

National [Bondi shooting](#)

OPINION

I told a friend the world was trembling, then Bondi erupted



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It was only on Saturday that I commented to a friend that it felt like the world was trembling; as if we were all birds taking flight, or animals seeking higher ground, in the face of an approaching storm.

I didn't quite know what was registering in my body – starvation, slaughter, war, the relentless cooking of the planet, the never-ending hallucination of a mobster in the White House, the housing crisis, social media-fuelled disinformation, a collective loss of trust, an end to any shared reality, or all of the above.



Digitally altered image. Photo: Mark Baker/AP

I'd been feeling for a long time that this was no ordinary time, that somewhere in my nervous system – perhaps in all our nervous systems – I'd been tuned to a frequency bandwidth of disturbance, and that a great disturbance was coming our way.

It was with relief, therefore, that I went down to south Bondi on Sunday evening to have dinner with my partner and two friends – two Jewish men and two non-Jewish women together at Gelbison, a family-run restaurant that has been serving our community its own Italian comfort food for nearly four decades. We were there for about five minutes when [the gunshots rang out](#). I didn't hear them at first because of the noise of people screaming and diving under tables, and then the mad rush to the back of the restaurant, where there was no exit.

"I can't believe my daughter is consoling me," one stricken mother said, as we pressed against the walls, mostly in stunned silence.

Hundreds of people were running past the restaurant, but still I wasn't sure this was a mass shooting, at least not until the next round of gunfire set off another stampede and we finally joined the rush through the backstreets to my home.

My first thought in the restaurant had been, not that this was the first night of Hanukkah – which it was – but that the Middle East conflict had finally smashed its way onto our shores. My second thought was the question of an Israeli friend who'd visited me in Bondi a few years ago: "What do people worry about here?" she'd asked, watching all the lovely tanned men and women rushing to the sea with surfboards under their arms.

"Oh, we worry about all the normal things," I replied. "Death, illness, pain, unrequited love, loneliness, the cost of living ..." and I could see in her bemusement my own good fortune and all the assumed dispensations of a country rarely, if ever, at war.

After leaving Gelbison restaurant, we got home and immediately turned on the television news – the ABC spectacularly missing in action – to discover the carnage that had just taken place a few hundred metres from where we'd been sitting. The numbers of dead and injured kept changing as the sky slowly turned from soft pink to inky black and the chopper rotor blades kept thumping above us.

I didn't know then that my elder daughter and son-in-law had been swimming at North Bondi 30 minutes before the two gunmen, father and son, had begun their murderous rampage.

I didn't know until yesterday that Rabbi Eli Schlanger had been the first murder victim identified and, that about 6pm on Sunday, writer Nikki Goldstein had been talking to friends about the book she and Schlanger were near completing. *Conversations with my Rabbi* is to be loosely based on the set of moral commandments presented by God to Noah following the Great Flood of biblical times, and, as Goldstein said, their book is about how we might learn to live harmoniously, Jew and non-Jew, in a collapsing world.

"Eli was such a beautiful man," she told me, "and I was telling the story only last night of how we met, just as he was about to die."

Strangely, that reminded me of how, just before the bomb had ripped through the Sari Club in Bali's Kuta beach in 2002, killing and injuring hundreds, the song blaring from the loudspeakers had been Sophie Ellis Bextor's *Murder on the Dancefloor*. Sometimes, the presentiment of things comes roaring through the loudspeakers of a nightclub, at other times, floating in on a frangipani breeze.

Here's another foreboding, although it feels more like fact now – that the usual suspects will seek to extract as much political capital from this catastrophe as possible.

Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has, of course, [been quick to accuse Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese of fuelling “the antisemitic fire”](#) by recognising a Palestinian state, as if Israel's campaign of mass murder in Gaza had had no bearing on the global tidal wave of support for the Palestinians.

The Murdoch press predictably attacked the Labor government immediately for its weakness in the face of antisemitism, as if the virus of antisemitism hasn't been a light sleeper in the dreamscape of nations for centuries. The Liberal Party under Sussan Ley inevitably accused the Albanese government of ignoring Jewish Australians for two years; so, too, on cue, Pauline Hanson.

And [Jillian Segal](#), Australia's special antisemitism envoy, unsurprisingly called on the government to fully endorse [her controversial strategy for combating antisemitism](#), a strategy that, in this Jewish man's opinion, holds terrifying implications for how justifiable criticism of Israel will be further conflated with antisemitism.

All this finger-pointing before we've even had a moment to collectively mourn the dead and injured. How about we pause and consider the two lasting images that the December 14, 2025, Hanukkah massacre presents us with?

One is of two men in black shooting innocent people; the other is of a man in white – an angel with the perfectly Muslim name of [Ahmed al Ahmed](#) – running towards the gunman.

Who do we choose to be in the midst of this national tragedy? The ones who pick up the guns – figuratively or literally – to cause harm to others, or the ones who run towards danger to save them?

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