Judy Rapfogel, the Enigma Linking Two N.Y. Scandals

By Josh Nathan-Kazis

One September night in 1997, Judy Rapfogel threw a party. Press reports had just declared her the winner in a tight Democratic primary race to represent Manhattan's Lower East Side in the New York City Council, effectively making the seat hers in the heavily Democratic town. Her boss, the powerful man in New York State politics, Silver's chief of staff, Rapfogel has for many years arguably been the most influential Democratic town. Her boss, the powerful man in New York State politics, Silver's chief of staff, Rapfogel has for many years arguably been the most powerful woman in New York State politics.

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However, within a week later, the $15 million savings account held in Rapfogel's name was seized by the IRS. The bank's lawyer said Rapfogel's account was not connected to the $345,000 in a separate account held in her husband's name.

The Clintons' saving account was frozen, and the couple was unable to pay their $10,000 bail. A judge ordered Rapfogel to be held without bail. Her husband was sentenced to prison for fraud.

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In the end, Rapfogel was convicted of wire fraud and tax evasion for using the funds to pay for her legal fees and to cover her living expenses. She was sentenced to 30 months in prison and ordered to pay $3.3 million in restitution.

Why Israel's Booming Shadow Economy Has Fast Become a 'Cultural Sport'

By Naomi Zeeflevf Jerusalem

When Israeli tax authorities target Reuven's real estate, supply stores in East Jerusalem, Reuven's off-the-books employees know the drill. Either leave the building or pretend to be a customer. The caricature of the landscape, the only contact with the tax office, is the 65-year-old woman who has owned and operated businesses in Jerusalem, they have always supplemented a small number of legal employees with the books workers in order to boost business. The changes have started to carry decades of tax time if Silver is convicted. Silver has denied the charges.

Judy Rapfogel, whose office did not respond to a request for comment for Rapfogel page, has been sentenced to 30 months in prison and ordered to pay $3.3 million in restitution.

INSIDE

Shabbat Crisis with the Writer and Scholar Judith Shulevitz

By Abigail Pogrebin

I'm failing at Shabbat, the most important holiday of them all. It's not that I'm skipping it; for the past eight years, I've gone to services most Friday nights and many Saturday mornings.

I do feel some Shabbat separation just to keep going — opt out of efficiency, technology, commerce; see where it leads.

Bibi's Upcoming Speech to Congress Bruises Israel's Bipartisan Standing

By Nate Gutman Washington

Within one week, the fundamentals of the pro-Israel community have been shaken like never before. The community's longtime centerpiece legislative effort — the drive to impose new sanctions on Iran — has been forced off the calendar. No one is more important than the motion that supports Iran is a bipartisan issue in American politics has suffered.

The source of the setback could be traced down to one event: Republican House Speaker John Boehner's January 21 invitation to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to speak in Congress in front of a joint meeting of Congress and Netanyahu's unexpected acceptance of the invitation — without consulting Boehner's Democratic counterparts and without telling President Obama about his outreach to a head of state.

From that moment, events spiraled downward quickly, leading the community to some questions and answers and, with blame being assigned in all directions. When Rep. John Yarmuth, a Jewish Democrat from Kentucky, was asked about the latest entanglement, he pointed to the large American Israel Public Affairs Committee lobby group and to big donors as responsible for pushing Congress far to the right on issues relating to Israel. “Unfortunately,” Yarmuth said.

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A CITY BUS GETS HIT BY MORTAR FIRE IN DONETSK, 13 PEOPLE DIE

January 22

That day at work I talk to Paul, who is a reporter...

I wanted to go to Eastern Ukraine and write about it, but nobody wants to read about it.

My family is from there. I keep thinking these were nice people, these people had normal lives.

You should write about it. You can make it personal.

But I don’t know anything.

And everyone is so far-fried, my mom will want me to change all the names in whatever story I tell...

I guess I can try.

Cousin Grisha: An Incomplete Story of One Civilian

When I was a kid, my mom’s brother, uncle Yuri, and his kids, Lybka and Grisha, lived in Sievierodonetsk, an industrial town two hours northeast of Donetsk. My cousin Grisha was one year younger than me, and we became friends when our families spent time in Donetsk in the summers. I was a bigger brat than Grisha, and I schooled him in brattishness.

Now Uncle Yuri lives in Russia. Lybka is back in Sievierodonetsk, and Grisha is dead.

As adults, our relationship was complicated by an occasional Facebook message. He still lived in Sievierodonetsk, working as a municipal driver. He had a pretty blonde wife, a six-year-old son, and a fat white cat called Kefir. We started to talk more when the war started. Sievierodonetsk is in the Luhansk Region, an area that is 99% Russian-speaking. The town itself was mostly spared. (Grisha’s sister, Lybka, evacuated to a village when the fighting began, but the war went right through her village, and she ended up spending weeks in a cellar.) Grisha and his wife sent their son to stay with relatives in Western Ukraine, but stayed in town themselves. He explained that he didn’t want to lose his job. His attitude, on the whole, was strangely practical. Like most people in Eastern Ukraine, he was a Russian speaker, but he had no allegiance to the separatists who controlled Sievierodonetsk last summer. He didn’t watch TV (“Everybody lies,” he said), preferring to read blogs that offered practical advice— for example, how to avoid getting arrested during the regime change. He was sure that when the Ukrainians returned, the entire population of the liberated territories would be suspected of collaborating with the separatists.

The liberation, on July 22, was fast and relatively bloodless. The Ukrainian army took the town after just one night of shelling (Grisha referred to artillery fire as “the soundtrack”). The next day, he uploaded some YouTube videos of the liberation ceremony. A Ukrainian army commander, dressed in a bulletproof vest, accepted the traditional bread-and-salt from a small group of townsmen. Someone wrapped a Ukrainian flag around the shoulders of the ubiquitous Lenin statue. “Where are you going next?” a woman asked the commander, after thanking him. “Well keep fighting,” he said. “And who is in charge here, race? Who is the boss?” someone asked. “The army, man, I tell the army to go.” The army man nodded, then pointed to some man standing off to the side. “You should talk to him.”... The small crowd seemed happy but wary. “They don’t care who is in power,” Grisha said. “They’re just happy the shooting is over.” The next day, he messaged me again. “Remember the army guy from the video? He’s dead. And all of his soldiers are dead.”

The war, or the cease-fire (who even knows the difference?) went on, with Sievierodonetsk nominally under Ukrainian control. Lybka came back to town, and Grisha and his wife brought their son back in time for the start of first grade. Then, last month, Grisha was killed in the lobby of his apartment building. According to Lybka, someone is killing young men in town, and nobody knows who. He may have “unrelated something,” Lybka speculated. My mom asked if there was an investigation, but Lybka just laughed. What investigation in a town with no functioning police? It’s total anarchy, she said. The family got back Grisha’s body, but not his clothes... And Uncle Yuri wasn’t able to attend the funeral because one can’t actually get to Sievierodonetsk— you can’t fly or take a train there... And if we never find out what happened, my family is sure of one thing—that Grisha, directly or indirectly, is a casualty of the war that wrecked his town...