



## Women in the News

# Margot Grabie

ADVOCATE FOR SAFE DRIVING

**LOCATION:**  
Hancock Park,  
California

**OCCUPATION:**  
Entrepreneur

**CHILDREN:** 4

**T**hree months ago Margot Grabie, a *frum* mother of four, took a washable window marker and wrote a message to drivers on the rear window of her minivan: “MY KIDS ASK YOU NOT TO TEXT AND DRIVE.”

Much of Margot’s day is spent in the car ferrying kids to and from *yeshivah*, the supermarket and the park, battling the infamous Los Angeles traffic. The California native, who lives in Hancock Park with her husband, Ezra, and children ages two to twelve, felt compelled to raise awareness about the dangers of texting at the wheel, especially after her husband, an avid cyclist, mentioned how frequently he sees drivers typing away, oblivious to their surroundings. Worried about her husband’s safety, she decided to take action.

“I thought I’d write the message on my car to see what the effect would be,” she said. “I had no idea the response would be so positive.”

People honked in support as they passed her

on the freeway and stopped her in the street to tell her they liked her message. Strangers even asked if she had an extra marker so they could join her campaign, so she began carrying extras everywhere she went. Margot soon realized that she was on to something.

When she emailed her local paper, the *Larchmont Chronicle*, to spread the word about safe driving, the editor responded immediately and ran the story a few days later. Then a reporter for CBS saw Margot’s feature and thought it was an important cause, and the network sent a reporter to cover the campaign. The spot was aired in May, which was National Teen Safe Driving Month.

The press catapulted Margot’s message beyond her Jewish neighborhood, connecting her campaign to other organizations like the Conor Lynch Foundation and the Casey Feldman Memorial Foundation, both of which were established by families who lost loved ones due to distracted

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—Margot Grabie

driving. Margot is excited to pool resources with these groups to advance the cause.

Since Margot hasn’t been a victim of unsafe driving, *baruch Hashem*, people often ask her what inspired her to get involved. She tells them, “My husband’s participation in Bike4Chai, an amazing Jewish organization that helps kids with cancer, is what motivated me to become an activist and offer a solution to this problem. Plus, as a *frum* mother, I am always thinking about how to make my children’s lives better.”

In the past few months Margot’s campaign has gained hundreds of followers. In addition to posting photos of people who have requested markers and written “Don’t Text, Just Drive” on their cars, she also posts accident information, statistics and tips for safe driving.

So far, Margot has distributed hundreds of markers to drivers in Israel, South Africa, Italy, Canada and Mexico, as well as several US states. Others want to join her campaign even if they are not yet ready to write on their own vehicles.

“You can’t be a hypocrite and text while driving around with this message,” Margot says.

Margot’s kids look out for drivers who put down their phones after seeing the message on the rear window of their minivan. And anyone who shares carpool duty with her knows that her kids will politely ask anyone who’s driving them to stop using the phone. Margot has even lobbied her kids’ school to make carpools “no-cell-phone zones” to further promote safety.

“My kids feel proud,” says Margot, emphasizing that her aim is to raise awareness gently.

Inspired by the outpouring of public support, Margot recently decided to take her message to the next level. She designed

an app that will train drivers to leave their phones untouched. The app is slated to hit Google’s and Apple’s app stores within two weeks.

The app displays a picture of the driver’s kids, mom or other close relative, and plays a prerecorded message from that person reminding the driver not to use the phone (for example, “Mommy, please put down your phone!”). Testers reported that it actually worked, keeping them from texting in the car. “How can I *not* listen to my children?” said one friend. “It felt like they were right there with me.”

Margot calls her approach an old-fashioned solution to a new-world problem. Her long-term goal with both the marker campaign and the app is to change people’s habits. “I believe that everyone can make a difference,” she says.

Setting her sights high, Margot would like to get large corporations with delivery trucks, such as Amazon Fresh, UPS, FedEx and other fleets, to display her “Just Drive, Don’t Text” message on their vehicles. Uber is currently evaluating the campaign as an opportunity to show good corporate citizenship. Getting Starbucks to print her message on their cups, even for a day, is another dream.

“I’m a one-woman show,” says Margot. “Reaching these goals will require working with someone with more expertise and connections to the advertising industry.”

Several companies and individuals have donated markers to her cause, enabling her to send out the marker kits for free. Margot isn’t looking to make money on the campaign; the downloadable app will also be free of charge.

Margot’s “day job” is running several online businesses, including sewingpatterns.com and printsew.com. Her latest for-profit venture is BroomTrunk.com.

“I like to keep busy,” she explains. □



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