

Evan Gershkovich, Still Unjustly Detained in Russia, Receives the

PRESS CLUB HONORS WALL STREET JOURNAL REPORTER, WHILE HIS COLLEAGUES, FRIENDS AND COUNTRY CONTINUE TO DEMAND HIS RELEASE

Daniel Pearl Award

BY SARAH KROUSE

Evan Gershkovich made a heart symbol with his hands in April, smiling from inside a see-through defendant's box in a Russian courtroom.

After more than a year of detention in Russia's notoriously sterile and isolating Lefortovo prison, the 32-year-old *Wall Street Journal* reporter showed the world that his spirits remain high.

Gershkovich, a U.S. citizen who was accredited by Russia's Foreign Ministry to work as a journalist in the country, was detained on March 29, 2023, by the Federal Security Service while on a reporting assignment in the city of Yekaterinburg. He has been awaiting trial on an allegation of espionage that he, the *Journal* and the U.S. government vehemently deny. The State Department has declared him wrongfully detained, a designation that commits the government to work for his release.

Russian prosecutors this month approved an indictment of Gershkovich, falsely accusing him of espionage and referring his case to a trial court, where he could face a series of secret, closed-door hearings. Authorities haven't publicly presented evidence to back up their allegations.

"Russia's latest move toward a sham trial is, while expected, deeply disappointing and still no

less outrageous," Dow Jones CEO and *Wall Street Journal* Publisher Almar Latour and *Wall Street Journal* Editor in Chief Emma Tucker said in a statement at the time.

Gershkovich is the first American journalist to be held in Russia on an allegation of espionage since the end of the Cold War. He has become a symbol of a new era of hostage diplomacy in which journalists and others are increasingly used as pawns by hostile states.

He has a contagious chuckle, a disarming smile and a chatty nature that puts sources, co-workers and friends at ease. Gershkovich is a son, a brother, a friend and a cherished colleague known for his humor, boundless energy and commitment to covering a nation he loved.

His stories capture the complexities of a country at war, from Putin's censorship to a sinking economy, a turbulent oil and gas industry and the connections between Russian and Ukrainian people. Gershkovich's work is distinct because of the voices he went to great lengths to capture: a coffee shop owner, a satellite company entrepreneur, a Russian DJ, a combat veteran planning to seek political asylum and the families of soldiers killed in battle. His focus on people shines through his copy.

Tonight, the Los Angeles Press Club is honoring him with the Daniel Pearl Award for Courage and Integrity in Journalism at the Southern California Journalism Awards. The prize is named for another *Wall Street Journal* foreign correspondent who was devoted to explaining the Arab and Islamic worlds to readers, and was killed by terrorists in Pakistan in 2002.

Pearl and Gershkovich represent "a really admirable and courageous form of journalism informed by being fascinated by the people in the countries where they're based," said Paul Beckett, assistant editor at *The Wall Street Journal*. Beckett, a long-



Gershkovich family photos...



time editor and reporter in New York, London, Mexico City and Washington, D.C., knew Pearl and now works full time on efforts to free Gershkovich.

Gershkovich, Beckett said, is like Pearl in having "real emotional attachments" to the place he covers and being "very open to hearing all kinds of points of view in the people and places they covered."

Gershkovich grew up speaking Russian at home in New Jersey, the son of Soviet-born Jewish emigres. As a child, Evan was curious and gregarious. His sister, Danielle, describes spotting him in the halls of their high school laughing with groups of people.

He is a keen soccer player and discovered a love for writing and travel in college. Gershkovich graduated from Bowdoin College in 2014 and started his journalism career in New York. He moved to Russia in 2017, working for *The Moscow Times* and *Agence France-Presse* before joining the *Journal* in January 2022.

"He was interested in all aspects of Russian culture, from financial and political to just the everyday person's experiences," Danielle said. "I think he felt he had a duty to be there to tell the stories of those people."



DANIEL PEARL AWARD
EVAN GERSHKOVICH



Gershkovich family with President Biden and First Lady at 2023 White House Correspondents Association dinner.



Top: On location, on assignment.

Above: Sharing cake at *Moscow Times*.

Right: Playing for Bowdoin College in third round of NCAA soccer in 2011.



that information, Brown said.

Gershkovich effortlessly melded into the *Journal's* newsroom, quickly spotting the sharpest reporters and editors, and chatting about journalism over beer or on WhatsApp, Brown said. "He simply loved talking about the trade, the craft, the process and the subject matter."

President Biden has said that he is working to secure the release of Gershkovich and other U.S. citizens wrongfully detained abroad. U.S. negotiators have proposed prisoner swaps to free Gershkovich, but so far no deal has been reached.

Gershkovich spends 23 hours a day in a cell. He writes letters to his friends and family—Danielle said she recently received three back—and plays chess via mail with his father. He hears occasional recaps of Arsenal matches on a Russian TV and is an avid reader.

The day Gershkovich made the heart sign with his hands, his mother sent her husband and daughter a screenshot.

"It's so hard to imagine how strong he is and how he's still carrying this light and this joy with him even in these circumstances," Danielle said. "It's just a credit to his strength and his optimism and his innocence."

Gershkovich's friends and colleagues have spent the last 14 months traveling, getting married, having children, filing stories, and celebrating holidays. We are outraged by all that he has missed.

We will continue to advocate for his release with readathons of his articles, social media storms, group swims and runs, letters and appeals to U.S. officials.

We see his strength and we will match it. As long as he's there, we'll be everywhere. We will not stop until he is free. 🇺🇸

Sarah Krouse is the Los Angeles Bureau Chief at The Wall Street Journal.

When Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022, Gershkovich traveled to the Belarus-Ukraine border, the only American reporter to see the first wounded Russian soldiers being evacuated. He published a story with details of the string of military ambulances he saw and the voices of local residents and doctors.

"He wanted to let someone else tell their story and be able to let their voice come through him," Danielle said of her brother's work.

Gershkovich wasn't naive about the risks of his job.

"Reporting on Russia is now also a regular practice of watching people you know get locked away for years," he tweeted in July 2022.

Russia and the far eastern portion of Europe are increasingly dangerous places for journalism, according to Reporters Without Borders, a group that advocates for press freedom.

"He believed the West—as Ukraine's main funder—needed vital information provided by journalism to inform its choices," said Eliot Brown, a longtime *Wall Street Journal* reporter in London who is friends with Gershkovich. Gershkovich felt that journalists needed to be brave in dispatching

#ISTANDWITH EVAN

It has been more than one year since our friend and colleague Evan Gershkovich was wrongfully detained by Russia during a reporting trip and accused of espionage. The Wall Street Journal and the U.S. government vehemently deny the allegation and continue to call for his immediate release.

No journalist should ever be detained for simply doing his job, and the charge against Evan is an outrage. Journalism is not a crime, and any portrayal to the contrary is fiction.

The stakes are high: Without press freedom, there is no free society.

Every day Evan remains detained is a day too long. We will not rest until he's home.

Please continue to share Evan's reporting and the latest updates on his situation by visiting [WSJ.com/Evan](https://www.wsj.com/evan).

Use the hashtag **#IStandWithEvan** to help keep his story front and center.

