

## **The Goldman Boy**

My family had known the Goldmans for many years. Actually, we came from the same town in Poland – Lencyza or in Yiddish Lenchitz – a small town near Lodz. Among my father’s old photos is one from 1917 of members of the local Zionist club and Mrs. Goldman appears there. Like my parents she and her husband also migrated to Palestine in the early 1920s, but did not stay very long and continued on to Australia, where he eventually established a profitable wholesale clothing business. I think they were instrumental in bringing our family to Melbourne, and over time developed business ties as well as personal ones. At that time we had no relatives in Australia, so friendships going back to the “old country” were very important, especially for my father who, being the youngest of his family, missed his siblings very much.

I was only a child then, oblivious to what was going on around me, and not particularly interested in my parents’ friends, but I was aware that the Goldmans were always around. They had one child, Danny, who spent a lot of time at our place and we at theirs, but he was my brother’s friend, not mine, as both boys were five or six years older than I.

Even so, I recall many incidents concerning this family, which are firmly fixed in my memory. A terrible trauma happened to me once in the Goldman home. My brother had taken me one day to see their new radio, a handsome cabinet model of a sort that was just coming onto the market. Previously “radio” meant to me a small crystal set with which my brother tinkered and heard vague distant voices. But the Goldman’s radio was large and had a loud, strong sound. I asked my brother who was talking and he told me that there was a little man sitting in the box, who did the talking. I was terrified and ran back to the door, and stood at a safe distance. (I was about five at the time.) Even after my brother explained that he was joking, that radio was simply the latest invention with a big future and that there was no one

inside the box, it took me quite a while to overcome this first shock, and the memory of it has stayed with me.

Then there was the time Danny came to play with my brother, when they were about eleven or twelve years old. They stayed at home by themselves while my mother took me with her to do some errands. In that particular house where we lived part of the backyard onto which the kitchen door opened had been covered with corrugated roofing material, into which a skylight had been set so that the kitchen wouldn't be dark. It was a nice sunny day and the boys thought it would be a good idea to climb up on the roof and sit in the sun. Danny thought it would be a better idea to sit on the skylight, but as he was a chubby boy the glass gave way and he went crashing through to the ground below. The noise, together with my brother's shouts at the sight of blood, brought the neighbors in, and they summoned an ambulance, which took Danny to the hospital. My mother came home to the sight of shattered glass and blood, and my brother in tears. She went to inform the Goldmans, who rushed off in hysterics to the hospital. Fortunately, no bones were broken and the damage was mostly cuts and bruises. Danny was released a couple of days later, and of course my brother got the blame, but I don't remember if he was punished or not. The event became firmly fixed in our family storybook.

The Goldmans also used to take a summer place in one of the nearby beach resorts, Frankston, and we were often invited to spend the day. I remember a frightful sunburn I once got, and so had to sleep on my stomach for several days.

As we grew older and our interests diverged, I saw less and less of Danny, who was also going his own way, not always to his parents' satisfaction. Sometimes I felt that his mother eyed me speculatively, but we were not in the least interested in each other.

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Once, on some special occasion, my brother invited me out to a movie. We were to meet at the café for a snack; my brother was a notorious latecomer, and I always refused to wait for him in the street. I was early and after giving my order settled back in my chair to look around. Not many people were there – no one that I knew, until I suddenly saw a familiar face at one of the more secluded tables. It was my brother’s friend Danny Goldman. He was with a young woman and they seemed to be deep in conversation. I did not know her, but had heard that he was “going steady,” so presumed she was the one. Although they were holding hands across the table, they looked more troubled than happy, oblivious to their surroundings. When my brother came, I pointed out the scene to him and he went over to say hello. He even sat down with them for a few minutes.

Danny and his friend Sara were indeed having a serious conversation, my brother told me. They were facing a difficult dilemma. She had said that Danny’s father simply did not like her or her family, and she was sure he would never agree to their marrying.

“What can we possibly do?” she said, appealing to my brother.

Danny kept trying to reassure her that they would find a way. While Alec sat there, he said to Sara, “I’ve talked to him several times, but he won’t budge. My mother is coming round but I don’t think she can persuade my Dad. It’s a real mess, and I’m terribly sorry that he’s making life so unpleasant for us, and particularly for you.... I don’t intend to give you up. We’ll find a way eventually. Please try to be patient a little longer.”

We had to leave for the cinema, but I was very troubled by this conversation. I was an impressionable, sensitive young person and could sense the strong emotions latent in the situation. I didn’t like violent scenes and was glad I was not directly involved.

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Some weeks after that afternoon when I had seen Danny and Sara in the café, a news flash went through the community: Danny Goldman was missing; he hadn't been home for three days, and hadn't contacted his parents, or Sara. Everyone was dumbfounded by the mystery though it was common knowledge that father and son didn't exactly get on.

Then on the fourth day, a stormy wintry day, a pile of his clothes, neatly folded, was found in a secluded spot on the St.Kilda beach. Shock and horror gripped the family and friends. The police were called in, and people began congregating at the Goldman home, as after a death. Mr. Goldman walked round like a man in a daze, trying to digest the terrible facts before him. It was impossible to talk to him – he was on a different planet. His wife was a little calmer, trying to be optimistic and hoping it was just a bad dream from which they would awaken to a sane, customary world.

After another three days, the police found Danny hiding out in one of the country towns, and brought him back to his parents. What ensued then can only be imagined, especially when Mr. Goldman discovered his wife had been party to the plot to break down his opposition to the marriage. He felt he had been made to look like a fool, and was as embarrassed as he was angry. Now Mrs. Goldman's calmness during the crisis became understandable; apparently, she had instigated or at least supported the plot, because she wanted her son's happiness, and disagreed with her husband's negative stand. She didn't want her son to die; she wanted him to marry and raise a family, and in her own quiet way she had stood up against her husband – and won.

The engagement of the young couple was announced, and the wedding took place three months later. I went on *aliyah* and left all behind, but I heard occasionally from my parents when each of the four Goldman grandchildren came into the world. Danny went into his father's business, which he eventually inherited and managed successfully, and their

children all did well in their adult careers. He was active in community affairs, becoming a public figure, and even took an interest in local politics.

Danny and Sara remained together for almost seventy years, until Death indeed parted them. Danny passed away just a few months ago, in January 2009. Many of the tributes spoke of him as a kind, generous and loving person, deeply attached to his family, and concerned with the welfare of his community. So, it seems Danny and Sara did live happily ever after, but my family always remembers him as the boy who fell through the skylight.