

THE WEEKLY PRINT

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Personal not personnel: New book on presidential best friends

In his new book, Gary Ginsberg chronicles the most impactful presidential friendships including Eddie Jacobson and Vernon Jordan

By Matthew Kassel

Gary Ginsberg, a former political strategist and longtime media executive, decided to write his new book, *First Friends: The Powerful, Unsung (And Unelected) People Who Shaped Our Presidents*, during the Trump administration. He perceived that the former president, in contrast to others who previously held the office, had no friends in his immediate orbit willing to give it to him straight when a bit of real talk could have been helpful.

"One of the real benefits to having a first friend is the ability to speak the blunt truth, the unvarnished truth, and it struck me, with [President Donald] Trump, that there really wasn't that person," Ginsberg, 58, told *Jewish Insider* last month over lunch in the West Village, where he lives with his wife and two sons. "I was able to confirm that with somebody very close to the president who also recognized that void in his life."

In the final, tumultuous months of Trump's presidency, Ginsberg argues, that void was particularly glaring — and ultimately harmful. "To have somebody who could have said to the president, 'Look, you have the opportunity now to leave

this office with dignity, get off this 'big lie,' and do what's right for yourself and for the country,'" Ginsberg mused. "But there was really nobody who said that to him."

Still, the idea for the book, published by Twelve and released last week, had been gestating for decades. "On the positive side, and one of the reasons why I wanted to write the book," Ginsberg said, "was that I saw in my own life, and then in my own work experience, the value of a first friend."

Ginsberg, whose multi-hyphenate career includes high-level positions in law, politics, media and corporate communications, first observed that dynamic in 1984 as a 21-year-old staffer on former Sen. Gary Hart's presidential campaign. He took note of the Colorado senator's friendship with the actor Warren Beatty, one of the only people who could speak matter-of-factly with the candidate. "He'd say, 'Gary, stop acting and talking like a politician,'" Ginsberg recalled.

Later, working on Bill Clinton's presidential bid, Ginsberg witnessed the power of friendship during the New Hampshire primary when Clinton's allies "rescued the rocky candidate by traveling to the state to personally reassure skittish

voters of his character and integrity," as he writes in *First Friends*. In the book, Ginsberg details Clinton's close personal relationship with Vernon Jordan, the civil rights leader who died in March — one of nine chapters on friendships including Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, Franklin Pierce and Nathaniel Hawthorne and Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Daisy Suckley.

Some friendships came to him after diligent research, but when he sat down to begin working on the book, there was at least one story Ginsberg knew he wanted to write: the relationship between Harry Truman and Eddie Jacobson, a Jewish haberdasher who played a key role in convincing his longtime friend from Kansas City to recognize the state of Israel in 1948.

"For me, it was the most consequential moment of the book in terms of a friend's influence," Ginsberg said, "a friend calling on all the tools that a first friend has to influence a decision for the betterment of the country and the world."

Without Jacobson's vociferous lobbying, Ginsberg argues, it is uncertain whether Truman — who was facing fierce opposition from some of his own advisors — would

have supported the fledgling Jewish state. "It's a precarious time because Truman has the State and Defense departments basically arguing that the Partition Plan is not good for American interests," Ginsberg said, adding that Truman was "frustrated as all hell by how much the Jews are pressuring him."

Still, Truman's decision, in the end, appears to have been motivated in large part by Jacobson's advocacy.

The recognition by Truman "established a baseline of a relationship between the two countries that really matured from there," Ginsberg said. "The fact that he did it 11 minutes after the declaration, and then stood behind it, was really significant. It silenced any doubters, because, you know, America was speaking with a mixed voice up until then."

"There was no guarantee that we were going to continue to support the idea of a Jewish state, so for Truman to be so unequivocal about it and so quick about it was really important for establishing this alliance, which has endured a lot," Ginsberg added. "That's why I thought it was an important story to tell."

For Ginsberg, who is Jewish, the story also resonates on a personal level. Ginsberg was raised in a Conservative Jewish household in Buffalo; two of his great-grandfathers were rabbis from Eastern Europe. He first visited Israel in 1977, during a teen tour while he was in high school. "I was mesmerized by the country," he said. "We spent a week on an army base. We toured the whole country. It was a very different country than it is today. You can't believe how primitive it felt."

"I became a pretty ardent Zionist early on in my life from '77 on," said Ginsberg, who has family in Israel. He returned for a summer in 1983, when he studied at Hebrew University as a Dorot scholar.

Ginsberg got his undergraduate degree from Brown University, where he was a close friend of John. F. Kennedy, Jr. He would later become a founding editor at *George*, the politics and culture magazine started by Kennedy in 1995. Ginsberg was with Kennedy the night before he died in a plane crash in 1999 at the age of 38; they talked at length about Kennedy's plans for after *George*, which was failing at the time

and would shutter two years later.

When asked, Ginsberg said his friendship with Kennedy, who is said to have harbored political aspirations, perhaps played a subliminal role in informing his new book.

"Maybe on a subconscious level, sure," he acknowledged. "But, you know, John was a long way from being president of the United States. Unfortunately, we'll never know whether he would have become a president."

While the nine relationships in *First Friends* are presented in a mostly positive light, Ginsberg believes that there are moments when presidents have been led astray by their confidantes. Richard Nixon's friendship with the Florida banker Charles "Bebe" Rebozo, he says, is a prime example.

"Nixon, immediately upon becoming president, enlisted Bebe in some of his most nefarious acts," Ginsberg told JI. "On one level, it's a beautiful friendship: Two men who can sit for hours in silence and revel in each other's company. He spent more time with Bebe than he did with his wife, for sure, and vice versa. I mean, Bebe's wife says, and it's in the book, 'Bebe has three interests, and I know I'm number three.'"

But Ginsberg is doubtful that Rebozo, whom he describes as a "pure aider and abetter" once Nixon was in the White House, could have acted as a check on his friend's worst impulses. "If Bebe Rebozo had been able to say, 'Dick, come on, I'm going to appeal to the better angels in your complex psyche,' could he have had that influence? Hard to really see it."

Fittingly, Ginsberg benefited from the help of a number of friends and acquaintances who offered editorial input as he made his way through a draft of the book — his first — last year.

David Remnick, the editor of *The New Yorker*, was on hand to give some guidance. "He was quite deep in the book and he showed me part of the manuscript and what I did was to do a kind of rough edit like any editor would, which is to say reading with a pencil," Remnick told JI, adding that he offered Ginsberg "some suggestions on tightening things up" as well as "very ordinary editorial kibitzing."

The journalist Charlotte Alter, a senior correspondent at *Time* magazine, also provided input during the editing process.

"Gary understands relationships

better than anybody — how they work, how they shape the attitudes of powerful people, and how behind-the-scenes personal relationships can have broader public impact," Alter told JI in an admiring email. "Presidents are people too, and their friendships are just as important to them as they are to ordinary people — maybe even more important, given all the pressure they're under. Gary speaks the language of friendship fluently, so he was the perfect person to examine the largely uninterrogated influence of presidential friendships. Not everybody writing about politics speaks this language as fluently as he does — it's a specialized instinct that not very many people have."

Ginsberg, an avid reader of presidential biographies, has been interested in American political history since childhood.

"In the third grade, I watched a play about Abraham Lincoln being assassinated," he recalled. "I was transfixed by Abraham Lincoln. I still remember, to this day, coming back from that play and just being utterly mesmerized by this character, Abraham Lincoln, and it just sent me on this lifelong journey to learn about presidents and ultimately work for one. That's been a big kind of through-line in my life."

Ginsberg served in the Clinton administration and later worked in executive positions at News Corp. and Time Warner. He has also led corporate communications at SoftBank.

Ginsberg had long wanted to write a book but never found time for it until the pandemic slowed things down. "I would say it was pretty high on my bucket list, probably along with winning the Masters golf tournament, but that was never going to happen," he quipped. "I've always had the interest, and then with the pandemic, it really gave me an opportunity."

He hopes to write more books, and some ideas are now percolating, but he declined to reveal any plans on the record.

For now, though, he is glad to have finally explored, in depth, a topic that has long been of interest to him, both personally and professionally.

"It was an arduous but ultimately satisfying process," he said of writing the book. "I had a lot of friends who wanted to read what I was writing." ♦

The funnier, happier glory days of politics, according to an insider who lived it

Former congressman, cabinet secretary and Motion Picture Association head Dan Glickman reflects on a life of public service

By Gabby Deutch

When Dan Glickman's grandparents arrived in the U.S. from Eastern Europe, how did they get to Wichita, Kansas?

"They took the train," Glickman said, laughing.

That's a joke — the first line of defense for Glickman, a former nine-term Kansas congressman, agriculture secretary and head of the Motion Picture Association. "We've become kind of a humorless society," he told *Jewish Insider*. "Politically, it's just much harder to have fun. Self-deprecating humor helped me a lot through the ups and downs of my life." (In reality, the joke's punchline is mostly true; his grandparents boarded a train in Boston and decided to get off in Wichita.)

In a new book *Laughing at Myself: My Education in Congress, on the Farm, and at the Movies*, Glickman looks back at his decades of service in what he now feels was a very different era in American politics, one with, he explained, less money and partisanship, and more humor.

Glickman, a Democrat, represented Kansas's 4th Congressional District in the House of Representatives from 1977 to 1995 — his "best job" — until losing in the "Gingrich Revolution" that took place in the midterm elections during President Bill Clinton's first term. He attributes today's polarization in Washington to two things: "Socialization was different back then. Members and their families lived in Washington," said Glickman. "Another difference, of course, is money in politics, the metastasis of money."

As a Democrat who represented a mixed urban-rural district in a red state, Glickman was not a party-line legislator. Everything about his career in Congress is a bit of a throwback, which he acknowledges. "I could

afford to be independent. I didn't follow my party's lead all the time, when I thought it was inconsistent with my congressional district. That's hard to do today," he explained.

Growing up, Glickman's family was active in Wichita's small Jewish community of some 300 families. After arriving from Belarus, his grandfather joined the scrap metal industry, which Glickman said was an "exclusively Jewish industry" at the time. His family belonged to the local Reform temple, one of two synagogues in town — "or as my dad would say, the synagogue that we went to and the synagogue nobody would go to," Glickman joked.

Glickman grew up without any significant partisan affiliation, although he noted that his parents always voted and followed politics. "They were interested in politics, but not ideological," he noted. He was class president in the sixth grade; after graduating from law school, he worked for a Republican senator in Washington. "I always knew I wanted to be in politics. I went back to Kansas probably with that in mind," he told *JL*.

Before running for Congress, Glickman served on his local school board, though when he ran for the position he was so young that his children were not yet of school age. He said his age contributed to his decision to run for Congress, too. "Being young had a lot to do with my initial political process because when you're young, you don't analyze it quite as carefully," he explained. "This was a different era. I didn't have 1,000 consultants, and I wasn't raising money every second. It was more of instinct that I said, 'You know, I think I can win this race.'"

When he arrived in Washington, Glickman did not have a singular priority. As a Kansan, he always focused on agriculture

and food — rural voters helped elect him in his race against an incumbent Republican — but he also served on several other committees over the years, including a stint as chairman of the House Intelligence Committee. "I had an eclectic interest in just about everything that came down the pike," he stated.

Glickman suggested that legislative priorities have changed over the years, pointing out that while individual members have their focus areas, they rarely deviate from the party's top issues. "I never considered the speaker of the House to be my boss," said Glickman. Much of that, he said, comes down to the massive amounts of money that candidates must raise now, and the nonstop campaigning that dominates their time in office. "Whereas I ran for \$100,000 in my first congressional race," Glickman explained, "today, you'd have to raise \$100,000 a day, probably, in a competitive race, or thereabouts. That changes the culture of the job and it becomes less focused on substantive issues."

Now, he sees one kindred spirit on Capitol Hill: "I have some sympathy with [Democratic West Virginia Sen.] Joe Manchin. I don't know all the issues he's dealing with, but it's so hard to be an independent force in politics today," said Glickman. "Being in the middle of the road was politically sensible for me. Today, being in the middle of the road is often a disaster politically."

U.S.-Israel relations had not been a priority for Glickman during his time on Capitol Hill, though he wrote in his book that "support for Israel had always been part of [my] Jewish tradition."

"I think that the Congress was more uniformly supportive of Israel [back then] than it probably is now, even though it's still

supportive of Israel,” he said of his time in office.

In one way, Israel did play a role in Glickman’s decision-making: He once considered mounting a challenge to then-Sen. Bob Dole, a Republican who, years later, would go on to be the party’s nominee for vice president. “I remember a lot of the AIPAC folks used to come to me and say, ‘No, you can’t do that, Dole is too supportive,’ even though I was fully supportive of Israel and worked on Soviet Jewish immigration, and those issues, and met with a lot of Refuseniks,” said Glickman.

Glickman decided not to challenge Dole, which proved useful to getting him another job down the road. After Glickman lost his bid for a 10th term in 1994, he flew to Los Angeles for a job interview with Disney. Upon landing in California, he received a call from his wife. “She said, ‘Leon Panetta wants to talk to you,’” he recalled. At the time, Panetta was then-President Bill Clinton’s chief of staff, but Glickman knew him well; they were elected to Congress the same year. Panetta asked Glickman to join the administration as secretary of agriculture, after the previous secretary left due to an ethics scandal.

To get the job, Glickman had to be approved by the Senate, which was in Republican hands after GOP candidates

picked up eight Senate seats. But the majority leader was Bob Dole, a fellow Kansan. He helped usher Glickman’s nomination through the Senate. “Can you imagine that, the leader of one party talking to the president of the other party, about recommending somebody in the Cabinet posts, and the president would go along with it? It just doesn’t happen,” said Glickman.

His most consequential — or, more accurately, almost-consequential — moment as agriculture secretary came when he served as the “designated survivor” during Clinton’s 1997 State of the Union address, during which time he went, accompanied by Secret Service, to New York to visit his daughter. (Prior to the Sept. 11 attacks, designated survivors were not obligated to stay in Washington.)

“I was honored to be selected,” Glickman wrote, “but if I am completely honest, there was the tiniest voice in the back of my head thinking something altogether unexpected. God forbid it happens; I could be the first Jewish president of the United States!” His wife talked him out of his “delusions of grandeur,” he noted.

After six years in Clinton’s Cabinet, Glickman left the White House but continued to work in politics and policy. He spent time at Harvard, running its Institute of Politics, before becoming chairman and CEO of the

Motion Picture Association of America, Hollywood’s main lobbying group, after the organization’s longtime leader Jack Valenti told a headhunter that Glickman was his preferred candidate. It was an unexpected next move for a former agriculture secretary. “I’d say, ‘Well, in my days in agriculture, I grew popcorn, and now I sell popcorn,’” he recalled. “Half jokingly, it’s just a saying, but it was a big jump from agriculture into the movies.”

It was mostly a lobbying position, and he frequently disappointed friends who assumed he spent his days with actors. But if he didn’t spend all day long with Hollywood celebrities, he cavorted with famous political figures instead.

“As secretary of agriculture, I could usually see ministers of agriculture around the world, but rarely see heads of state. As head of the movie industry, I could see a head of state almost anywhere that I would go, if I needed to,” he said. “Entertainment just kind of has a power that none of the other areas had, at least globally.”

Working in the movie business “got me the most access,” Glickman said. But nearly three decades after he was voted out of office, “I always think that the best job was being a congressman.” ♦

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The bipartisan duo creating community for Jewish Hill staffers

The Congressional Jewish Staff Association has big post-pandemic plans

By Gabby Deutch

For many of the thousands of Jewish young people who have traveled to Israel with Birthright Israel, the free 10-day trip has led to lasting friendships and even marriages.

Because this is Washington, a fateful 2019 Birthright trip led to professional advancement.

In this case, friendships formed on the

trip proved useful for the Congressional Jewish Staff Association, a nonpartisan organization that provides programming and mentorship for the hundreds of Jewish Capitol Hill staffers. Charlotte Kaye, a Republican, and Justin Goldberger, a Democrat, hit it off and befriended their trip leader, Joel Cohen. Cohen, who now works for Rep. Dina Titus (D-NV), was finishing up

a stint as president of CJSA, and he thought Kaye and Goldberger were the right people to take over leadership of the group. “Our Birthright leader actually passed it on to Charlotte and myself,” said Goldberger.

In a recent interview with *Jewish Insider* at a Capitol Hill cafe, Kaye and Goldberger suggested that the vicious partisanship of the past year has amplified the need for

CJSA's cross-party relationship-building. The Jan. 6 Capitol riot, Kaye said, made it "easier" for the organization to bring people together. "It was a traumatizing experience," she explained. "I think we were all looking for some sort of healing and peace — not peace fully, but some sort of understanding of how to move forward."

Among members of Congress, across-the-aisle collaboration can be hard to come by these days, particularly after Jan. 6. Democrats and Republicans have been sparring this week about funding for Capitol Police in the wake of the Jan. 6 events. But the policy experts, schedulers, speechwriters and chiefs of staff who handle the day-to-day business of Congress see friendships with aides of the opposing party as a good thing. CJSA, which was founded in 1998 and adopted its current name roughly a decade ago, seeks to create opportunities for those relationships.

"I remember being intimidated coming to D.C. when I was 22, a staff assistant on the Hill, desperately trying to find some sort of group to fit in with," said Kaye, a staff member on the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions for Sen. Richard Burr (R-NC). She discovered the group two years ago at a lunchtime Passover Seder the organization hosted at the Capitol. "Finding out the CJSA existed and you could start to recognize faces and know people was comforting," said Kaye.

Some of CJSA's bipartisanship is strategic. It's Washington, after all; young staffers know they need allies to make it in the cutthroat world of Capitol Hill.

There are no exact numbers on how many Jewish staffers work on the Hill, but CJSA's email listserv has more than 500 members. "The advice I always give entry-level staffers is to build your network, because you never know who will be your first foot in the door," said Goldberger, senior policy advisor for Rep. Donald McEachin (D-VA). "I have friends who are Republicans on the House side, and it's a lot easier to find sponsors for a bill if you have a relationship with them prior."

But groups like CJSA also help young people find community at a workplace that pays little and requires long hours. "My best friends still are people that were in entry-level jobs answering phones when we first

came to D.C. and bonding over that," said Kaye.

CJSA has existed for more than 10 years, but Kaye and Goldberger took over with the hopes of formalizing some of its programs and increasing its offerings.

"We started realizing that other staff associations were a lot more legitimate," said Kaye, referring to groups like the Congressional Women's Staff Association and the Congressional Black Associates. (In years past, a Staff Association Fair — the grown-up, Washington version of a college extracurricular fair — has been held to introduce Hill employees to different membership groups.) "We wanted to bring that organization to CJSA, because there's such a big Jewish community and it's kind of a loss if we don't take advantage of that," Kaye explained.

"I think making [the group] more formal hopefully will cover everyone and be a little more inclusive," said Goldberger. He wants CJSA to be an organization that actively brings in new people, so that if a new staffer shows up to an event for the first time, they won't feel awkward lingering on the outside of a circle of older staffers who all know each other. "I wish there had been, when I was a young staffer, someone who would actively reach out and be like, 'Hey, we're having a Pride Shabbat, you should show up.' Or, 'Hey, we have a mentor-mentee program, we'd love for you to sign up.'"

The big changes Kaye and Goldberger hoped to make when they took over as co-presidents last year included hosting more regular programming and events with members of Congress, creating a mentorship program and instituting dues. But then the COVID-19 pandemic began, and CJSA had to pivot to virtual programming.

"It was tough," Goldberger said. But CJSA managed to keep members engaged throughout the pandemic. A number of Zoom cooking classes with popular Jewish food institutions in the District included a bagel-making class hosted by Bethesda Bagels and a kugel-making class with Schmaltz Brothers, a kosher food truck. CJSA hosted mindfulness and meditation workshops in the wake of Jan. 6 and joint events with other groups such as the LGBT Staff Association. Some CJSA members convened regularly for a "Booze With Jews"

virtual happy hour, and at times members of Congress — including Rep. Susan Wild (D-PA) and Rep. Ted Deutch (D-FL) — joined in.

"Something too that was really cool to see was we had a lot of district staffers and state staffers join us for the virtual events," said Kaye. "That was nice, for them to be able to connect with the D.C. staff and other Jewish staffers from back home in the district."

Although most visitors are still barred from Capitol Hill because of COVID restrictions, many staffers have begun to return to the Capitol and surrounding offices. At the end of this month, CJSA will hold its first in-person happy hour in a year and a half. "We're excited to get off the screen," Goldberger noted. "We saw a drop off of attendance in our virtual events. People just don't want to do it anymore," Kaye added.

Also in the works is a mentorship program, where senior Jewish staffers will be paired with a younger aide to mentor. CJSA also hopes to restart "staff dels," or staff delegations, where staff members visit a particular part of the U.S. to learn about a topic (such as national parks) or another country, similar to the "codels" — congressional delegations — that regularly take legislators to particular areas. Kaye said CJSA hosted staff trips to Israel and Japan several years ago.

"We have the opportunity to start traditions that we didn't have before," said Goldberger. "I know personally I would love a Hanukkah CJSA party... similar to the White House [that] has a Hanukkah or Christmas party — like that, but more for staff."

And one goal that they know is a long shot: getting Jewish members of Congress to host parties or Shabbat dinners for Jewish staffers. Before Kaye or Goldberger were on the Hill, members occasionally attended CJSA-affiliated Shabbat gatherings.

"I heard that [Senate Majority Leader] Chuck Schumer used to have these epic Jewish happy hours to set up Jewish singles on the Hill," said Kaye. "He's notorious for setting up a bunch of Jewish singles," added Goldberger. (This is true — a 2012 report in *The New York Times* found that 12 couples who met in Schumer's office had gotten married. He signed a ketubah, a Jewish wedding contract, for one couple, and

another named their dog after him. “Forget Master of the Senate. This is the Yenta of the Senate,” *The Times* wrote.)

“We want to have that tradition and camaraderie,” said Kaye, “more so than we’ve ever been able to do in the past.” ♦

JULY 14, 2021

The inspiration for Joshua Henkin’s ‘Morningside Heights’ is close to home

The author’s new novel about a family confronted with early-onset Alzheimer’s echoes his father’s battle with the disease

By Jacob Miller

For Joshua Henkin, wrestling Morningside Heights, his newly released fourth novel, to the ground has been a long personal journey that spanned eight years and 3,000 pages of drafts.

The book, billed as “a poignant, illuminating portrait of marriage,” by *The Wall Street Journal*, tells the fictional story of Pru Steiner’s marriage to Spence Robin, a brilliant Columbia University professor, who is diagnosed with early-onset Alzheimer’s. Focusing mostly on Spence’s family, Henkin gives color to a clan navigating a challenging disease and complex relationships.

Spence’s character, a MacArthur “genius” grant recipient who teaches Shakespeare at the Ivy League school, is closely modeled after Henkin’s late father, Louis Henkin, who taught law at Columbia (which is in the Morningside Heights neighborhood of Manhattan) and also developed Alzheimer’s, albeit later in life than Spence. After Henkin’s mother attended a session for caregivers at the local JCC, Henkin, who teaches writing and runs the master of fine arts program at Brooklyn College, began writing a novella that drew on imagined conversations from that class; that work, many permutations later, became *Morningside Heights*, which is published by Pantheon.

Henkin told *Jewish Insider* that writing about the disease presented him with a new challenge: “Fiction has to familiarize the unfamiliar and defamiliarize the familiar,” Henkin explained. Books about Alzheimer’s can be complicated because the course of the disease is predictable; instead of focusing

on the illness, Henkin chose to write about family relationships enduring in the face of an unrelenting disease.

Writing fiction based on personal experience presented new dilemmas for Henkin, the author of three previous novels including *Swimming Across the Hudson*, *Matrimony* and *The World Without You*. He was initially resistant to introducing a love interest for Pru, which deviated from his family’s experience. “My mother remains extremely loyal to my father 11 years after my father died,” Henkin told *Ji*. In writing a new romantic attachment for Pru, he feared that his mother would feel uncomfortable about her stand-in character’s actions. But after friends convinced him Pru’s faithfulness seemed unrealistic in fiction and after a phone conversation with his mother, who gave her blessing to this new, unexpected plot twist, Henkin decided to include a storyline about a relationship with a second man.

By incorporating a secondary romance for Pru, Henkin explores a grieving wife’s torn emotions and what he now considers the “false dichotomy” between faithfulness and disloyalty: While Pru is not completely faithful to Spence, she remains loyal in many ways, always prioritizing his care and never abandoning him. “The question of loyalty is much more complicated than I thought before I wrote this,” Henkin reflected.

The book’s title harkens to an era when the poorer neighborhoods of Manhattan’s Upper West Side bore “meaningful differences” compared to the wealthier Upper East Side. “The neighborhood was

a character in the book in a certain way,” explains Henkin.

As Spence’s health declines, the neighborhood gentrifies, and as the book progresses, the city’s landmarks evolve.

“I grew up in Morningside Heights and I went to Ramaz [a Modern Orthodox day school] on the [Upper] East Side of Manhattan,” Henkin reminisced. “I was the son of intellectuals and the relatively poor kid at a wealthy school where my friends had TVs in every room in their apartment and we had a lot of books and a TV we kept in the closet.”

The early portion of the novel pays homage to the Morningside Heights of Henkin’s youth, where Louis Henkin would be recognized on the street by other academics familiar with his legal work. In other areas of Manhattan, the elder Henkin’s appearance would not elicit the same response.

At the same time as Henkin’s characters are navigating health issues and interpersonal relationships, they also grapple with their Jewish identity, reflecting the complex tensions of Jewish practice in contemporary America. Pru’s father is Orthodox, while her mother is less religious. Although Pru had a certain disdain for organized religion growing up, she remained observant until marrying the secular Spence, after which her religious practice dwindled. Pru and her mother return to synagogue several times throughout the novel, reflecting on their former religious lives and their new religious identity.

Henkin explained that the inspiration

for the religious tensions portrayed in the novel came from a familiar place. “I grew up in a complicated Jewish home,” he explained. Henkin’s grandfather was Rabbi Yosef Eliyahu Henkin, a rabbi so widely respected in the Orthodox community that Henkin jokes his last name earns him free meals in certain circles. “My father was frum until the day he died, and my mother grew up in a Reform family and was much more secular,” he added.

Henkin attended The Ramaz School from kindergarten through 12th grade and spent his childhood summers at the Conservative movement’s Camp Ramah in the Berkshires. His early adulthood included both a stint at a yeshiva in Israel and summers in Colorado, where he was “the only Jew anyone had ever met.” The confluence of Henkin’s experience provides a rich discussion of Jewish identity in Morningside Heights.

Henkin traces his career as a novelist to a job at Tikkun magazine as the first reader of fiction manuscripts, where he pored over

many submissions that did not make it to publication. “I didn’t necessarily think I could do any better, but I felt inspired. I thought if other people were willing to try and risk failure, I should be willing to risk failure too,” Henkin explained. He abandoned plans to pursue a Ph.D. in political science and began writing, eventually moving to Ann Arbor, Mich., to enroll in the University of Michigan’s MFA program.

Explaining the task of the novelist, Henkin says, “Messages are for rabbis and priests and political scientists and philosophers and politicians. For me, fiction is irreducible and it’s about making characters jump off the page, and setting them out in the world and getting them into trouble.”

Growing up, Henkin’s parents never pushed their children to pursue high-paying careers. His parents, both trained lawyers, did not practice law: his father taught law and his mother worked in human rights, running the Justice and Society seminars

at the Aspen Institute and serving on the board of Human Rights Watch. Unbound by the expectation that he would enter a profession that would require extra years of study and advanced degrees, Henkin felt free to pursue writing. Like their father, Henkin and his two brothers are all teachers.

Morningside Heights was slated for release during the coronavirus pandemic, but had its publication delayed. The time in lockdown allowed Henkin to move past Morningside Heights and write the first draft of a new novel. He is currently at work on two more books, as well as a collection of short stories.

About the “character” who formed the inspiration for his new novel, Henkin reflected, “[My father] was very supportive of my work and he was less of a fiction reader than my mother is, but I think he would have taken [the book] for what it is... I like to think he’d have been happy or proud.”



JULY 14, 2021

The Cuban Jewish entrepreneur behind 305 Fitness

Sadie Kurzban’s fitness company, which has seven locations in three cities, offers dance cardio workouts to a devoted — and growing — fanbase

By Gabby Deutch

“I’m having a really crappy morning,” Sadie Kurzban told thousands of viewers in a YouTube live stream. It was April 2020, just weeks into the COVID-19 lockdown. Kurzban was at her parents’ house in Miami, sporting a sparkly crop top, hoop earrings and big curly hair; with an earpiece over her head, she stood on a patio in front of a hot pink wall, Ariana Grande playing in the background.

The 31-year-old founder of 305 Fitness, a company offering popular cardio dance classes to a devoted and growing following, told her fans that she had just learned her business did not receive a Paycheck

Protection Program loan from the federal government. “Sometimes, these systems are set up so that the big guys win and the little guys don’t.”

She spoke candidly, unscripted, in front of a grainy webcam — a contrast to the pristinely edited videos from competitors like Peloton. “I’m feeling quite upset, demoralized. But I’ll tell you what. It’s OK,” she said. “The reason why I love 305, the reason why I like to move, is because so much of our lives, we are told we don’t matter. And when I get to move and shake and connect, I’m able to boost that self-esteem and that confidence and most importantly that fire part of myself that tells me I’m worthy and

I have to keep trying.” When she finished her pep talk, she launched into a 40-minute high-intensity dance workout.

Normally, Kurzban would have been teaching a class at one of 305’s seven studios in New York, Boston or Washington, D.C. But in March 2020, 305 shut down its in-person offerings and — like so many other fitness companies — began offering free workouts on YouTube, streamed live from instructors’ apartments. The company had no playbook at first; one instructor used cans of beans for the strength-training part of a workout because she didn’t have weights at home. Another almost knocked over his parents’ fine china. Classes were imperfect, but they

were authentic, and participants loved it.

"I need your energy! Whoo hoo Sadie DANCE!" said one comment. "Thank you Sadie! I aspire to be like you!" another read. "u bring me joy and love and deserve everything."

For Kurzban, who started the company after winning an entrepreneurship competition as a senior at Brown University, 305 is more than just a dance class. It's a community, and a way of life — one that investors have bought into, pouring millions of dollars into the venture she founded in 2011. "One of the ways that we stand out is it's not just a good workout, although it is. It's also just so good for your mind, body and soul," Kurzban told Jewish Insider during a recent Zoom interview. She joined the call from a lounge chair on Miami Beach.

Raised on Key Biscayne, a barrier island across from Miami, Kurzban has no formal dance training. "I'm half-Cuban, half-Jewish. I think the dancing comes a little bit more from the Cuban side. It's just a lot of love of music and confidence and expressing yourself through your body," she explained. "Latin people, we are a very expressive bunch and do a lot of that through physical humor and movement."

The daughter of liberal activists, Kurzban was taught to "question everything, including Jewish teachings." She attended Jewish day school as a kid and learned Hebrew for an hour and a half daily — "Sadly, I know none of it" now, she admits — and is now trying to find ways for Judaism to fit in with her life.

"Friday nights were the time to get together, [and] we did the blessings [growing up]," she recalled, but her family became less observant when her father's parents died.

"[My father] allowed us to choose for ourselves what we believed in," Kurzban explained. "I ended up marrying a guy who's Jewish and whose family really relates to it. So definitely, it's in my culture and I feel very culturally Jewish. But like many people our age, we are figuring out what it means for us to be Jewish in 2021 and beyond."

Kurzban's commentary in that video from last April is standard fare for her: sprinkle some light politics with a motivational speech before smoothly transition to dancing. She learned from her parents to advocate for causes she cared

about without concerning herself with others' opinions. "We never learned to care for other people's money, or there was never a sense of what the neighbors were doing. It was just, have conviction and belief in yourself and march forward and roll," said Kurzban.

Her father, Ira Kurzban, is a prominent immigration attorney who has argued on behalf of Haitian immigrants in front of the U.S. Supreme Court. Her mother, Magda Montiel Davis, is infamous in Miami's Cuban community for an ill-fated and very public display of affection for Fidel Castro. "She was known to actually be in favor of a lot of Fidel's policies in Cuba, which is very, very rare for a Cuban exile to feel that way," said Kurzban.

In the early 1990s, Montiel Davis ran for Congress against Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL), who retired in 2019 after 30 years in Congress. "She ran as a Democrat in Miami, which was even less popular then," said Kurzban. Her parents taught her a lesson that has served her well in dance and beyond: "They just really taught me to think for myself, think independently," Kurzban observed.

Growing up, Kurzban struggled with body-image issues, and found dance to be "the only fitness class where I wasn't just totally hating on myself and counting calories and being mean to myself," she noted. "It was the first fitness-style class where I was actually just really enjoying myself and feeling free and feeling proud of my body."

She got into Zumba in high school, and "slowly but surely made my way from the back row to the front row," she recalled. By the time she graduated high school, she was teaching Zumba classes; when she got to college at Brown, she started experimenting with her own style, teaching fitness classes for extra cash at the university gym.

She majored in economics but was unsure what to do with the degree. "I was kind of wandering through college and figuring it out," Kurzban said. "I knew that [I would do] something, probably, where I was some kind of leader or teacher because that's where I get the most fulfillment."

She started working on turning her passion into a business a year before graduation, and her senior year, she won

\$25,000 toward the project in Brown's Entrepreneurship Pitch Competition.

She took that seed money with the dream of building "a single studio in New York that felt like a nightclub with the best talent. Obviously, we've grown bigger since," said Kurzban. 305 Fitness now has seven studios, and Kurzban hopes to open more; it also has an online membership program, "305 At Home," where people can stream classes on their phones or TVs; and the company certifies instructors around the country, who can teach 305-inspired classes outside the company's three brick-and-mortar locations.

When she was first approaching investors, some of them didn't understand what she was trying to do, and would suggest ways she change her fitness program to focus on metrics — similar to Orange Theory, which tracks participants' heart rate and workout intensity. "There are all kinds of weird suggestions I've gotten through the years," Kurzban said. But she had an intrinsic understanding of her ideal consumer — young women, like her and her friends. "I just knew in my gut, like, this is the future, this is what people want, is something that's social and community-driven and fun and self-expressive."

Unlike some other fitness classes, 305 instructors do not have set choreography they must use, nor do they plan out their entire classes in advance. Each class has a live DJ who chooses the music as they go, and the instructors choose dance moves to match the music. "Everything is to the beat," Kurzban explained. "It's high-intensity, high-energy, aerobics or dance cardio, and it blends dance moves like a body roll or a booty shake with more sports drills, like jump squats and jumping jacks."

305 workouts are not about losing weight or looking a certain way. Sometimes 305's live-streamed workouts — which are now professionally recorded in 305 studios rather than in instructors' homes — will feature, next to the instructor, a 305 subscriber who Zooms in from their bedroom, full of excitement but generally lacking in dance skills. The goal is to communicate that the classes are not about skill but about having a good time. "305 is about people feeling good in their skin, people feeling like they can express themselves authentically," Kurzban

has also sought to spotlight LGBTQ and non-white instructors and participants.

Now that 305's studios are open again, the company has to try to turn virtual participants into in-person, paying customers. "A lot of our business is just driven by word of mouth," she said. "I think it's hard to do it until you come see it. I don't know how well we do on the marketing and positioning front."

The name "305" is an homage to her hometown (Miami's area code is 305), inspired by positive and negative aspects of her upbringing. The company's vibe is "Miami Vice," with neon blues, pinks and

greens coloring the studios and branded apparel.

"I had the idea when I was out dancing with a girlfriend in Miami," noted Kurzban. "We just looked around and it was so fun. We've been dancing for hours. And I wanted to recreate that same party vibe."

But the culture that emphasized the physical in all its glory — suntanning, clubbing and working out in South Beach — also had a dark side. There is "all of the pressure we put on [people], especially young girls, how obvious that is when you come to Miami, when you grew up in Miami, all of the emphasis on what you look like,"

explained Kurzban. "I wanted to rewrite that. I wanted to bring the fun and the sexy and the confidence of Miami without the pressure to fit into the box and look a certain way. So hence, 305 outside of 305." She hopes to one day open a studio there; before returning to her home in New York earlier this year, she led outdoor 305 classes on the boardwalk in South Beach.

Kurzban might not live in Miami anymore, but her heart remains in the 305. When asked about her favorite song to dance to, she said, "There's a fun one, this Pitbull one, 'Move to Miami.'" In Kurzban's world, everyone is moving to the beats of Miami. ♦

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A Black Jewish filmmaker brings her dual identities to BET

Lacey Schwartz Delgado's 'Black x Jewish' highlights the shared fight against antisemitism and racism

By Gabby Deutch

Lacey Schwartz Delgado believes conversation — the tougher the better — can bring about change. Her own story proves it.

She had several hard conversations with her parents after learning, at age 18, that her biological father was not the Ashkenazi Jewish man who raised her but actually a Black man with whom her mother had an affair. It had been explained to her throughout childhood that she was simply dark-skinned, a trait she was falsely told she inherited from her Sicilian Jewish grandfather. She chronicled the journey of racial self-discovery that followed this revelation in her acclaimed 2014 documentary "Little White Lie."

Now, Schwartz Delgado has teamed up with BET TV to bring a difficult but important conversation to BET's viewers. She directed "Black x Jewish," a 30-minute TV special that premieres tonight on BET and explores the intersection of antisemitism and racism, along with the decades-long relationship between Black and Jewish communities to confront hate.

"It was really exciting and interesting to think through how to have that conversation in that space for that audience," Schwartz Delgado told *Jewish Insider*. "Obviously, there are people of all different backgrounds who are going to be tuning into BET — but it was really created for a Black audience."

The special will be available online to stream tomorrow. It is the latest project from BET's "Content for Change" program, a \$25 million initiative announced last summer to target racial inequality in America.

"Black x Jewish" starts with an exploration of the contrasts of January 6: The night before, Georgia elected its first Black and first Jewish senators; several hours later, white supremacist rioters invaded the U.S. Capitol. "I think that framework really sums that up the highs and lows. The high is when these communities come together and can achieve incredible things, and then the lows are when the hatred against both communities collectively comes out," said Schwartz Delgado.

The special features a diverse array of activists, faith leaders and artists — some are

Black and not Jewish; others are Jewish but not Black; several, like Schwartz Delgado, are both. "It was less about us kind of trying to check all the boxes and more just to make sure that we were inspiring the beginning of a conversation," she said.

"There is power in unity," Schwartz Delgado notes in the special. It traces the history of the Black and Jewish communities working together during the civil rights movement, while also featuring in-depth discussions about the ways that antisemitism and racism intersect.

Prominent interviewees include Yavilah McCoy, a Black Jewish activist and educator; Susannah Heschel, professor of Jewish studies at Dartmouth College and the daughter of civil rights activist Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel; Ebro Darden, a Black Jewish hip-hop artist; Rabbi Jill Jacobs, CEO of T'ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights; and Rabbi Sharon Brous, founder and senior rabbi at IKAR in Los Angeles.

Rep. Hakeem Jeffries (D-NY), the chairman of the House Democratic Caucus,

is the only politician to appear in the film, but that's less about politics than it is the unique demographics of his Brooklyn district. "All roads lead to Brooklyn," Jeffries jokes. Schwartz Delgado observes that he "successfully navigates a place where Black folks and Jewish people have both lived for generations," and that Jeffries is "on a mission to see how Black and Jewish communities can look at their own experiences to find common ground and build alliances." (Schwartz Delgado is married to Rep. Antonio Delgado [D-NY], who represents parts of the Hudson Valley and the Catskills.)

The special comes more than a year after last summer's widespread racial justice protests, which led many Jewish institutions to commit to diversity and inclusion efforts, particularly when it comes to Jews of color in their communities. Schwartz Delgado is heartened by some of the progress she has seen but contends there is more work to be done. "I think it's fair to say that the work is continuing. It's not just a flash in the pan. The work is also very complicated," she explained.

She has worked on issues relating to diversity in the Jewish community for many years, including a long stint as national outreach director for Be'chol Lashon, a San Francisco-based organization that fosters discussion of inclusion and race in the Jewish community. Fifteen or so years ago when she started working on issues of diversity in the Jewish community, "we were still constantly doing panels where it

was just even talking about the existence of people of color who are also Jewish," said Schwartz Delgado. "I'm not saying that never happens in any spaces anymore, but now we are evolving into having more of a conversation about what actually needs to happen in the Jewish community to be inclusive."

But it's personal conversations about how racial identity fits into Judaism that must continue to happen to make real progress, she argues. Right now, "a lot of times we're talking about having these conversations [about race] on the societal level," but the more intimate personal conversations are what will spark change, Schwartz Delgado suggests.

"If we flipped the conversation and actually start from a more personal space, what we'll find is that when you take all of these families, you put them together, that makes communities. When you put all these communities together, that makes society," noted Schwartz Delgado, and that's when she believes societal change can happen.

Since her childhood, the conversation in the Jewish community — and the amount of education Jews are given about diversity in the community — has changed dramatically. "Many of us have grown up where being Jewish was synonymous with being white. We didn't even talk about us being white. But it was... out in society synonymous with whiteness," she noted.

"There's a lot of conversations about the Black American community and the Jewish American community, and it's almost like

we forget that there are many of us who are living with both of that," Schwartz Delgado pointed out. "We're talking about how those two communities integrate, well, how do we internally integrate those identities [within the Jewish community]?"

For Schwartz Delgado, it took having difficult conversations with her family to come to terms with her story and be able to create art about the huge questions surrounding her identity. She is still a practicing Jew, raising her twin boys Jewish in an interfaith household. "I think I'm very similar to a lot of other young Jewish families who are just trying to figure it out, the same thing of, how do I reconcile where I came from with what I connect to individually?"

Seven years after the release of "Little White Lie," "we still hear from people on a daily basis who connect deeply to the story," she observed. That includes Jews of color like her, but it includes many more people who are simply grappling with their identity or who relate to the coming-of-age story in the film.

"When we had the film come out, we really were very intentional about making sure that we wanted it to be in as many different spaces as possible," she recalled. "This is a perfect example, actually, of this show, like — I'm currently talking to [*Jewish Insider*], a Jewish publication, about a show that's going to be on BET. I love that. That's very exciting to me to make sure that we're crossing boundaries." ♦

JCRC-NY's Michael Miller reflects on three decades of service to New York's Jewish community

Miller stepped down from his role as executive vice president and CEO of the Jewish Community Relations Council of New York on July 1

By Matthew Kassel

On July 1, Rabbi Michael Miller, the longtime CEO and executive vice president of the Jewish Community Relations Council of New York, quietly stepped down from the organization to which he has dedicated half his life.

Throughout more than three decades of service, the mild-mannered rabbi, 72, established a reputation for himself — largely behind the scenes — as a deeply respected faith leader, navigating such crises as the Crown Heights riot, the murder of teenager Ari Halberstam and the recent conflict between Israel and Hamas, which coincided with an uptick in antisemitic incidents in New York.

But a week before his departure, Mayor Bill de Blasio saw to it that Miller got his due.

"The most diverse place on earth needs shepherds who make sure that all our communities stay in communication, that even in times of crisis we find unity and that we support each other, create solidarity between communities," de Blasio said appreciatively in his daily press briefing. "No one has done that more, for years and years for this city, more than Rabbi Michael Miller."

Holding up a proclamation as a parting gift to the man he described as a "friend" and "treasure," the mayor proudly decreed "Thursday, June 24, 2021, in the City of New York as 'Michael Miller Day.'"

While Miller is hardly a household name in New York City, de Blasio's enthusiastic tribute was a testament to the rabbi's commanding influence in Jewish communal life and beyond. Beginning in the mid-1980s, with the JCRC then entering its second decade, Miller helped transform the fledgling nonprofit organization into the city's leading mainstream Jewish group.

The JCRC represents the Jewish community to New York government officials and counts more than 50 local Jewish groups as members. Its portfolio includes intergroup relations as well as domestic affairs, missions to Israel and safety and security.

Recently, Miller helped lead a vaccination drive for Holocaust survivors living in New York amid the pandemic, an effort de Blasio singled out for praise in his media briefing last month.

At a certain point, however, Miller concluded that it was time to give someone new a chance to shape the direction of the JCRC. "This is a decision that I made," he said in a recent Zoom interview with *Jewish Insider* from his office in Manhattan, shortly before retiring. "It's not a decision which was forced upon me, and I think that it's the right time for a younger person to step in."

Leaving at age 72, he said, seemed fortuitous enough. "It's a multiple of chai," Miller quipped, referring to the Hebrew word for life associated with the number 18.

His successor is Gideon Taylor, a commercial real estate executive in New York who previously served as the executive director of the Claims Conference, which seeks restitution from Germany for Holocaust survivors.

"We're going through various changes, and the person sitting at this desk will be looking much more long-term than I can," Miller said. "Having somebody here who can look forward not in days or in months or in a limited number of years but for a decade or more, I think, is going to be very helpful to the organization, and I think it will be helpful to the community."

He isn't completely severing ties with the organization. Miller now holds the title of CEO emeritus and will continue on

as a consultant as the JCRC manages the transition to new leadership.

His institutional knowledge will no doubt prove invaluable as the organization navigates a changing political atmosphere. "There's many things that have happened over these three and a half decades," Miller said, "so the important piece of it for me is the evolution of the organization and dealing with these matters."

The JCRC, which Miller characterizes as "fundamentally a center-based organization," has more recently contended with a leftward shift in New York City politics, particularly around Israel. Last August, for instance, the New York City chapter of the Democratic Socialists of America distributed a questionnaire asking that City Council candidates pledge not to visit Israel if elected — a direct attack on the JCRC, which has been leading local elected officials on missions to the Jewish state for more than two decades.

One such trip was criticized by Dianne Morales, a candidate for mayor in New York City's recent Democratic primary, as "propaganda," according to leaked audio obtained by *The Forward*.

"It was just kind of insulting for her to say that," said Miller, who recalled having dinner with Morales after the trip and hearing no such reservations. "If she had to say that, say it to me. Don't say it to others."

Miller's approach to those he may disagree with has most often been even-keeled.

"The rise of political progressivism has been a significant challenge to the mainstream Jewish community, and part of what I believe we need to engage in is communication with influencers who are progressive," Miller told JI. "That's one of the reasons why I've decided to step

aside, because the vast majority of those progressive political figures and communal figures are much younger than I am and are going to be on the scene, most likely, for decades to come.”

In his final years at the helm, Miller sought to initiate such conversations himself. Though he struggled to secure a meeting with Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY) during her first term, he had better luck this past spring, when he interviewed the Bronx congresswoman for 38 minutes as part of a series of conversations with New York representatives.

The conversation, which touched on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as well as Ocasio-Cortez’s own “sense of spirituality,” was ultimately a fruitful one, Miller said at the time. “The interview has concluded and we still want to continue to engage,” he told JI last April. “From my perspective, this was an opening.”

Miller hopes to pursue similar discussions in his capacity as CEO emeritus. “These issues don’t go away, they evolve,” he said. “Intergroup relations, racial tensions over the past three and a half decades have evolved. Some might view this as a negative. I, of course, like to view it as a positive.”

“I have seen the evolution,” he added. “I have also seen the evolution of leadership, of leadership internal to the Jewish community, external to the non-Jewish community, further externally to the political world. And some come, some go, some remain. Who do we deal with? Who do we talk to? The most important aspect or factor in dealing with the community relationship agenda is communication.”

Miller, whose executive position ran parallel with five mayoral administrations, has talked to them all.

He recalled a meeting with Ed Koch, New York City’s charismatic former mayor, in the late ’80s. “The meeting was in the Blue Room in City Hall, and the discussion was around Crown Heights,” Miller told JI. “I was a young whippersnapper, and you’re sitting there with Ed Koch, who was a larger-than-life character and figure. But I wasn’t shy and I said, ‘Mr. Mayor, Crown Heights is a tinderbox, and it’s not going to take very much for Crown Heights to explode.’”

“Well, one thing that did explode was Ed Koch,” Miller added. The mayor “tore into

me for using that expression of ‘tinderbox’ because it was on his watch. Well, it was just a couple of years later that yes, indeed, it was a tinderbox, and the place did explode.”

Miller was just five years into his leadership role at the JCRC when, in the summer of 1991, racial tensions between Black and Hasidic residents in the Brooklyn neighborhood of Crown Heights violently escalated.

The young rabbi, whose organization describes the riot as a “pogrom,” was featured in Anna Deavere Smith’s one-person play, *Fires in the Mirror: Crown Heights, Brooklyn and Other Identities*. “I went to see the show, and I forget exactly what she was wearing on her head,” Miller told JI. “It might have been a red yarmulke. So I waited at the stage store for her to come out.”

“I said, ‘You know, you’ve got this thing on your head. I don’t wear that kind of yarmulke. I wear the knitted types,’” Miller remembered telling Deavere Smith.

Later, as she was preparing for a TV broadcast of the play, Devere Smith called Miller and asked to borrow one of his own personal skullcaps. He happily obliged. “If anybody ever watched ‘American Playhouse,’” he said, “that was one of my kippot.”

Miller graduated from Yeshiva University High School and then went off to Israel for a year of study in 1967, his visit coinciding with the Six-Day War. “That had made a very deep impression on me,” he said. “It was a searing experience.”

Back stateside, Miller sought his ordination as a rabbi, continuing in the tradition of his late father, who was also a rabbi and served as president of the Claims Conference. Miller volunteered for the U.S. Army, serving as a chaplain in Fort Knox, and then took a position as a rabbi in Springfield, Mass., ministering to a large Orthodox congregation while serving as a chairman on the Jewish community relations committee of the local federation.

In 1983, he traveled to the Soviet Union and visited with refuseniks, smuggling in Judaica. “It was daunting,” he said of the trip, which he did alone.

It was after that experience that Miller decided he wanted to dedicate his life to the Jewish community, not as a pulpit rabbi but as a Jewish organization professional. He

was hired the following year as director of Israel international affairs at the JCRC by Malcolm Hoenlein, whom he succeeded as executive director in 1986.

Now 35 years later, Miller is the one handing the reins over to his younger charge.

“People say you love your job,” Miller said. “It’s impossible to love this kind of a job. The weight of the responsibility isn’t enjoyable. But it’s more of a mission, and that’s what I’ve committed myself to.” ♦