

# Freed journalist describes Iran jail, questioning

**ATHENS, Greece (AP) — A British-Greek journalist released from jail in Iran said Friday that he had been blindfolded, held in solitary confinement and subjected to frequent interrogations.**

**I**ason Athanasiadis said the corridors of Tehran's main Evin prison had been filled with demonstrators arrested during massive rallies that followed Iran's disputed June 12 presidential election.

He said he was held there for 18 days and questioned for alleged spying.

"It was full to bursting with people who had been arrested in the street riots," Athanasiadis said in an interview with The Associated Press after his return to Athens, where his parents live.

"There were people sitting in rows on the floor; ... there were others being interrogated at little desks in the corridor because the interrogation rooms were full," he said.

"I heard questions and shouts coming from the interrogation rooms and the occasional slap."

Athanasiadis said he was detained and questioned by officials from Iran's Intelligence Ministry and was generally treated well, except for being slapped once during an early interrogation.

He was released July 5 after petitions from the Greek government.

Athanasiadis, 30, who speaks Farsi, is a freelance reporter who had been working for The Washington Times.



He said he was kept alone in a continually lit 5-foot by 8-foot (1.5-meter by 2.5-meter) cell and subjected to about a dozen lengthy interrogations, most while blindfolded.

Athanasiadis said he was blindfolded and told to turn his head to the wall whenever he left his cell to be questioned.

He still managed to sneak glimpses of the crowded corridors, he said.

Athanasiadis said that his interrogators showed him a 2005 photograph of himself chatting with a British diplomat as proof of his suspicious behavior. They also pointed to romantic text messages on a mobile phone he had borrowed from a friend; messages he said were to the friend who owned the phone.

"It was really a sort of Alice-in-Wonderland situation at times," he said. "At the end of the interviews, they were quite chummy and we were talking about philosophy. ... At this point they had all pulled on surgical masks so we could look each other in the eye."

Athanasiadis said his interrogators eventually apologized to him for taking so long, explaining they had been busy with the demonstrations.

"The way the system seems to work there is that if someone is suspicious then (security forces say) 'we'll just take him in'."

He said he was arrested by armed and plain-clothed men at Tehran Airport, who punched him and pushed him to the ground when he tried to alert other passengers to his detention.

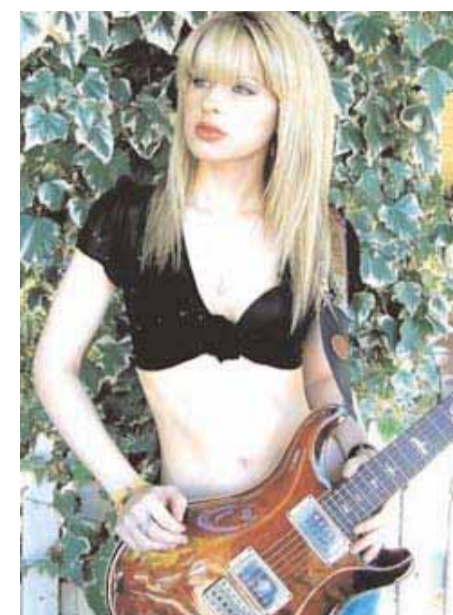
He said an American woman who was a bystander at the airport wrote down his details and later telephoned his editor in Washington, D.C.

On Wednesday, Athanasiadis met with Greek Foreign Minister Dora Bakoyannis and thanked her for playing a key role in ending his imprisonment.

He also thanked Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, spiritual leader of the world's Orthodox Christians, for his appeal to Iranian authorities.

"There was an amazing show (of support) by Greek diplomacy, also using unorthodox and interesting pressure points," he said.

"The Ecumenical Patriarch coming up in my support is something I'm going to be eternally grateful for."



## Michael Jackson's Greek Guitarist

While the world is mourning the death of Michael Jackson, the grief of Orianthi Panagaris is no less. She is one of the people who came close to the pop star in the days before his death. Everyone started wondering who the guitarist was in the video clip of MJ's rehearsals for his last tour that was going to take place in London this July. Guitarist Orianthi was seen jamming with Michael Jackson in the video clip which shot her to fame in just days. However, Orianthi's career started years earlier.

**Orianthi Panagaris**, or Orianthi, was born on January 22, 1985 in Adelaide, South Australia to Greek parents. She learned to play the acoustic guitar at age six, started electric when she was eleven and left school at 15 to focus on writing songs and performing. She has been playing in different bands since she was 14 around Adelaide and her first support show was for Steve Vai when she was 15. Orianthi had the opportunity to meet and jam with Carlos Santana in her hometown when she was 18. He invited Orianthi to get up and jam with him at sound-check then later asked if she would join him on stage that night. Orianthi signed with Geffen Records, and is living in Los Angeles and making a new record. Orianthi has played with Prince, toured with Steve Vai, made a video clip for Panasonic HD, had a song in the Bratz movie, played at the Eric Clapton Crossroads Guitar Festival and appeared in the New York Times business section promoting eco-friendly acoustic guitars. She has also appeared at the 51st annual Grammy Awards with Carrie Underwood where she was Underwood's lead guitar player. As a member of Michael Jackson's band she was to replace Jennifer Batten who had performed with Jackson for almost a decade. Jackson and Panagaris had been reported to have rehearsed for three hours per day up to the day before the pop legend died. Orianthi Panagaris performed in Jackson's public memorial on July 7th, 2009.

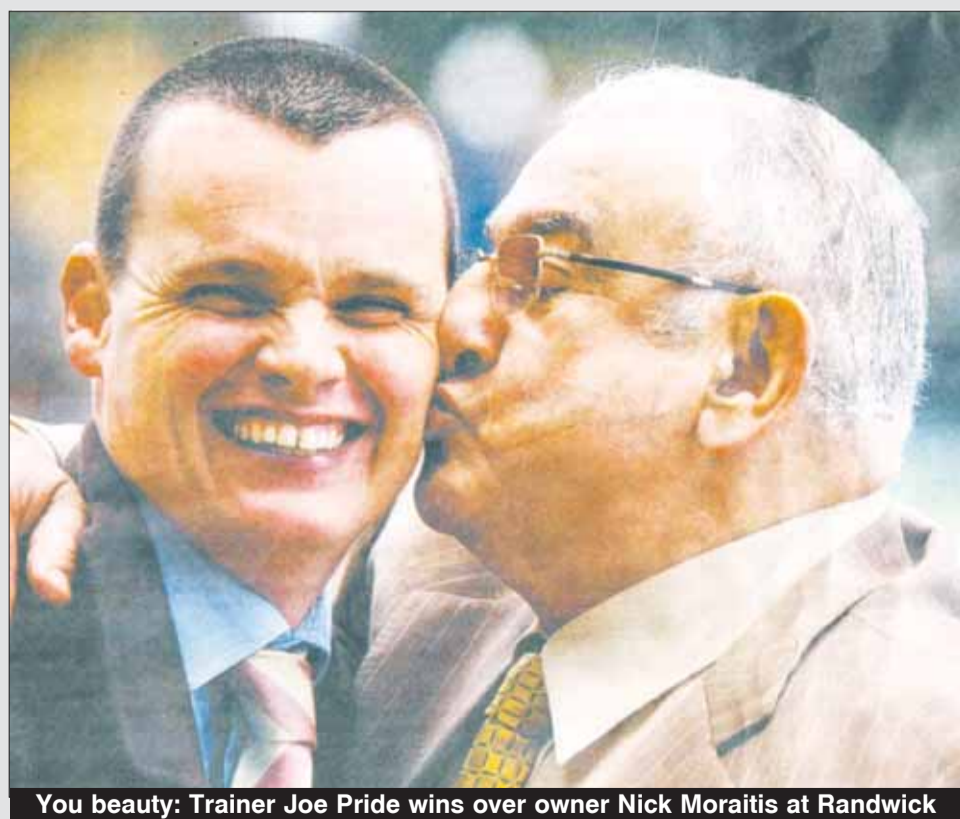
Orianthi has completed the recording of her first US release with Grammy nominated producer Howard Benson. The album is currently being mixed by Chris Lord-Alge.

## A cheeky win for Moraitis

**OWNER Nick Moraitis was so happy to have won the final event at Randwick with Bejewled that he planted a nice sloppy kiss on trainer Joe Pride's cheek.**

**Moraitis had not been at the track for more than two months after undergoing a spinal operation.**

**But he still knew how to find his way into the winner's circle as he celebrated another victory courtesy of pride. "I can't believe in such a short turnaround what Joe has been able to do for my horses. He has plenty of ability and he's a family man. He's got a great future," Moraitis said. The pair was sure to make headlines when Cox Plate hopeful Vision and Power steps out in the spring.**



**You beauty: Trainer Joe Pride wins over owner Nick Moraitis at Randwick**