

THE WEEKLY PRINT

Daniel Hernandez wants to be the next pro-Israel progressive in Congress; How the new movie 'How It Ends' began; East Coast editor shakes up L.A.'s journalism scene; Likud's Nir Barkat calls Bennett-Lapid coalition 'interim' government; The Naval petty officer who found her rabbinic legs at sea; and Cuban Jews step up for their patria

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Daniel Hernandez wants to be the next pro-Israel progressive in Congress

The 31-year-old lawmaker, who rose to prominence in the wake of the 2011 shooting targeting former Rep. Gabby Giffords, is making a name for himself as he launches a bid for Congress

By Matthew Kassel

As a vocal supporter of Israel in Arizona's House of Representatives, Daniel Hernandez, a 31-year-old Tucson lawmaker now running for Congress, says he has increasingly found himself at odds with Democratic colleagues over Middle East foreign policy. "I've been taken to task by folks who disagree with me," Hernandez said in a recent interview with Jewish Insider. "They don't think that this is an important issue to be working on when you're a state legislator."

Hernandez remains uncowed, even as he recognizes that he may be carving out something of a lonely path on the left. During the recent conflict between Israel and Hamas, he issued a proclamation, alongside Republican state Sen. Paul Boyer, recognizing Israel's right to defend itself while reaffirming Arizona's support for the Jewish state. "Why are you opening up that can of worms?" Hernandez recalled being asked the following day by several members of his caucus. "This is a really big problem, you shouldn't be talking about this."

He rejects such arguments. "There are people who say you can't be a progressive and support Israel," Hernandez scoffed. "I push back on that because I've been doing it for a decade."

In his bid to represent Arizona's 2nd Congressional District, Hernandez is hoping that he can bring those values to the federal level after nearly five years as a state legislator. "This is a district that's important personally," Hernandez said. "But this is just an important seat for Democrats to hold on to in the next election, and I think I'm the best candidate to do that."

Hernandez brings a compelling personal story that is likely to resonate with voters in the blue-leaning district, which was represented by former Rep. Gabby Giffords (D-AZ) a decade ago. As a college-age intern in the congresswoman's local legislative office, Hernandez was credited with saving Giffords's life when she was shot in the head by a gunman at a meet-and-greet outside Tucson in 2011. Hernandez provided critical assistance in the immediate aftermath of the shooting, propping up Giffords's head and holding his hand over the wound in an

effort to stop the bleeding.

While Hernandez insisted that he was no hero, former President Barack Obama begged to differ at a memorial service in Tucson the following day for the shooting's six casualties, commending the young volunteer for his bravery — a clip Hernandez highlights in his emotionally resonant campaign kickoff video.

With more than a year remaining until the Democratic primary, experts who spoke with *JI* say it is too early to assess dynamics in the open-seat race to succeed retiring Rep. Ann Kirkpatrick (D-AZ).

Recent filings from the Federal Election Commission, however, suggest a relatively level playing field as the race slowly heaves into motion. State Rep. Randy Fries, a trauma surgeon who treated Giffords after the shooting a decade ago, leads the pack, with just over \$566,000 in campaign contributions. Trailing behind in second place is Kirsten Engel, an Arizona state senator who has pulled in about \$335,000. Hernandez, who entered the race later than his opponents, has raised nearly \$270,000.

Just two months into his campaign,

Hernandez is already emerging as the pro-Israel favorite in the race. Earlier this month, Pro-Israel America, the bipartisan advocacy group, announced its support for Hernandez, naming him as the only non-incumbent candidate in a batch of congressional endorsements including such pro-Israel heavyweights as Reps. Kathy Manning (D-NC), Brad Schneider (D-IL) and Debbie Wasserman Schultz (D-FL).

"A self-proclaimed 'pro-Israel activist,' Hernandez speaks regularly about the importance of the U.S.-Israel relationship and has led initiatives as a state legislator to strengthen the alliance," Jeff Mendelsohn, executive director of Pro-Israel America, told JI. "He champions the Jewish state's right to sovereignty and security, condemns efforts to add unnecessary political conditions to U.S. security assistance for our ally in the Middle East, and strongly opposes the anti-Israel BDS movement."

Hernandez is also poised to benefit from a like-minded incumbent in the House: Rep. Ritchie Torres (D-NY), the first-term Bronx congressman who describes himself as "the embodiment of a pro-Israel progressive." Torres told JI that he is backing Hernandez in the primary, a decision he is likely to announce officially later this week.

"I see myself in Daniel: a pro-Israel progressive who has been drawn to public service by the power of his own lived experience," Torres explained to JI on Monday. "As a survivor of gun violence, he will have a uniquely powerful voice on one of the greatest crises affecting our nation. I couldn't be prouder to endorse his candidacy for Congress."

The feeling is mutual. "We have a very similar profile as two openly gay Latinos who are progressive and still care deeply about that U.S.-Israel relationship," Hernandez said of his sense of connection with Torres. "He's definitely a model of somebody that I admire and look up to. It's difficult and it can be tricky, because you'll have colleagues who say you can't be this if you support that, and that's not the reality. Progressives, by nature, are people who care about freedoms, whether it's LGBTQ freedom, whether it's women's rights. These are issues that I care about a lot."

Hernandez developed an early and abiding appreciation for the Jewish state

thanks to an elementary school teacher from Hungary who spoke of her experiences as a Holocaust survivor. "She was trying to talk to us about what had happened to her family during the Holocaust, and really trying to explain to us the power that hatred can have on a society to make people turn against each other," Hernandez recalled. "It really stuck with me."

"As I got older, I learned more about the issue, learned about Israel, and I thought it was fascinating that there was a new country," Hernandez added. "I'm like, 'Well, how do you start a country?' Then I started going to the library and reading more about it, and the more I read about it, the more interesting it became."

Later, as a volunteer on Hillary Clinton's first presidential campaign in 2008, Hernandez befriended a group of passionate Jewish supporters who called themselves "Yentas for Hillary." "They taught me all the Yiddish words you're not supposed to say in polite company," said Hernandez, who also picked up recipes for kugel and brisket, which he has since tweaked to include jalapeño jelly — in keeping with his Southwestern roots.

"But they really educated me about the importance of having a strong relationship with Israel," Hernandez remembered, "and how important it was after having survived the Holocaust, or having family members who survived the Holocaust, having a place that they could call their own."

In 2012, after winning a seat on his local school board, Hernandez visited Israel for the first time on a Latino leadership mission sponsored by the AIPAC-affiliated American Israel Education Foundation. The trip immediately followed Operation Pillar of Defense. "When we boarded our flight, we were told that there was not a ceasefire signed, and if it hadn't been signed by the time we landed, we wouldn't be able to deboard the plane," he said. "We'd have to turn around and fly right back to New York."

"I can still smell the shells collected by the police stored at the police station in Sderot," Hernandez recalls in a lengthy and detailed Israel policy paper he produced for his congressional bid. "When I returned from my trip, I knew I had a responsibility to speak out about Israel."

Hernandez, who assumed office in

2017, now serves as a board member at A Wider Bridge, the nonprofit organization that connects LGBTQ communities in the U.S. and Israel. He has since returned to the Jewish state three times, most recently with his younger sister, Alma, a Democratic lawmaker in Arizona who has established herself as another outspoken pro-Israel voice in the state legislature. Two years ago, the siblings led a delegation to open an Arizona trade office in Tel Aviv.

Alma converted to Judaism in 2015 after she discovered that her maternal grandfather was Jewish. While Daniel has yet to take the leap, he is active in Jewish community life, attending synagogue on the High Holidays and preparing meals for family get-togethers on Passover and Hanukkah. He jokingly describes himself as "an honorary member of the tribe," though he says his sister often encourages him to convert. "I'm too lazy to learn that Hebrew," he said.

"I always considered Daniel more of an atheist than anything," Alma countered teasingly in an interview with JI. The siblings, who serve together in the statehouse, are also roommates. "I'm the one who does the cooking because Alma is a terrible cook, and I don't think she'd be upset with me admitting it to you," Hernandez declared. "She does the dishes and helps set up the table."

"He always says that — 'you're a terrible cook,'" Alma shot back. "He watches all these cooking shows and thinks he's the best cook ever, but in reality he just thinks he knows."

Both siblings often field more serious insults on account of their pro-Israel advocacy. "One of the tensions that we both have, obviously, is being Democrats who are outspoken about our support for Israel," Daniel emphasized. "She gets a lot of very weird and kind of rude messages from folks, and a lot of times they use antisemitic attacks." Hernandez added that he has also been on the receiving end of such invective, despite not being Jewish. "People, I think, don't understand why two Latinos who are Democratic state representatives from Tucson would talk about this issue, let alone be champions on it."

"For us to be told, you know, 'don't talk about these things,' 'don't be someone who's kind of upsetting the boat,'" Hernandez

said, “it’s not something that we’re used to, because we’ve always just been very upfront about where we are.”

Even as he has faced some criticism for his foreign policy views, Hernandez has developed a reputation as something of a bipartisan workhorse in the state legislature. He was instrumental, for instance, in helping his sister introduce her recently passed Holocaust education bill to the GOP-controlled state legislature, according to Michael Beller, a co-founder of Arizona Teaching the Holocaust, which supported the bill. “He was an asset to our organization,” Beller told JI. “He’s very politically astute.”

Though Beller is a Republican, he says he has often found common ground with Hernandez. “He’s passionate about his causes, he’s committed to them, and I respect that,” Beller told JI. “There’s something important in individuals who are willing to come to the table and have open discussions and dialogue.”

Paul Rockower, executive director of the Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Phoenix, expressed a similar view of Hernandez. “He’s a real pragmatic leader and does a lot to bridge the bipartisan

divide,” Rockower said.

Hernandez opposed the Iran nuclear deal in 2015 out of concern that it did not go far enough in forestalling nuclear proliferation, among other things. But he also took issue with the Trump administration’s hasty withdrawal from the agreement three years later. Now, he is optimistic that the Biden administration will forge “a new deal that will permanently halt Iran’s nuclear ambitions,” as he puts it in his Israel position paper.

Still, while Hernandez supports the administration’s “efforts to obtain a ‘longer and stronger’ deal,” he objects to any “easing of sanctions before the Iranians take tangible action to curtail their nuclear program.”

In conversation with JI, the congressional hopeful seemed eager to bring his knowledge of Israel and the Middle East — as well as a host of other policy matters including healthcare, education and LGBTQ issues — to the House.

Hernandez, who believes that the Jewish state is often held to an “impossible standard,” is well aware that the debate over Israel has intensified following the conflict with Hamas. “The biggest change is now I’m seeing that the effort to kind of try and

delegitimize Israel and really try and attack anybody who supports Israel has gotten worse,” he said. “I think it’s been a concerted effort over the last couple of years to really make this an issue that doesn’t have the bipartisan support that it’s had in the past.”

“We don’t have to defend every single action that the government has taken,” Hernandez conceded. “There are times where we can disagree with the actions of the government and still support the people, and I think that’s one of the distinctions that many of my colleagues don’t understand.”

But ultimately, Hernandez wants to move past such disagreements.

“We have a tendency to fixate on the people who are opposed. I will still always kind of seethe over that one email or that one message from somebody who was unhappy,” he said. “I think it’s just human nature to kind of dwell on the negative comments instead of supporting and lifting up and saying, ‘Oh, my God, we have all these people who really agree with us, and we have these great people like Congressman Torres who are just great champions, so let’s support them and focus on that as opposed to all the people who don’t agree with us on this issue.’” ♦

JULY 16, 2021

How the new movie ‘How It Ends’ began

Couple and creative partners Daryl Wein and Zoe Lister-Jones applied what they learned in therapy during the pandemic to make the film

By Gabby Deutch

When the pandemic forced people into their homes last spring, some took up hobbies like baking or biking.

Husband-and-wife writing duo Daryl Wein and Zoe Lister-Jones took up therapy. They used what they learned to co-write, produce and direct *How It Ends*, a comedy-drama about one woman’s last day on Earth before the planet is destroyed by a meteor. The movie comes to streaming services and select theaters on July 20.

“We had started to explore, like, the inner

child in both of us — that was just something that we were tackling, and investigating, you know, early childhood stuff,” Wein told *Jewish Insider*. “We were like, ‘Alright, that’s interesting. What if we came up with a story that was an exploration of the self, selfhood, self-acceptance and overcoming one’s fears?’”

The movie centers on two characters, who are really the same person: Liza, played by Lister-Jones, and her “younger self,” played by “*Mare of Easttown*” star Cailee Spaeny. (Several big names have cameos,

including Fred Armisen, Olivia Wilde, Nick Kroll and Bradley Whitford.)

Liza’s “younger self” follows Liza around, urging her to spend her last day making amends with friends and family and going to the last party on Earth. Along the way, they have a number of surprising and funny run-ins — Liza’s first kiss, walking around in only a Speedo bathing suit; her best friend, who predicts Liza will have an amazing afterlife; and a stranger who is searching the city for his girlfriend, who got lost on a romantic scavenger hunt he planned.

Liza and her younger self walk through an eerily empty Los Angeles, the result not of special Hollywood know-how or film permits but the pandemic — they filmed the movie with a bare-bones team (Wein shot the film himself) at a time when people were mostly staying home.

But despite the apocalypse theme and the quiet streets, Wein asserts that “How It Ends” is not a COVID-19 movie. “This was capturing a special moment in time. The streets of L.A. were empty, so [viewers will] understand that this was made during the last year,” he explained. “But I think it can function and exist on its own two feet.”

The wide-angle shots of Los Angeles, showing Lister-Jones and Spaeny walking on deserted streets alongside Italian cypress trees in the hills above the city, were not just an artistic choice. “We designed it around the circumstances of the pandemic, meaning we knew we had to shoot outside because it was just too difficult and unsafe to be inside at that time,” said Wein.

He and Lister-Jones knew from the start of the pandemic that they would use their time at home toward a creative pursuit. “We were, like everybody, freaking out, and just overwhelmed and sad and depressed, and trying to figure out really how to move forward as artists,” Wein recalled. “We were like, OK, we can take up a hobby while we sit

inside for the next year, like bake sourdough bread like other friends were, or start pottery.’ Or we were like, ‘We can try and capture this amazing moment in time.’”

The pair have collaborated on several other movies through their production company Mister Lister Films, and “How It Ends” is not the first to take a page out of the duo’s lives. Their first film together, “Breaking Upwards” (2009), showed a couple — played by, of course, Wein and Lister-Jones — grappling with a stagnant relationship and opting to take up polyamory. The idea came from their own experiment with an open relationship, which did not work out for the pair.

Some of Wein’s other movies have touched on current events more overtly than “How It Ends,” including “Blueprint,” a 2017 drama about a police shooting. Following the recent violence in Israel, Wein said he would consider a project that relates to his Jewish roots: “Everything that was happening recently with Israel and Palestine brought up a lot of issues around antisemitism, and I’ll probably do some film about that at some point in the future,” he noted.

None of his films have touched on Judaism (though Lister-Jones’s character does refer to her cousin’s bat mitzvah in “How It Ends”), but Wein says his faith has played a role in his creative pursuits.

Wein grew up in Westport, Conn., a well-to-do suburb of New York City, where he was raised with a close connection to Judaism. “My Jewish upbringing was Reform but spiritual and family and community oriented,” Wein said. “My dad has a pretty strong relationship to the Holocaust and our ancestors who perished there.”

After high school, Wein left Connecticut to pursue filmmaking in New York. He and Lister-Jones met at the Tisch School of the Arts at NYU, where both were students. Judaism remains a part of their lives.

“I have kind of a funny relationship to my faith,” explained Wein. “I feel like it serves me here and there, in that I feel like I belong to a community of like-minded individuals who are there for me, and that tradition is, I think, what matters the most to me, more than anything.”

“Even though my films aren’t about overtly Jewish topics or subjects, I feel like they have a Jewish soul to them,” he said, naming Woody Allen and the Coen Brothers as inspirations. “From an intellectual standpoint, I think I like to wrestle a lot with ideas in the same way that Jews tend to wrestle with big ideas and the Torah and in general ... I think that the screenplays that I’ve written, or co-written are definitely intellectually based, in a way, or just highly analytical.” ♦

JULY 19, 2021

East Coast editor shakes up L.A.’s journalism scene

‘I’ve always been an outsider wherever I am,’ says the editor of Los Angeles magazine

By Matthew Kassel

Early last month, Maer Roshan, the editor of *Los Angeles* magazine, received an ominous letter just as he was about to publish a damning and deeply reported feature on Yashar Ali, a former political operative who has more recently achieved widespread admiration as a buccaneering freelance journalist and popular Twitter

personality. His impressively sourced stories have, over the past few years, taken down several high-profile figures in the media and entertainment industries.

But the piece told a more complicated story, alleging a “rather checkered history” of legal troubles as well as grifting and other manipulative behavior fundamentally at

odds with the righteous persona Ali had crafted for his hundreds of thousands of social media followers. During the fact-checking process, the story took a troubling turn, as Ali disclosed on Twitter that he was suffering from suicidal ideations, “prompting concern and warm words of support from thousands of people,” as the journalist Peter Kiefer wrote in his article.

So it was with some level of concern when, right before press time, Roshan got a lawyer's note written on Ali's behalf. The letter, according to Roshan, warned somewhat vaguely that his publication would be held responsible if anything should happen to Ali after the story came out. He published it anyway. The story went viral immediately, trending on Twitter for days and setting new traffic records for the magazine.

Despite its success, the feature story, which took five months to produce, was perhaps more than anyone involved had bargained for. Ali, who did not respond to a request for comment, has yet to publicly address the piece, and he has barely tweeted since it went online at the beginning of June. "I hope everything is well with him," Roshan, 53, said in a recent interview with *Jewish Insider*. But the veteran magazine editor also wonders how other publications had missed it. "It was so obvious," Roshan marveled. "I was like, why isn't anyone doing this story?"

The same could be said for any number of articles Roshan has published at *Los Angeles* magazine since he took over in January 2019. Over that short period of time, Roshan has helped reinvigorate the scrappy monthly periodical, which turns 60 in November, as a formidable presence in California's contracting media ecosystem, where outlets like *Los Angeles Weekly*, *The Orange County Register* and *California Sunday Magazine* have either faced steep staff reductions or shuttered entirely.

Los Angeles, on the other hand, seems now to be operating on solid footing, though it has also seen cuts in recent years. During the pandemic, when newsstand sales for many magazines experienced steep drops, *Los Angeles* increased its circulation, Roshan says, and web traffic has quadrupled under his leadership. The magazine, he emphasizes, is profitable.

Published by Hour Media Group, the magazine had been struggling to achieve relevance before Roshan came on. "It was a lot of service journalism, like best parks and stuff like that," he said of the outlet, which is the oldest independently published city magazine in the country. When he interviewed for the job, Roshan pitched a more ambitious approach, vowing to pursue splashier and scoop-driven features on

politics, Hollywood and other power nodes in Los Angeles and beyond. "They were like, 'Yeah, we're up for that,'" Roshan said. "I'm like, are you sure?"

Even with a small editorial staff operating on a shoestring budget, Roshan has consistently pushed the magazine to punch above its weight, producing substantive features on local power brokers like Rep. Adam Schiff (D-CA), Gov. Gavin Newsom and Alex Villanueva, the Los Angeles County sheriff who was elected on a progressive mantle but has since taken a sharp turn to the right. "We did a big story which kind of set the tone," Roshan said of the Villanueva profile. "We called him 'the Donald Trump of L.A.,' and I think he's now adopting that formally."

Roshan's coverage has often been prescient. He commissioned an early story on the campaign to free Britney Spears from a controversial conservatorship and scored the first interview with Charlotte Kirk, the British actress entangled in a series of Hollywood sex scandals. Last year, at the beginning of the pandemic, *Los Angeles* was the only outlet to report from inside Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti's COVID bunker, and two summers ago, Roshan published a deeply revealing interview with Louise Linton, an actress who is married to former Trump administration Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin.

As a recent Los Angeles transplant, Roshan is now drawing on previous high-level editing roles at publications like *New York* and *Talk*, where he served as an editorial director in the early aughts. But in many ways, the experience of navigating newfound terrain, on deadline, is a familiar one for the seasoned editorial hand. Throughout his decades-long career in journalism, Roshan averred, his perspective has often been "shaped by a sense of being both a participant and an outsider in very different worlds."

He grew up in Tehran as a Jewish kid with an American mom, he noted, and entered a Long Island yeshiva as a 12-year-old Iranian immigrant with no knowledge of Hebrew. During high school in Queens, Roshan, who is gay, studied Talmud while "mingling with club kids in Manhattan on the weekends." For his college essay at New York University, he was asked to write about

two people he admired. "I chose Truman Capote and Menachem Begin," he said.

"The same duality has informed my career," Roshan said, before going through his diverse resumé. He started a gay weekly in New York City "at the height of the AIDS crisis," he said, "and a global addiction news site at the height of the opioid epidemic." *Radar*, which he started in 2003 on his living-room floor, "regularly took on the sacred cows of the establishment," Roshan told JI, while being funded by Jeffrey Epstein and Mort Zuckerman. "I think that varied experience has been a valuable asset as a journalist," Roshan argued, "especially at this awful, polarized moment in our culture and our media."

So far, readers seem to have appreciated Roshan's new and more adversarial direction at *Los Angeles*, though he acknowledges that his tenure has not been without controversy. Near the end of his first year atop the masthead, Roshan published a long profile of Gavin McInnes — the Vice co-founder and Proud Boys figurehead — that was accused by some critics of sanitizing his image as a far-right provocateur. "We got a lot of shit for that one," Roshan said. "But that story was just in *Vanity Fair*."

While Roshan often aims to compete with the *Los Angeles Times*, the city's leading daily, he accepts that his publication is operating at a major disadvantage, at least in terms of institutional resources. Still, what the magazine lacks in size, Roshan says, it makes up for in spunk. "What we can bring," he told JI, is a "different kind of sensibility" as well as "more attitude."

The former editor of the *Times* agrees. "He is a careful editor who knows a good story when he sees it and certainly has an appetite for accountability journalism," said Norman Pearlstine, who tried to hire Roshan after taking over as the paper's executive editor in 2018. "He got the offer to do L.A. magazine, and understandably opted for something where he could basically run his own show," Pearlstine, who stepped down from the *Times* late last year, told JI. "He's done a few pieces that I certainly looked at and said, when I was in L.A., these are things that the *Los Angeles Times* should have gone after."

"Some of the things he doesn't print are as impressive as the things he does," Pearlstine

added. “I don’t mean that he withholds things, but he’s an editor who encourages people to stretch, encourages them to take risks. But then he does have the ability, when the piece comes in, to be an advocate for the reader, and that distinguishes him from a lot of editors.”

Nick Denton, the founder of *Gawker*, upped the ante when asked for his appraisal of Roshan’s editorial chops. “He’s the last great magazine editor,” Denton said in an email exchange with JI, “but I’m guessing everybody says that.”

Denton’s website, before it went under, was known for its often unsparing documentation of New York’s media machers, and Roshan garnered his fair share of coverage, particularly as the founding editor of *Radar*, a magazine whose gimlet-eye ethos aligned in many ways with *Gawker*’s swashbuckling style.

For a time, Roshan was something of a quintessential New York media figure, an in-demand editor courted by Tina Brown and Kurt Andersen who was widely respected for his incisive editorial eye and well-known for his ubiquitous presence on the late-night party circuit. The journalist Vanessa Grigoriadis, who wrote for Roshan during his time as a deputy editor at New York magazine in the ’90s, recalled running into him on the scene when she began doing party coverage early in her career. “He was always the brightest light in any room,” she told JI, “full of laughter, intelligence and kind ribbing.”

“We started working together and he taught me everything I know about reporting,” Grigoriadis said. “Mostly, it was about being fair to people while also telling the story you wanted to tell. I also always think about him whenever I go to a party, because he taught me that you should never leave without saying goodbye to not only the host but everyone you talked to while you were there. I prefer Irish exits myself, but I always think, ‘I should do this for Maer.’”

Roshan seems to have broken his own rule when he left the New York media world a decade or so ago after relaunching *Radar*. He had good reason for doing so, though, having struggled for some time with alcohol addiction, which precipitated his brief yet messy departure from public life. Roshan sobered up at a rehab facility in the Valley

and emerged reenergized, founding a sobriety website called The Fix and finally landing in Los Angeles about six years ago, in part so he could be closer to his family.

The change of scenery has been positive for Roshan as he has immersed himself in his adopted city after decades on the East Coast. “The culture is being made here on all sorts of levels,” he said, noting that he is learning fast about Los Angeles in his new role editing the city’s titular magazine.

It isn’t the first time Roshan has found himself in a new environment following a period of profound disruption. Roshan was relatively insulated from antisemitism growing up in Iran, attending an elite international school where he and his classmates — many of whom were children of diplomats — pledged allegiance to the United Nations.

Roshan’s parents, both Jewish, settled in Iran after meeting at college in the United States. His mother was from Far Rockaway, in Queens, and his father was Persian. “Shockingly, when I think back about it now, my mom, who was raised Orthodox, suddenly decided to marry my dad and move to Iran,” Roshan recalled, “which at the time was not a place where nice Jewish girls were running off to.”

He fled the country with his family in 1979 as the Islamic revolution was underway and before the ayatollah returned from exile. “It was pretty bad by then,” Roshan recalled. “There were people on the streets and they were setting fires.” His father stayed behind to sort things out, escaping nearly a decade later, but died of cancer shortly after arriving on American shores.

In the U.S., Roshan first lived with his maternal grandparents in Queens, and although he was only casually observant in Iran, he was now expected to maintain an Orthodox lifestyle. “We came from this world where we had Passover and Yom Kippur, but there was not much beyond that, really,” Roshan told JI. “Suddenly, we were going to yeshiva and wearing yarmulkes.”

“There were nice things and also vexing things about that experience,” he said. “Shabbos seemed so awful when it started — like, are you kidding, we can’t turn the TV on? But even now, I think there’s something nice about this idea of just turning everything off and engaging with

your family or your friends.” At his Jewish day school, Roshan ran for office, which required that he deliver a speech in Hebrew. He hadn’t quite yet mastered the language, he recalled, “so I had to write it down in, like, phonetics.”

Later, Roshan moved to Long Island’s Five Towns with his mother, and they loosened up a bit from a religious standpoint, even as he continued to attend yeshiva through high school. “It was hardcore,” he said of his experience at an all-boys yeshiva in Forest Hills, Queens, though there were some unexpected delights, including his rabbi, whom Roshan describes as something of a formative influence. “He was a special, interesting guy,” said Roshan. “He could talk about the Sex Pistols. He was pretty out there for a rabbi.”

Near the end of high school, Roshan was receiving a different education as he ventured into Manhattan, “hanging out with yeshiva buchers by day and drag queens by night,” as he put it. “It was very interesting, living different parts of life simultaneously.” He came out to his mother right after he graduated from high school, on his way to college and a career in media. “My mom was not incredibly happy when I told her,” he said. “It was hard at times, sure, but it would have been hard if I wasn’t Orthodox.”

While Roshan is no longer Orthodox — he jettisoned his yarmulke when he got to NYU — the former yeshiva student still feels a connection with that part of his past. “It’s kind of baggage you can’t lose, nor do I want to,” he said.

“I think more than anything, my religious education provided me with a very basic moral code — a sense of decency and right and wrong that has proved to be remarkably adaptable throughout my life,” Roshan told JI. “Don’t lie. Be kind. Avoid envy. Stay humble. Basic, even cliché. But they helped me get through moments in my life where such distinctions were sometimes cloudy.”

More than anything, Roshan has been dedicated to journalism. “Other little boys liked baseball stars, and I was really big on the news,” he said of his childhood admiration for such iconic editors as Clay Felker, Harold Hayes and Hugh Hefner.

The journalist Aaron Gell, who worked with Roshan at *Radar* and has since edited some pieces at *Los Angeles* on a freelance

basis — including the story on Ali — described his old boss in an email to JI as “maybe the only one of us left who, despite all the agonies of the media business, still genuinely loves the game and plays it with unrelenting joy.”

After college, Roshan ventured to Key West, Fla., assuming he would make it work as a writer while working on a fishing boat. “But obviously no one was going to hire me for their fishing boat,” he said. Instead, he got his first job as a crime and Navy reporter for the *Key West Citizen*. The beats, he said, often intersected.

Back in New York following his southern sojourn, Roshan started a gay weekly magazine, *QW*, and began working his

way up the New York media career ladder, passing through *New York* and *Talk* on his way to *Radar* and *The Fix*.

When he arrived at *Los Angeles* not long ago, Roshan remembered being told that his experience would be underwhelming compared with New York. “One of the things people said was, ‘You’re going to get to L.A., and it’s going to be a media backwater’ and ‘no one’s going to pay attention,’” he said. “But I think, if nothing else, we’ve proved that not to be the case.”

Now coming up on his third year at the helm, he believes the magazine is well-poised for success. He has launched a number of podcasts, released special issues and is even experimenting with

NFTs for various covers. Events are in the works. He is optimistic about expanding the publication’s portfolio of offerings.

“Maer understands what a mass audience wants, on a deep level,” said Grigoriadis, his former charge. “He knows they want to be told a story, and they want to learn something, but they want to have fun at the same time. He’s also incredibly gifted at identifying ‘who will be hot next.’”

It helps, Roshan suggested, that he can maintain something of a constructive distance from his immediate environment. “I’ve always been an outsider,” he said, “wherever I am.” ♦

JULY 21, 2021

Likud’s Nir Barkat calls Bennett-Lapid coalition ‘interim’ government

The former Jerusalem mayor told JI that U.S. lawmakers ‘understand’ the Israeli public opposes the move

By Marc Rod

Israeli MK Nir Barkat, a member of the Likud party with aspirations for party leadership, referred to Israel’s new coalition government as an ineffectual “interim government” in an interview with *Jewish Insider* on Tuesday.

“They have no vision. They have no ideology. They have a mutual veto between the left and the right,” Barkat, the former mayor of Jerusalem, said of the new Naftali Bennett-led government. “And they agree to only do things that are not controversial. Therefore they can’t really make any bold moves. They start legislation and never finish a lot of it,” Barkat explained. “Nobody expects anything from them.”

Barkat predicted that Likud will “return [to lead the government] probably quicker than people think.”

The former Jerusalem mayor spoke to JI while visiting Capitol Hill on Tuesday to push back on Biden administration efforts

to reopen the shuttered East Jerusalem consulate, which previously functioned as a hub for U.S.-Palestinian relations.

Barkat met with eight lawmakers — split between parties — on Monday and Tuesday to discuss what he said was Israeli opposition to the consulate. He would not name the legislators with whom he met. Israeli opponents argue that a consulate serving Palestinians in Jerusalem would undermine the goal of a united Jerusalem as the undisputed capital of Israel.

“I’ve been conveying my views and the understanding of the Israeli public — 75% of the public in Israel does not support such a move,” Barkat said, citing a poll that showed that 72% of Israelis oppose a U.S. consulate in Jerusalem for Palestinians.

U.S. lawmakers “understand that this is something that the Israeli public is strongly against” he added. “It’s a move you don’t want to make without thinking. And they understand that this is a process that

America respects, as a democracy.”

Barkat did not meet with any of the nine Democratic senators who wrote a letter to President Joe Biden in support of reopening the consulate.

Barkat emphasized that no new diplomatic missions to the Palestinians have been opened in Jerusalem since Israel achieved statehood — although several nations have preexisting Palestinian missions in the city that predate 1948. Former President Donald Trump shuttered the consulate in 2019 after moving the U.S. embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

Barkat worries that reopening the consulate would spark a wave of attempts by European countries to open similar missions in Jerusalem. The MK added that the U.S. and other nations should open diplomatic missions inside the Palestinian territories, such as in Ramallah, if they want to serve the Palestinians.

Barkat said he emphasized to U.S.

lawmakers that “this is not a time for a partisan move against the Israeli public opinion.”

“I think we need to focus on bipartisan issues, and shy away from [a] partisan one-sided move,” Barkat said.

The MK said he further argued that the new Israeli government would be unlikely to support the consulate move, as right-wing members in Prime Minister Naftali Bennett’s ruling coalition would be unlikely to vote in favor.

“Many people understand that this is something that could dramatically shake the new government and risk the new government because the right-wingers of the government are going to be in a very bad situation... if they have to give consent to the American request, and I believe that they will not give consent,” Barkat said.

In addition to his diplomatic efforts in the U.S., Barkat is pursuing legislation in the Knesset to block any foreign government from opening a mission to the Palestinians in Jerusalem.

“It’s similar to if there’s a lawsuit against something, you just wait for the courts to decide. You don’t want to sneak a decision knowing that there’s a legal procedure... happening in Israel,” Barkat said.

Barkat, a member of the Likud party which is now in the minority in the Knesset for the first time in over a decade, delivered a pessimistic report on the new government’s first weeks in office.

“We realize that sometimes sitting in the opposition sharpens your thinking. We work as a group,” he said. “We were able to derail a number of government decisions that could not pass in the parliament without a

majority.”

Looking to the future, Barkat made clear his aspirations to lead Likud, but said he doesn’t plan to challenge longtime party leader and former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu directly.

“When Netanyahu... [decides] to resign, I will be there to compete for the leading role in Likud,” Barkat said. “We are a democracy, and Netanyahu was elected to be the head of the party, and I respect that.”

Barkat indicated he would not have handled the recent conflicts in Jerusalem — over issues like evictions and access to the Temple Mount — differently than the city’s current mayor, emphasizing that the evictions are the purview of Jerusalem’s court system, meaning politics “are totally irrelevant.” ♦

JULY 20, 2021

The Naval petty officer who found her rabbinic legs at sea

Reconstructionist seminarian is the first rabbinical student to get a prestigious military scholarship as she prepares for a career as a chaplain

By Stewart Ain

The Navy’s recruiting poster proclaims, “Join the Navy and See the World.” Kanaan Goldstein joined and the native of Norman, Okla., not only saw the world, she found her calling.

“I loved it,” she said of the six years she served in the Navy, five of them aboard the USS Wasp based in Norfolk, Va.

“I had beautiful relationships, saw the world, met people from all different walks of life and learned things about myself,” Goldstein, 29, told *Jewish Insider* in a Zoom interview. “I decided I wanted to become a Jewish lay leader and to lead services on the ship. I became qualified to do that and when we went out to sea, I would go to the chapel, turn around the little Jesus and transform it from a Christian to a Jewish space.”

Goldstein was soon given the go-ahead

to conduct Shabbat services on Friday evenings.

But there was one problem – there was only one other Jewish sailor onboard. The service morphed into Torah study, but quickly became a safe space for others on the ship to come and speak with her about whatever was on their minds. There was no other space for those kinds of discussions on the ship.

“We had prayer books, but this became a place for human connection,” said Goldstein. “And it was through this thing we created that I was feeling extremely fulfilled. People would come to me during the week and say, ‘I need to talk to you about something.’ I was connecting with them.”

In the Navy, Goldstein explained, “everything was, ‘go, go, go,’ and there was no time to slow down. It was with

that realization that I found I was getting something from this, and it was then I realized I wanted to be a chaplain in the Navy. To do that, I had to become a rabbi.”

After completing her six-year Naval tour, during which she served as the fire control technician responsible for the operation and maintenance of advanced electronic equipment dealing with guided missile systems and underwater weapons, she enrolled in the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College in Wyncote, Pa. Because of the pandemic, all classes last year were held virtually; she plans to attend in person this year. Earlier this month, Goldstein was named a 2021 Tillman Scholar, the first rabbinical student to receive the prestigious honor since the scholarship was founded in 2008. She is one of 60 veterans, U.S. service members and military spouses named this

year.

The scholarship assists with academic expenses and can be used for tuition and fees, living expenses and books. It was awarded by the Pat Tillman Foundation, which was established for the professional football player after his death in 2004 while serving with the 75th Ranger Regiment in Afghanistan. (Tillman left a thriving football career with the Arizona Cardinals in the wake of the Sept. 11 attacks.)

Goldstein entered the Navy with her parents' permission at the age of 17. She had decided to enlist a year earlier after meeting with a Naval recruiter who came to her high school.

"He gave me a beautiful speech about having control of your life, discipline and great adventures," Goldstein said. "I began going to meetings of the delayed-entry program and hanging out at the office. My grandfather and an uncle had both served in the Navy, and I saw the Navy as a place where I would have independence. In the Navy I would do my own thing."

She entered boot camp in September 2009 shortly after graduating high school. After serving her six years in the Navy, attaining the rank of petty officer, second class, Goldstein returned home to attend four years of college at the University of

Oklahoma, in her hometown, where she majored in psychology and Judaic studies.

After graduating, she spent one semester studying at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. She then moved to Syracuse, N.Y., where she worked as a Hillel engagement specialist at Syracuse University, one of the country's top schools for veterans, where she had a chance to connect with students who had served.

In 2019 she met Curtis Kuhlman, a petroleum engineer, and they have been in a relationship ever since. Kuhlman is not Jewish, Goldstein said, and practices no religion. The two now live together in Yukon, Okla., and plan to marry one day.

Goldstein chose to affiliate with the Reconstructionist Judaism movement and enroll in its seminary, because she felt it was "the only school for me because it is aligned with my values as a human being. Its policy on interfaith relations, Jewish blood lines, attitudes towards inclusivity and diversity – it made me feel that this is the school where I belong."

She added that the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College is the only rabbinical seminary that would accept her application because of her relationship and her belief that he does not need to convert to Judaism.

"We have agreed to live a Jewish life

with Jewish values," she said. "With most other schools you are not allowed to be in a relationship with a non-Jew. And I want to be able to ordain marriages between interfaith couples and same-sex couples. Love is love."

Goldstein plans to graduate in 2025. She aspires to "be in the Navy Reserves as a Naval chaplain, and to work as a chaplain during the week with a police department, hospital or any place that might need a chaplain."

There are now 22 Reform, Conservative and Orthodox rabbis serving as reservist chaplains in the U.S. Army, Navy and Air Force who are accredited through the JWB Jewish Chaplains Council, according to Rabbi Tracy Kaplowitz, its director of operations.

"Their calling as rabbis is to serve beyond just Jews," she said. "They want to serve Americans."

For now, Goldstein is looking forward to rabbinical school, which is something of an extension of the path to self-discovery she found in the Navy. "Ninety percent" of the seminary classes, she said, "is learning about yourself. I want to continue that journey and welcome all the things I didn't know." ♦

JULY 22, 2021

Cuban Jews step up for their patria

Pro-democracy protests in Cuba resonate with young and old Cuban Jews in the U.S.

By Gabby Deutch

“*Patria y Vida*” — “homeland and life” — is the chant that has animated thousands of pro-democracy protesters in Cuba, angry over economic shortages and rising COVID-19 deaths, over the past week and a half.

Members of the vibrant Cuban Jewish community in the U.S. have spoken out in support of the protests, hoping for a better life for people in their ancestral country. But many Cuban Jews have never been to their

patria.

"I'm seeing millennials who are Cuban and Jewish talk about their frustration or their feelings on the protests in Cuba," Janna Berenson, a 25-year-old Miami native whose mother was born in Cuba, told *Jewish Insider*. "I'm proud that they're not leaving it to the people who came from Cuba to do all the talking when this is such a part of their identity."

Nearly all of Cuba's 15,000 Jews fled the country soon after Fidel Castro seized power

in 1959. For people in Berenson's generation and her parents' generation, who fled when they were young children, Cuba is a place they have never visited or have no memory of. Many non-Jews from Cuba have come to the U.S. more recently, including a large wave of refugees in the 1990s.

"This is sort of a lost legacy — the fact that Cuba seems inaccessible to us in so many ways," said Leon Rodriguez, who served as director of the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service during the Obama

administration. “It does affect me in the way I think it probably affects a lot of other Cuban Americans.”

Despite the fact that most Cuban Jews in the U.S. left the country more than 60 years ago, their connection to the island nation remains strong. Support for the protesters comes naturally for a community of refugees who fled the Communist regime that still controls the country.

“They are supportive of change, and they are supportive of the Cubans that are demonstrating,” said Jaime Suchlicki, director of the Cuban Studies Institute, a Miami-based think tank. “It’s not only about food and lack of medicine, but it’s also about political freedom, and political change. It indicates an exhaustion on the part of the Cuban population that wants to see that change in Cuba.”

Suchlicki’s story is similar to a lot of Jewish Cubans: He was born in Cuba and came to Miami at the start of the Castro regime, but his family was not native to Cuba. His mother was born in Buenos Aires to parents who had fled pogroms in Poland, and his Russian father arrived in Cuba after being wooed by the weather.

“He got on the boat,” Suchlicki recalled. “The first stop of the boat was in Havana, so he got off. He liked the climate. He was living in a cold climate in Russia so he said, ‘Look, I’ll stay here for a while.’”

Because Cuba’s Jewish community came from elsewhere — mostly Eastern Europe and Turkey — many Cuban Jews in the U.S. also feel some connection to their ancestors’ original homeland.

“As is the case with us Jews, Cuba is just a part of a larger identity for us,” said Rodriguez. Three of his four grandparents came to Cuba from Turkey, and for him, “the Turkish heritage is as defining as the Cuban heritage.”

Most of those Cuban Jewish refugees settled in Miami, although their descendants now live around the country. The Cuban Jewish diaspora was affected by the Surfside condo collapse, which killed several members of the community.

“These have truly been weeks of an emotionally charged atmosphere,” said former Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL), who represented Miami for 30 years and who was born in Cuba. “The tragedy of the collapsed

condo building in Surfside impacted many Latinos who are Jewish. That was a horrific low point. But they also experienced some high and positive emotions as the Cuban Jews saw the massive and powerful protests against the regime that has enslaved their native island nation for more than 60 years.”

Rep. María Elvira Salazar (R-FL), who now represents Ros-Lehtinen’s former district — with the largest Cuban Jewish population in the country — is the daughter of Cuban refugees. “The Cuban people have taken to the streets demanding one thing & one thing only: freedom,” Salazar told *JI* in a statement. “For 62 years, the Castro regime has systematically persecuted the people of Cuba and the United States must stand with them in their struggle for freedom.”

More than anywhere else in the country, Miami’s Jewish community is defined by its Latino — and Cuban in particular — population.

“When you leave South Florida, people can’t reconcile the fact that you might be Latin and Jewish,” said Berenson.

“They are the ones that are the most established Latin American Jewish community in Florida, in Miami,” said Dina Siegel Vann, director of the American Jewish Committee’s Arthur and Rochelle Belfer Institute for Latino and Latin American Affairs. “They’re very much part of Jewish institutional life, Miami being really the epicenter.”

Last week, *AJC* tweeted in support of the protests, writing, “We join [President Joe Biden] and leaders from across the world in calling for greater freedom and opportunity for the Cuban people after decades of authoritarian rule.”

On Wednesday, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said the Biden administration is considering sanctioning “Cuban officials responsible for violence, repression, human rights violations against those peaceful protesters.” The president also ordered a review of U.S. remittance policy to ensure money sent by Cuban Americans reaches family on the island and said he will consider increasing staff at the U.S. Embassy in Havana.

The protests are already resonating politically in the U.S., with many Republicans accusing Democrats of being soft on the issue and supporting socialism

in Cuba. A statement from the Black Lives Matter Global Network Foundation seemed to make the argument for them.

“Black Lives Matter condemns the U.S. federal government’s inhumane treatment of Cubans,” the group said, blaming the decades-long U.S. embargo on trade with the country for Cuba’s poor conditions rather than the Cuban government’s actions. The statement was criticized by many Cuban Americans. Politico wrote that potential 2024 Republican presidential candidates have “seize[d] the chance to rail against socialism and court a constituency that helped deliver Florida to Trump last year.”

Suchlicki argued that the embargo is not what is causing Cuba’s problems, instead blaming the country’s leadership. “Unfortunately, there is a belief that if you lift the embargo, things are going to be wonderful,” he said. “The embargo is not the problem of Cuba. The embargo doesn’t prohibit Cuba from buying food, doesn’t prohibit Cuba from buying medicine.”

A March poll found that 66% of Cuban American voters in Florida now support keeping the embargo in place, compared to just 36% six years ago, when President Barack Obama was loosening ties between the U.S. and Cuba. That puts many Cuban American voters in line with Republican positions, even though several years ago the majority of Cuban American voters in Florida supported Obama’s actions.

Still, Rodriguez — one of the most prominent Cuban American Democrats — pointed out that not all Cubans in the U.S. align with Republicans.

“There is definitely a spectrum of views,” Rodriguez argued. “I think there is the one that’s perceived as dominant throughout the country, but I think there’s a broader range than the way it’s perceived.” ♦