

**NIGEL Savage**, the son of Shirley Savage and the late Gerry Savage, was raised in Sunnybank, Bury, went to cheder at Bury Hebrew Congregation, and was educated at King David Junior and Manchester Grammar schools.

At the University of Sussex he was uninvolved in Jewish life until the student union of which he was chairman passed a motion to ban the Jewish society for being Zionist; in response he successfully took out an injunction against the union through the British High Court.

In his first career he worked in the City of London for NM Rothschild, and was one of the founders of the New Israel Fund in the UK.

In the 1990s he took a sabbatical to learn at Pardes and Yakar in Jerusalem and in 2000 moved to America to found Hazon, now the largest environmental organisation in the American Jewish community. (He launched Hazon by leading a 3,300-mile bike ride across the country to raise environmental awareness in the Jewish community).

He has twice been named a member of the *Forward* 50, the annual list of the 50 most influential Jews in America, and in 2015, in recognition of his work at Hazon, was awarded an honorary doctorate by the Jewish Theological Seminary.

He lives in Manhattan with his wife Liz.

#### 1. Nickname?

Nige? My wife calls me Fred, Poppy or Poppolini.

#### 2. Best and worst things about your job?

The Jewish community. And, er... the Jewish community.

#### 3. Favourite musician?

Elton John. Missy Higgins. Idan Raichel. Oh, and Brahms, and Katy Perry. They naturally go well together, right?

#### 4. Football team?

Manchester United. (Very strangely, my mother and a majority of my cousins are City fans. But whereas Jewish lineage is matrilineal, football support is patrilineal –

## MY LIFE IN 20-ish QUESTIONS

### NIGEL SAVAGE

and my father and my zeide were United fans).

#### 5. What would you call your autobiography?

Eau Sauvage?

#### 6. Biggest worry?

Donald Trump. It is hard to comprehend how evil and dangerous he is. The new president is due to be inaugurated on January 20. Joe Biden needs not just to win the election, but to cope with the aftermath if Trump refuses to accept the result, or starts a war in December or January. The period from the election to the inauguration may well be truly terrifying for America and for the world. I hope America gets through these next four months safely. Very scary.

#### 7. Last time you cried?

Oh, I cry all the time. When Andy Murray won Wimbledon, I was ruined. Actually, the last time I was at Wimbledon, which was maybe three years ago, it was the first time I'd been there in aeons and just being there made me cry. Then the other day someone asked me about the assassination of Rabin, and I started crying – a very different sort of tears.

#### 8. Last book you read?

I read a lot. Right now I'm on a weird Clark family kick – reading the biography of Kenneth Clarke, and the third volume of Alan Clark's diaries. And I'm rereading Alan Lew's *This Is Real And You Are Completely Unprepared*, which is remarkable and I always read it this time of year.

I'm also reading a simplified Hebrew edition of the autobiography of Eliezer Ben Yehuda – reading that in Hebrew is very moving indeed. The best (and most Jewish) book on the environment I've read

recently is Jonathan Safran Foer's *We Are The Weather*. The last great novel was Richard Powers' *The Overstory*, when I turned the last page I was dazed.

#### 9. Favourite TV show?

We're watching a crazy run of Israeli shows. We loved *Hashoter Hatov*, which is ridiculously stupid and un-PC and totally fun.

#### 10. Favourite holiday destination?

I don't know if it counts as a favourite, but we went to Berlin for the first time three years ago. I had been invited to teach there, and having never been in Germany – and never wanted to go – we decided to go, and it was very fascinating and very intense.

Separately from all the Jewish stuff, the Berggruen Museum I found overwhelming. I walked into the very first room and just started crying. He was a dealer and then a collector and his autobiography is one of my favourite books.

Also Venice. I was there the year before last, the first time I'd been there in a long time, to work with a group of Jewish artists who were thinking about Jewish tradition and the climate crisis.

It was so amazing – staying in this faded palazzo with these very wonderful people. If the stars align I'd like to spend more time in Venice, though the catch-22 is that it has suffered horribly from tourism; this is why it's such an interesting prism through which to think about the environmental crisis.

#### 11. Favourite dish?

My mother's salmon cutlets.

#### 12. Favourite drink?

Laphroaig. Of course, my earliest answer to that question would have been Vimto. Ah, Vimto, where are you now?

#### 13. Of what are you most proud?

I don't feel proud of many things; I'm constantly aware of all the things I haven't accomplished or wanted to do better.

That said, I've done significant work in getting the Jewish community to think more seriously about the shmita year, the sabbatical year. The next shmita year starts next Rosh Hashana, in September 2021. It will be an important time to think about its underlying themes – our relationships to land, food, inequality, debt, and time itself.

#### 14. Most embarrassing moment?

I was giving a speech in Baltimore and I couldn't remember the next word I needed for the story I was telling, so I turned to the woman next to me – in front of several hundred people – and whispered "what's the American word for 'big road'?" – and then turned back to the audience and said "... highway."

#### 15. Hero?

Ruth Messinger. (Google her if you don't know her).

#### 16. What do you do in your spare time?

Last weekend I rode my bike to the beach in Far Rockaway, which was great. Liz says, "making your mother's bolognese sauce".

#### 17. How would you like to be remembered?

Well I'd like to be remembered for being neat, calm and tidy. That is definitely not gonna happen.

#### 18. What's top of your bucket list?

Going to Israel for the shmita year and not getting on a plane for the whole year. (We shall see if that's realistic or not...).

#### 19. What is your most treasured possession?

My father's tallit.

#### 20. Who in history would you most like to meet?

Teddy Roosevelt. The Rambam. Jesus Christ. Isaiah Berlin. Actually I did meet him, now I think of it, but it was near the very end of his life; doesn't really count.

I never had any interest in meeting the Lubavitcher Rebbe when he was alive. Then a couple of years ago I read three of the biographies about him, and that made me sad I had never thought to go to meet him.

On the other hand, I'm so happy that I did get to spend time with some people who are no longer alive who were truly inspiring – Rabbi Mickey Rosen and Bonna Haberman Browns and Reb Zalman [Schachter-Shalomi], all three of them just



amazing amazing people.

#### 21. Something people might not be aware of about you.

My wife says I'm a highly-functioning introvert. (Of course the "highly-functioning" bit is obviously very questionable).

#### 22. What does being Jewish mean to you?

When Facebook started, under "religion" I put "Man United" and under politics I put "Jewish". And, of course, I meant both fairly seriously.

Jewish to me is the frame through which I see the world. I think we too often fail to realise how extraordinary and radical and salient the tradition truly is.

#### 23. Sum up your career in three words.

An ish hazon?



LOVING FAMILY: Nigel with mother Shirley and wife Liz



ESTEEMED COMPANY: Nigel with Rabbi Yedidya Sinclair, UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon and Prince Philip

# Don't vote for Jews, mayoral candidate once urged

BY ADAM CAILLER

THE Liberal Democrats were forced to suspend a London mayoral candidate after footage emerged of her urging Muslim voters not to back a Jewish candidate.

Video footage from the run up to the 1997 General Election showed then-Conservative candidate for Blackburn Geeta Sidhu Robb driving around the area, shouting: "Don't vote for a Jew, Jack Straw is a Jew."

After the footage had emerged,

Ms Sidhu-Robb, pictured right, apologised "profusely" for her actions.

She said: "My behaviour caused offence and hurt and I am deeply sorry."

"There is no room for any form of racism or antisemitism in society and, as such, I very much regret my conduct at that time."

"It is in no way an excuse, but the context was that I was on the

receiving end of a consistent racist campaign and, wrongly, retaliated as I did."

She alleges that the Labour Party did something similar to her, telling the community in Blackburn not to vote for a Muslim, yet no evidence of this has been found.

She also tweeted that she was "actively reaching out to the Jewish community", but cancelled an interview with the *Jewish Telegraph* which was set to

take place on Wednesday.

Her spokesman said: "To be clear, she is not making any excuses and her apology is pretty fulsome and sincere."

"As such, I don't believe there's much more to add."

"Geeta really appreciates being given the opportunity, but on balance would rather not now take you up on it."

The Liberal Democrats confirmed that an investigation is now taking place.

