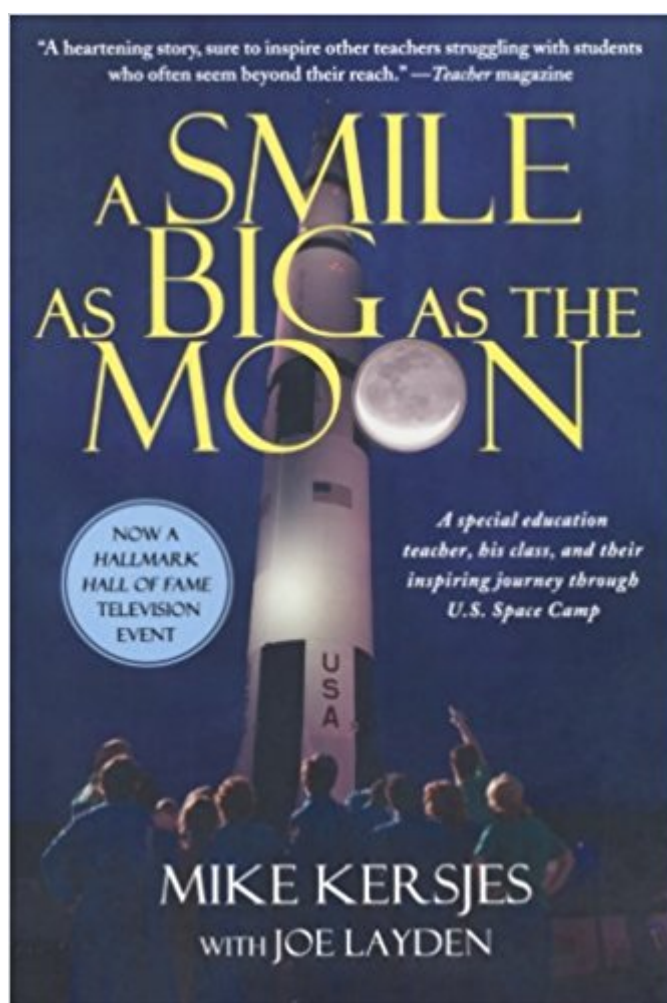


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A Smile As Big As The Moon: A Special Education Teacher, His Class, And Their Inspiring Journey Through U.S. Space Camp



Synopsis

Mike Kersjes always believed that his students could do anything—even attend the prestigious Space Camp in Huntsville, Alabama, where some of America's best and brightest high school students compete in a variety of activities similar to those experienced by NASA astronauts training for space shuttle missions. The challenge was convincing everyone else that the kids in his special education class, with disabilities including Tourette's syndrome, Down's syndrome, dyslexia, eating disorders, and a variety of emotional problems, would benefit from the experience and succeed. In *A Smile as Big as the Moon*, Kersjes explains how, with remarkable persistence, he broke down one barrier after another, from his own principal's office to the inner sanctum of NASA, until Space Camp finally opened its doors. After nine months of rigorous preparation, Kersjes's class arrived at Space Camp, where they turned in a performance beyond everyone's expectations.

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Customer Reviews

From a magazine article, educator Kersjes learned that students from all over the country could spend six days training and living like astronauts at Space Camp, a 450-acre theme park, museum and educational center at the U.S. Space and Rocket Center in Alabama. Knowing his high school students would relish visiting the facility, he pitched the idea to a colleague; she questioned his sanity. He mentioned it to his principal, who responded, "You should be preparing these students... for life beyond this school, not chasing some crazy dream." Why would an administrator be bitterly opposed to such an enriching experience? Because these students had developmental disabilities

like Down's and Tourette's syndromes, as well as emotional problems. Despite the opposition, Kersjes was determined to give his students the experience of a lifetime. With co-teacher Robynn McKinney and parent chaperones, Kersjes loaded 20 students, age 14 through 17, onto a plane from Grand Rapids, Mich., making them the first group of special education students to attend Space Camp. Kersjes recounts that most of these kids had never allowed their reach to exceed their grasp, yet there they stood, ready to take on an activity that would daunt many adults. The obstacles were plenty. From the NASA education program's initial unwillingness, to the \$50,000 needed for everyone to attend the camp, they met each challenge with enthusiasm and dignity, racking up some awards along the way. Kersjes's refreshing, heart-warming account proves that faith and vision can yield great things. Agent, Mickey Freiberg. (Feb.)Forecast: Jerry Bruckheimer (for Walt Disney Pictures) has purchased film rights to this uplifting story. Handselling by store clerks to junior high and high school teachers should boost sales. Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

A high school special education teacher in Michigan, Kersjes faced enormous odds when he decided that he wanted his class to attend Space Camp in Huntsville, AL, a program aimed at providing simulated astronaut training for gifted students. His 20 students had a wide range of learning and emotional disabilities and were stigmatized by other students and teachers. Readers will be genuinely moved by the many funny, sad, irritating, and even frustrating scenes, as Kersjes relates the numerous bureaucratic and educational stumbling blocks he encountered trying to convince administrators at his school and at Space Camp that his students could benefit and succeed in the challenging program. Once those barriers were overcome, he faced huge problems raising money for travel and, more importantly, preparing his students for the rigors of five days of training. Their individual and group triumphs make for a feel-good tale that's highly recommended for academic and public libraries. Will Hepfer, SUNY at Buffalo Libs. Copyright 2002 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

As a Special Education teacher for the past 28 years, it still amazes me that some teachers still don't have an understanding of the challenges faced by students with disabilities. Provided the supports and given the encouragement these students will consistently surprise us by rising to the occasion. This book does a great job of describing various disabilities and sends a positive message to all children. We just finished the book in class and the kids loved it. They walk a bit taller and with pride knowing that if they put the work in, it will pay off.

Wonderful story! I bought it because Big Dan graduated from the same high school that I did. I sat and had coffee with him after reading the book and learned what a wonderful, humble man he is. The special education teacher, Mike Kersjes, and the students did all of the work---but Big Dan made it all possible by providing the financial support that they needed. Be sure to keep a box of Kleenex handy, because your eyes will surely be leaking by the time you finish this book! There's a DVD, too---Hallmark made a movie by the same name. Look for it on and buy it, too!

A SMILE AS BIG AS THE MOON is a beautiful story. It touches the heart immediately. It is a story that focuses on ability not the individual disabilities of the students. Let's look past what we see and give everyone a fair shot at achieving success(at any level).I have worked with special ed kids during my professional career. They are amongst the most capable and sincere students that I have had. All they ask is an equal share at being accepted. We all have abilities. Just give them a chance.A disability doesn't define the level of achievement that one is able to reach. It is the heart of the person that should eclipse such out-dated expectations.

I loved this book because it reiterates the belief that all children have the ability to succeed given love, encouragement and the time and opportunity to stretch and spread their wings. We as parents and teachers should never give up on our kids!

This book was inspiring. To see what great lengths a teacher would go thru for special needs students is just so wonderful. He totally believed in the students and he encouraged them to reach beyond their potential, when no one else thought it would be possible. Too bad there are not more teachers/people out there who would go above and beyond for special needs students. They just want a believer and a chance.

I am the biggest fan of this book. It usually takes a lot for me to really get into a book but from the moment I bought it on my kindle it was hard to put it down. I really enjoyed this book . I have been to space camp before and am actually going for the 10th time this summer! I also am in the Early childhood Education program at my high school and have spent much time with Young children like the children in this story. This book really portrays both special education and space camp soo accurately. I would mostdefinatly tell everyone to read this book. I also would recommend watching the hallmark movie as well.

The journey the kids went on is fantastic and their two teachers should be appreciated and honored for all of their hard work. I enjoyed the inspiration of the story, but had a hard time getting past the author's negative opinions of several folks around him. He speaks ill of several people in the book, but doesn't seem to recognize that his ill will towards them is not unlike the ill will against his students which he continually fights. Ill will, is ill will, regardless of circumstances. I hope the movie is less clouded and really focuses on the true spirit of this story.

I originally ordered this book because it was required for my grad school class. After reading it, I would buy it all over again, with or without the requirement! It was a great read, especially for educators.

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