

JEWISH JOURNAL

2-8 Nisan 5783, March 24-30, 2023

Open Your Community

LILI 90210

Beverly Hills Mayor Lili Bosse is a daughter of Holocaust survivors with a lot on her mind, including helping the women in Iran and fighting antisemitism.

by Kylie Ora Lobell

Garcetti Goes to India
by Dan Schnur

Why Israel is Still Alive and Kicking
by Mordechai Bar-Or

MAYOR OF BEVERLY HILLS LILI BOSSE

**The Daughter of
Survivors Searching
for Light in the
Darkness**

» by Kylie Ora Lobell





“The rabbis came to me and told me to say my goodbyes to my mom. She said she wasn’t ready. She said, ‘I want to see my daughter become the mayor.’”

When Rose Orenstein was a young girl living in Poland, she had dreams of one day becoming a doctor. But her town was small, and the high school she wanted to attend had a Jewish quota. She found out before school started that she couldn’t get in.

So her family sent her to Lublin, a larger city, to get an education. While she was there, World War II broke out, and it became clear that Rose and other Jews were not safe. Rose was friends with a Catholic girl at her school named Urszula Grande, and her father was the mayor of Lublin. The mayor gave Rose false papers that said she was a Polish Christian girl, which kept Rose safe from the Nazis for the time being.

Rose never forgot her Catholic friend and the mayor. Because of them, she survived the war. And over seven decades later, in 2014, 91-year-old Rose sat and watched as her daughter, Lillie Bosse, was sworn in as mayor of Beverly Hills by her friend, actor Sidney Poitier.

“The year before, the doctor was telling my mother that she was on her deathbed,” said Bosse. “The rabbis came to me and told me to say my goodbyes to my mom. She said she wasn’t ready. She said, ‘I want to see my daughter become the mayor.’”

Rose, who died shortly after the swearing in, made a huge impact on Bosse, who introduces herself as the daughter of Holocaust survivors and dedicates much of her work to fighting antisemitism.

Bosse, who is now on her third term serving as mayor of Beverly Hills, was born in Rego Park, Queens, to Jack and Rose (Orenstein) Toren. Jack was working as an engineer in Russia during the war and lost his entire family, who lived in Poland, in the concentration camps.

While Rose’s false identity saved her initially, she was eventually sent to a Polish work camp. When she heard a woman talking Yiddish in her sleep at the camp, she approached the woman to warn her.

“She told her, ‘You’re here in a Polish work camp, and you’re not supposed to be Jewish,’” Bosse said. “She said, ‘You need to be careful. I’m Jewish too.’ The woman told on my mother, and she was sent to Auschwitz.”

The Nazis told Rose she was going to die in Auschwitz. But Rose was determined to survive.

During a death march, she ran away and hid behind

an enemy from fourth through seventh grade, and her father attended Beth Jacob every Shabbat.

Rose and Jack worked together at Jack’s body shop in Los Angeles, and were involved in The 1939 Society, a community of Holocaust survivors and their families.

“Growing up, all my parents’ friends were survivors,” Bosse said. “Their children were at least 10 years older than me, so I was always the youngest.”

Bosse never met her grandparents, and didn’t have any aunts or uncles either. But through The 1939 Society and her parents’ involvement locally, she gained an extended family.

“My whole family was wiped out, so I’ve spent my life trying to create an extended family for myself,” she said. “My community is my family.”

After Hillel, Bosse attended Beverly Hills High School and the University of Southern California. When she married her husband Jon and had her two sons, Andrew and Adam, she became involved in their schools and local issues, serving on the Beverly Hills Traffic and Parking Commission and the Planning Commission. She then became a member of the Beverly Hills City Council, and was elected mayor in 2014. Re-elected in April of 2022, she is now serving her third term.

Much has changed in Beverly Hills – and the world at large – since Bosse was a child. Back then, in the immediate aftermath of the Holocaust, the world was much kinder to Jews. Today, antisemitism is on the rise, and Bosse, who serves 35,000 residents, many of whom are Jews, has faced darkness right on her doorstep.

In October of 2022, antisemitic flyers that spread lies that COVID-19 was a Jewish conspiracy were distributed in Beverly Hills. That same week, an antisemitic hate group hung a flyer that said, “Kanye is right” over the 405. And then, this past Hanukkah, vandals threw rocks at a resident’s menorah on their front lawn and carved Nazi symbols into the official Beverly Hills menorah on the first night of the holiday.

“This was not something we’d seen before,” Bosse said. “Jewish people came to me and told me they’re scared. They said they wanted to take down their mezuzahs. I pleaded with them not to. I said we can’t let this stop us.”

To make a point to the antisemites of the world, after the menorah was defaced on Hanukkah, Bosse and other Beverly Hills residents turned a negative into a positive.

“My whole family was wiped out, so I’ve spent my life trying to create an extended family for myself.”

a barn. There, she fell asleep for a few minutes and had a dream where she spoke with her mother, who had passed away.

“In the dream, my grandmother said, ‘Rosele, you need to get up and run,’” Bosse said. “That’s how she survived.”

Rose met Jack in Israel after the war, and they soon got married and moved to New York, where Rose had some second cousins. They had Bosse, their only child, in 1961, and realized that they couldn’t stay in New York.

“I had a lot of ear infections, and the doctor told us that we had to live in California, Arizona or Florida,” Bosse said. “My parents chose Beverly Hills.”

The Toren family lived next to Beth Jacob Congregation on Olympic Boulevard; Bosse went to Hillel Hebrew Acad-

emy from fourth through seventh grade, and her father attended Beth Jacob every Shabbat.

Bosse’s parents were proudly Jewish and ardent supporters of the state of Israel; she has never been afraid to talk about her Jewish identity or speak up against antisemitism.

“One of the first things I tell people is that I’m the daughter of Holocaust survivors,” she said. “That’s the first thing out of my mouth. Often, people ask why I mention it. They say, ‘What’s that have to do with being an elected official?’ I tell them it’s what defined me. I bring it into my role as mayor. I fight for justice and I have a strong work ethic. I’ll always speak up.”

Mayor Lili Bosse attends the Visionary Women: Female Founders Salon 2023 on January 25 in Los Angeles, California. (Photo by Anaya Deberry/Getty Images for Visionary Women)



Bosse is vocal on Twitter and in the media about Judaism and antisemitism. She appeared on "Dr. Phil" alongside another local leader, Sam Yebri, to discuss antisemitism, and last year along with former L.A. Mayor Eric Garcetti, she attended the second annual Maycox Summit Against Antisemitism in Athens, Greece.

"When I was there, everyone said we were in a state of emergency with antisemitism," she said. "It's happening not only in the U.S., but in Europe, too."

The mayor is right; according to multiple surveys from the ADL, antisemitic incidences and beliefs are on the rise everywhere. Just minutes from Beverly Hills, in Pico-Robertson, a man shot and injured two Jewish men this past February. He was charged with a hate crime.



"Jewish people came to me and told me they're scared. They said they wanted to take down their mezuzahs. I pleaded with them not to. I said we can't let this stop us."

"These last few years have felt dark at times," Bosse said. "I really choose to find the light in the darkness."

That's what Bosse has been trying to do in the wake of Mahsa Amini's murder at the hands of the Iranian government. On Tuesday, Sept. 29, Bosse and the City of Beverly Hills lit up City Hall with the message "Justice for Mahsa

Amini" and it's been illuminated every night since then. Beverly Hills, home to thousands of Iranian Jews, also became one of the first cities to issue a resolution condemning the government of Iran for Amini's wrongful death.

Bosse, who participated in a rally for Amini in Hollywood, was approached by an Iranian woman there who hugged her and cried.

"She thanked me because I was there," she said. "I said this is not just an Iranian issue. This is an issue of human rights, which are being taken away. We need to stand up for them. We can't think, 'This isn't my problem.' This is our problem, because we are all one people. This is our opportunity to save humanity."

A few weeks after passing the resolution condemning Iran, Bosse was back at another rally, this time in Beverly Hills. She gathered with hundreds of other people to protest the Iranian government.

"The day of the rally was one of the most powerful days of my life," she said. "We were a united community. People came from all over Los Angeles to join us. We were standing up for human rights together."

Attending the rally illustrated one of Bosse's core beliefs: When we band together, we are stronger in our fight against hate.

"We need to fight for each other," she said. "Even though I wasn't born Iranian, there is no difference between us. We have the same story of being persecuted, whether it's because of our religion or culture or having our human rights being taken away. Rather than being afraid, we have to be strong and fight."

Bosse, who was recently honored with the Woman of the Year 2023 Shamsi Nekmat Award by the Iranian Jewish Women's Organization, makes a point to be there for all her constituents. This means she works around the clock — something that was instilled in her early on thanks to her entrepreneurial parents. She is on several residential chats, joining conversations on neighborhood happenings and making sure she responds to everybody's needs.

"I am available to everyone," she said. "I work 240 hours out of a 24-hour day. There isn't enough time in the day. I



Much has changed in Beverly Hills — and the world at large — since Bosse was a child. Back then, in the immediate aftermath of the Holocaust, the world was much kinder to Jews.

go to sleep with my ear bud in my ear. If a chat goes on in the middle of the night, I hear it and get on it right away. I have a self-imposed work ethic, and I want to be there for my family and community with every sense of my being."

The mayor holds events such as Live With Lili, a monthly meeting where members of her community can come and share their thoughts with her at City Hall. She also hosts Business With Bosse, where she visits different businesses and local events to support them and invites Beverly Hills residents to tag along. The city has a human rights commission and an arts and culture commission, and holds events like Kindness Week. They also host critical conversation events, where people can have important conversations about topics like diversity and humanity. The most recent, held on February 9, included Jewish Journal columnist Tabby Bedael and a group of diverse panelists discussing women's rights in modern times.



On Tuesday, Sept. 29, Bosse and the City of Beverly Hills lit up City Hall with the message “Justice for Mahsa Amini,” and it’s been illuminated every night since then.



Bosse’s Twitter feed is filled with pictures of her posing with different kinds of people from her community, including students at Beverly Hills High School, senior citizens at Roxbury Park Community Center and firefighters from the Beverly Hills Fire Department.

“We pride ourselves in being a civil city, where people can live or visit, and there is a sense of home,” she said. “People feel like they belong here. It’s human nature for people to want to be heard. My goal is to ensure that everyone in my community feels seen, valued and respected. There is love here.”

Looking forward, Bosse is going to continue to be there for her constituents and fight for everyone’s rights – even when it’s not the easiest or safest road to take.

“Because of my history, I’m not afraid,” she said. “My mother certainly wasn’t. She survived because she had strength and courage.”

Bosse often thinks about Rose, who went on to write two books about her experience in the Holocaust: “Destiny” and “A New Beginning.” She also told her story to the USC Shoah Foundation in 1995, where she talked about trying to find the grave of Urszula Grande, the long-lost friend who saved her. When she finally did locate it, she found that it wasn’t a proper grave.

“She put Urszula’s name and said, ‘With love from Rose,’ on the tombstone,” Bosse said.

Reflecting on her mother’s recent *yahrzeit*, Bosse talked about how Rose’s gravestone says, “Never give up.” It’s a motto that Bosse lives by.

“That is my theme every single day,” she said. “Never give up, and always live in gratitude. Every day I find something to be grateful for. Gratitude is my light.” ■

Kylie Ora Lobell is the Journal’s Community Editor.



“We need to fight for each other ... Even though I wasn’t born Iranian, there is no difference between us.”