

## PROFILE NAVAH SPERO



So many of us look forward to gathering with family at the Passover seder table every year. But for the recent coronavirus outbreak, Navah Spero, her wife and two small children would have been at Navah's parents' home in Merion, PA outside of Philadelphia. Navah, 38, had celebrated every Pesach of her life there to this point, with the exception of one year, 2002, when she'd been part of an extraordinary Sephardi seder with a family in Argentina.

Navah grew up in an Orthodox family. Her Hebrew name (meaning *to beautify* or *to dwell* in

the biblical language of the Psalms) might lead one to suspect an Israeli background; in fact, both sides of her family go back several generations in America, her mother from St. Louis, her father from Cleveland. An ardent Zionist and frequent visitor to Israel, her dad was acquainted with a woman there named Navah, and was drawn to the name for his only daughter, the youngest of the Speros' three children. In 1981, when Navah was born, he was a professor at Wharton, the University of Pennsylvania's prestigious business school.

She attended an Orthodox Jewish day school K through 8, then went on to a pluralistic Jewish high school, one of only a handful throughout the country. "It was non-denominational," she says of the student body, "about two-thirds Conservative; the remaining third Jews of all stripes." After high school she attended a girls' yeshiva in Israel for a year.

As an undergraduate at UPenn Navah majored in diplomatic history. In her sophomore year she applied to a study-abroad program in Argentina, which was able to place her in a kosher home and allowed her to be part of a multigenerational Spanish-speaking Argentinian family. She relished the opportunity to improve her Spanish, which she'd studied both in high school and college, and to join her hosts for Shabbat dinners and services in a Sephardi shul. At Pesach their seder table included their large extended clan. "Rice and beans were on the menu!" Navah says. "The whole experience in Argentina was fascinating."

After college she worked at a series of jobs and traveled around the world for several years, focusing on India and Southeast Asia, where she spent eight months. Returning to the States in the summer of 2006, she worked on an organic farm about an hour west of Philadelphia, but as a gay woman she found rural and suburban areas there restrictive and not conducive to social life. A friend who was living in Burlington and loved it here urged Navah to give the place a try.....and she was hooked. "Burlington has a rare quality," she noted in an interview several years ago. "It's the biggest city around, so even though it feels a lot like a small town, there's a cosmopolitan vibe. And the people are respectful and friendly." During a stint at the Intervale Community Farm, a back injury ended farm work for Navah forever and prompted her decision to apply to law school in 2007.

She met Katie Taylor at a welcome breakfast party for LGBTQ first-year law students at George Washington University. Initially just friends, they began dating a few months later. Katie is a native of Atlanta from a family with roots in Louisiana. An alumna of Wesleyan in Macon, Georgia, she majored in English and earned a Master's degree in theater from Catholic University of America. Both she and Navah graduated from college and GW Law with honors.

They stayed in Washington, DC after graduating from law school in 2010, where Katie worked in an environment and natural resources group of a large law firm and Navah spent a year as a clerk in the District of

Columbia Superior Court. Seeking a permanent job after the clerkship ended, Navah looked again to Burlington, where a friend mentioned an opening at Gravel and Shea, a premier law firm at which his sister-in-law was working. Though offered the job, Navah had to postpone her starting date, since Katie wanted to finish a full year at her position in DC. Even with the postponement, the two were forced to live separately for three months. Navah joined Gravel and Shea in October of 2011, and she and Katie reunited in Burlington in January 2012.

After stints with the State of Vermont Agency of Natural Resources and the Lake Champlain Regional Chamber of Commerce, Katie turned to her first love, writing, and in 2017 launched her own content writing business, specializing in creating compelling content for entrepreneurs and lawyers. She has been working from home for the past three years. Navah focuses on all aspects of litigation in state and federal court. While she works on a broad variety of cases, from personal injury to complex contract disputes, her specialty is trusts and estate litigation.

Listed as a “Rising Star” in *New England Super Lawyers* for 2017-2019, Navah is a top-rated litigation attorney in Burlington. She served as president of the Chittenden County Bar Association, where she helped develop opportunities for education and connection and worked to ensure that positive energy exists throughout the local legal community. She currently serves on the Vermont Supreme Court’s Advisory Committee on the Rules of Civil Procedure.

Navah and Katie were married in December 2012 in Central Vermont, among many loving friends and immediate family members. Combining their Jewish and Christian traditions posed some challenges, but both were thrilled with the experience and all those who could be there to celebrate with them. There was also sadness, as some family members chose not to attend for religious reasons. Navah and Katie have a strong, loving relationship based on mutual understanding and respect, celebrating Rosh Hashanah and Pesach in Philadelphia and the Christmas holidays in Atlanta. “We also put up a tree at home,” Navah says.

The family situation has been less challenging, she notes, since the arrival of their children, Moshe (Mo), now 3 and Eliana, born last year. Both children are at Full Circle Preschool, and the moms couldn’t be happier. “We love it!” Navah says. “We’re so grateful that the preschool started at OZ the year we needed it. The program and the teachers are wonderful.” Mo loves the outdoors and benefits from the school’s focus on fostering the children’s curiosity about the natural world around them. Full Circle Director Erika and the staff connect with the kids every morning via Zoom while everyone is at home.

For the past four years Navah has been a member of Ohavi Zedek’s Religious Committee, where she currently serves as co-chair with Basha Brody. Basha praises her commitment to Judaism and her approach to the issues that arise in our diverse community: “Navah makes sure every voice is heard. She brings her traditional background, her negotiation skills, an open mind, a mixed marriage and young family perspective to the committee,” Basha says. “She is the future of the synagogue.”

As the shelter-in-place directive restricts our physical interaction with the outside world, Navah, Katie and their kids are working and playing at home. A three-sport high school and college athlete/former world traveler, Navah’s exercise and travel are currently limited to family excursions on the trails behind their home in Richmond....alone for now, trying to stay safe.

*Dayenu.*

~ Judy Hershberg