

Gary Goldstein, Visual Artist

I remember that in 1998 I came from Israel to Hartford, Connecticut to attend my father's funeral. I expected that my family, my mother, brother, sister and I would be alone at the cemetery. To my surprise, there were over 200 people present. I discovered that my father was beloved. That's my parents were people who the entire community loved and cherished.

I did not remember my father ever saying "I love you." I remembered only the beatings and insults. The anger.

A process of healing began for me when I became a grandfather. Through the physical contact with my first grandson, I retrieved sensations, touches, smells and words that I received from my parents. That was the beginning of change. I began to see them as people who treated me, among other things, with warmth.

During the time of our meetings as a group at The Van Leer Jerusalem Institute, I found a greeting card for Hannuka that my father had sent me. I imagine that it was from the mid-90s when my mother was in the early stages of dementia. He wrote in his broken English. I could hear his Yiddish accent as he wrote:

"11/20

Hi kids How are you all
Home everything is ok
You never so much snow
This year more than last year
It is only December
Home is everything ok
cept your Mother she forget
olot Shuli she is working
The Boys are orede
Katie is in England
Michael is very busy He is agod
Boy, I am closer to my eightieth year
We love you Mom Dad."

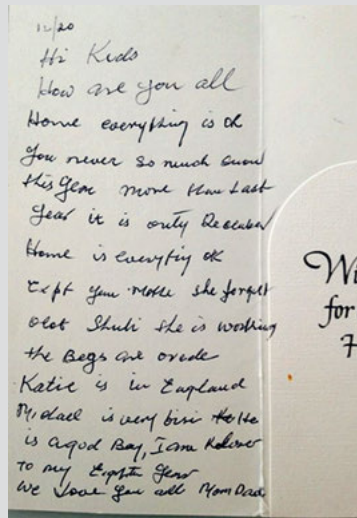


Fig. 1: Postcard from Sam Goldstein, USA, the 1990's.

Gary Goldstein

Inside That Gray Cloud

Thrilling leaves falling intermittently. Blackened hulks, shapes against a light sky. Memories of childhood. Children alone in silence, bombarded by screams, by hits, by cries. These black forms dancing, flaccid and inert on a leaden floor. Decimated by memory. Memories in an empty mind, emptied by thoughts dripping from that box into an overflowing pool. The waves inundating and drowning me. Stifling my air, my breaths. I am old. A no longer child. I am chilled by the waste, by the pain of that earlier time. Each time I remember. I cannot forget. I am grey. Leaden. Led to damnation. To silliness in memories, barbs and thorns and howling winds blowing me away. Knocking me down. Trampled and spiked. Stuck with barbs of thoughts, of flickering lights.

I was surprised that when I let Anat, my wife, read the texts which I had written, how difficult she found them. I was surprised as well when I read my brief texts to my writing Group – whose members are “second generation” – the reactions of difficulty, of pain, of horror. That is after listening to their brief tales of horror and woe. Stories of just growing up. Growing up in houses where people try to be normal, try to raise families, try to build their lives. Yet, intentions apart, results something else

Before I run away
Before I fall flat on my face
Before I kneel in obeisance
Obeying all requests
Before I hang out the laundry
Stretching and distorted
Uncomfortably forward and to the side
Before I finish the drawing
Blackening the space around the flower
I die of boredom and continue out of need
Out of satisfaction.
Before I sway from my
Decided path
Determined
Before
I knew
About today.
Before I lay me down

To sleep
 Putting an end to
 Today's consciousness
 Replenishing my desires
 Before I can't take it anymore
 I kneel
 I hide
 I fade away.

I tried to recall my mother saying my name. I could not really remember. What I did recall was Gary. Although that was strange, since the pronunciation of that Americanized name with her heavy Yiddish accent was probably unnatural to her. I asked my wife, Anat how my mother called me on our visits home. She said Gersheleh. I have no recollection of her calling me that name. Gersheleh for her was so much more familiar. It was warmer and intimate. It bespoke a continuum, a continuation. It made me small and loved, yet at the same time, foreign to myself and to others.

Each sentence when I was growing up never ended in the same language in which it began. The English words were pronounced in a heavy, Yiddish accent something which made me ashamed. I looked down upon my parents, upon their foreignness. Those diminutives, Gersheleh, Hanka, Moisheleh, made them small. They made us small. They diminished us. They created the feeling in me of Gershon, a stranger in a strange land. Nicht a hier. Nicht a heir. Neither here nor there.

During one of my brother's visits to Tel Aviv, sitting along the sea, we began to speak about our family while growing up. The more we spoke the less I remembered. It was as if hearing about a family I had seen in a film once. The more that we spoke, the more I felt like I was sinking. I was getting more and more tired. All my digestive problems returned after an extended period of well-being. I can see the mechanism in my reaction to my family. My shutting off and shutting down. A defense mechanism. I could not remember. I felt distant. I had no strength to move or to talk. I felt empty.

I was gone. Long gone. I was found and then not. Looking for myself. Looking. Lost. Listless. Hiding from myself. Buried under layers of heaviness. Flowers, blooming, yet I center upon the prickly, wounding parts. Fuzz. Fizzy. Effervescent. ORANGE. A kind of self portrait. Fleshy. Flecks. Flickers. I see only in snips, in snippets. In parts. Nothing is whole. There is only a hole. Nothing is whole. The walls. Dark. Scaling. Looming ever upward, covering the light. Covering my view of the outside where the lives of others transpire while I expire, respire, rip the tubes. Heaven help me and those around me. A net of mesh. A net of brambles, of things I feel and do not see. I feel lost at sea. I am sightless, hearing only the inner

noise, the necessities of day to day. The occasional bursts of hope send me rushing – scampering up the walls. Scaling the sides. Seasick with the effort. Feeling the scratches, the tears on my flesh, lunging, extending my body as at the end of a race. I lay panting, short of breath, my face on the floor.

I always knew that both my parents came from very large families, each from a family of eight children. I had cousins, uncles, and aunts. All those family members were murdered during the war. Only my father, my mother and her younger sister Tova survived. Despite all that I knew, and despite my mother's constant telling of her experiences, I never thought of my parents and what they experienced before the war and in the ghetto and the camps. I never thought of their families, my families, and what happened to them. For me, their presence was one of lack. While preparing for a lecture at a conference at Bezalel, I was amazed to see that most of my work from the last fifteen years was comprised of portraits. I realized with surprise that my work assumed the guise of a forest of faces, a forest of portraits of people that I never met, seemingly that I never thought about. Yet, I never stop thinking about them. Their images appear, transform and reappear in drawing after drawing, year after year on pages of old books upon which that I create my works.

So many stilled voices, once so loud so vibrant. None believed in their silence, their stillness. Snow covering their tracks leaving no trace. Children's voices, their excitement and energy drowning out the possibility of death, of debts, of devastation. Walking ahead, head raised, the frenetic energy, the lost souls, seeking salvation seeking peace, settling for less.

The street with that huge building, looming with its gaping mouth, large and with a locked gate, which opens to the inmates enclosed within. The row of bells named and others nameless. 29 Franciskanska Ulice, on the corner of Warsaw Ghetto Uprising Ulice in the old Lodz Ghetto. This six story building was part of my mother's recollections. At the corner where trams and buses run, you turn right in the direction of the Jewish cemetery. Anat and I went there with Milena, who guided us. After walking around the ghetto, to see the neighborhood where my mother and her family lived before and during the war, we continued to the cemetery. Then we went to eat Polish food. We ate pirogi, delicious, in a simple, modern, unappealing yet, somehow inviting restaurant with an abandoned garden in the front. We ate the doughy, comforting warmth. We felt life, sustenance, enjoyment on our taste buds, flowing into our bodies.

According to my mother's deposition to the German Reparations Commission, her family owned that large building. She recounted her memories going along with her father, and sometimes by herself, collecting the rents from their tenants. According to Milena, there is no record of my mother's family owning the building.

Will I last? Be the last in my class? The last one standing? Remaining after their demise? Will I live forever? Will I die with a bang or with a whimper? Drool. Saliva dripping off the corners of my mouth. My chin.

The crinkles of the scar on my cheek more pronounced and declarative every day. I stare in the mirror. My oracle. My father stares back. He was alive. Immortal like me. Now I am immortal without him.

Sadness sprinkles down. A light drizzle. First pleasing and then drenching wet. The breeze makes me shiver. Exposed. Naked. My clothes stick to my skin. To my bones. My gaunt muscles.

I cower. Within myself. Within my cave. My bunker. I seek relief. In myself. From myself. To be relaxed at ease. In myself. From myself. At home. In bed. Escaping into other lives. Not alone in a room. In space with myself. That raging beast devouring me. Gnawing my bones. Breaking the bones. Sucking the marrow.

I scream. I run. I escape. In my dreams. In life. In here, rooted to the spot. The spit still rolling down my chin. Welling up in my mouth. Collecting. Filling the space. Stifling my screams.

I'm choking. I'm choked. I wait for relief. I wait. I cannot walk. Cannot talk. Cannot run. Ridicule. Eject. Ejaculate. All remains. Exposed.

Feasted upon by the crows. Black. Cruel. Critical. Cawing. Making their unpleasant screams. Their yells. They fly away. Strings of flesh. My flesh in their beaks. I remain. rooted to the spot.

In life. In death. Rooted. Unable to move. To make. To initiate. To ingratiate. It is God's will. My will. My lack of will. Not lack of want. I want. I wanted. I desire still. And now I am still. Not moving. Rooted to this spot. This ground. This earth.

If I exist, I exist in people's memory. They in turn eaten. Chewed up. Their chins dribble and run with spit. And then, they forget.

When I was 32 or 33, married and living in Jerusalem, I met Arnold – a distant relative, whom I met once 22 years previously at my brother's bar mitzvah. Arnold suddenly reappeared in my life when he was in Israel to promote a book that he had written chronicling his experiences as a boy during the Second World War.

He describes my parents meeting after the war, their wedding and one other previously unknown fact – My father had been married before the war; He had a daughter who was murdered in Auschwitz. Shortly after that meeting, I visited my parents in the USA. I read them this excerpt in the book referring to my father's previous relationship. Both my parents were silent. My mother turned red. I asked if it was true. They said yes. I asked my father how old the little girl was. He said four years old. What was her name? Mary. Miriam. Whom did she look like? Dina, my younger daughter. That was the only time that we spoke about the subject.

Soft formless clouds
Against a bright morning sky
The edges bright white
The bulk dark
Days are formed in habitual pattern
Simple actions
Repeated one day
And the next
That routine
That simplicity
A country life
In the midst of this
City
To clean
To organize
To throw away
To do without
Clearing space
In this small apartment
More than enough for our needs
Reading
Adventure stories
Of war
An escape
A life lived
Vicariously
Making drawings
With small laborious
Marks
Repeated
Mark after mark
Drawing after drawing
Day after day
The drama included
Held fast
In those frozen images

For years, I had no memories of the house in which I spent most of my childhood. I could remember only my room which I shared with my younger brother and the back porch. Through efforts, I regained the living room and dining room and parts

of the kitchen. The rest of the house still remain unknown. The porch had a tin roof which I loved during times of rain. The sound of the rain pelting the roof was augmented by the tin. Almost any rain seemed like a storm. It was a place of refuge during summer storms where the warmth and wet combined with a dry shelter within.

The back porch was a refuge for also my father who smoked. My mother did not and could not stand the smell and residue of smoke, something my father trailed wherever he went. He often chewed Dentyne Chewing Gum, an effort to mask the smell. It was in the kitchen, after coming into the house, that my mother added a detail to a story with which I had grown up.

After the war, my parents lived in a displaced persons camp in Lampertheim, Germany for five years. There, they had a daughter, Feigeleh, named after both my father and mother's mothers. Tsipora. Bird. She died at 1 1/2 years of age, scalded to death by a pot of boiling water placed on a hot plate on a board between two chairs. The pain and agony to my mother was a theme frequently returned to by her.

One day in the kitchen, it could have been raining. It could've been winter. My father entered. I was sitting there with my mother. On my father's entrance, my mother shrieked "because of you and your cigarettes Feigeh is dead. You should have watched her and you went out for a smoke".

My father recoiled as if struck. He tightened like a coil and sprang at my mother as if he was going to grasp her face or throat. He growled and inches from her face he stopped, mute, helpless, limp.

What we do is bad at first, for a long time, and then, hopefully it gets better. Does it get better? Does something about us change? And what is it? Day in. Day out. Pubis up. Tailbone down. The same movement practiced each day. Each day something different. Each day exactly the same. There is a tremendous sense of loneliness. Of being inside. Of feeling the heating come on. Of turning away the cold inside us. There is no sense of the person, of life being sublime or transcendent. There is the room. The heat. Silent hours. No insights. Just inside. Just things. Life before was boring. Now is boring. There is a mist, grey and unformed. Darkness inside of me. Me inside that grey cloud. That grey smoke. It makes me tired, so tired I can barely move. Escape? But to where? The smoke is inside me. It makes me tired.

Little boy plays alone in a room. That room is attached to house, to a neighborhood, to a town. When thought of and remembered, there are spaces. There are places. There are no people. There is the floor. Carpeted. . Closed. There are two beds closely spaced. Two windows each on a different wall. There is the ceiling and door jamb. There is green abstract wallpaper. It was similar to Josef Albers square within a square. Although this one gives the impression of being a closed set, a stage. Again, a closed space. A closed box. Yet, this one repeating again and again, serial like.

Sometimes, the room with its walls seems so substantial, so real. So fortified. Sometimes, it seems like cardboard, miniaturized.

Sometimes stable. Sometimes hurtling into space. The house uncharted and unremembered is dark. The room is bright. There were small toys. There were tiny soldiers sharing that loneliness. Where were they? Were they in boxes? In bags? On the floor? There was a chest of drawers. I do not remember where. There might have been a closet for clothing and for toys.

Inside the house the protected, protracted space. It is space where one drifts weightless and alone in the dark. Dark nesses spared of light. It is the place where I do my work. There is no importance of my work to anyone but to myself. To think not is a conceit. To do it, to invest so much, is a conceit devoid of reason, of sense. Yet I do it, listening to poems, to hear the words expressing emptiness and loneliness, expressing death and its fear, the fear inside of me. There is something in the act, the action itself, which gives me warmth.

Morning. Early. Beginnings. Beginning. The excitement of making and seeing. Looking at what emerges. What flows. Whales captured. Harpooned. Killed. No longer alive. Captured. The men needed to live. To emerge alive. Living. 1942. Giving up their children. Knowing their fate. The guilt of not protecting. Of not fighting. Of giving them up to survive. Then, his next daughter . . . dying because of him? Medicated. Raging. He survived. He kept living. Why? How? How could he live with himself? Everyone dead. He survives.

To begin again
 Each new drawing
 Is so frightening
 Afraid of what
 Yesterday we saw two boys with a drone
 Flying it in a field
 In the middle of the city
 The drone got stuck
 In the trees
 It's propellers
 Twirling helplessly in the branches
 Neither up nor down
 Going nowhere
 The upturned faces
 Expectantly
 Hopefully

Gazing at the propellers
 Impotently
 Turning
 Making sounds
 Stuck

When I was six or six and a half years old I was photographed together with my one year old brother, my older sister and two other lovely, well-dressed girls. We were at a picnic, all well-dressed, clean, sparkling, the hopes of immigrant, tailor parents at a Ladies' Alteration picnic at the Foreman's home.

I am squinting, frowning into the camera, chubby, a double chin, slightly bow-legged. That has been an image that I have carried inside myself for years. I look unhappy. I appear unhappy. I am unhappy. We were photographed together simply because we were children. We didn't know each other.

I think of my grandson, how loved he is, surrounded by love. How many photos of him laughing and smiling. I ignore the photos of him unhappy and unsmiling, indeed frowning.

I have always felt unloved and unhappy as I appear in that photograph. It could well be that there are other moments, undocumented, with me smiling, running, happy. That fat, unloved, unlovable boy is what I see when I close my eyes, although I am surrounded by love. I can feel that my interpretation of the photo may well be flawed. In any event, I am not that little boy now. If he was here now, I know that he would be lovable, loved. My brother in his joy at standing, in his chubbiness, seems happy as he is today, except when he is not.

When I consider that little boy, I feel that the radioactivity of my misery infected and contaminated me all my life. I was NOT bad. My parents were not bad. My brother and sister were not bad. We were just miserable. That misery resurfaces so often despite so many signs indicating a different reality.

In that photograph, I was a vessel of hope, the hope of others. I still feel that little boy inside my body. I am pregnant with him now. I want so much to love him and I long for his love.

Bathing in warmth,
 Aglow.
 The sun's rays softening its painful midday glare.
 Floating. Drifting.
 Alone.
 A part.
 Words.
 Sounds.

Soothing, caressing thoughts lifting and snatching away.
 Conscious of the light's nearing end.



Fig. 1: Gary Goldstein, drawings from the series *Milkwood* (2011), 24.5x34 cm, ink, pencil and an oil felt-pen, painted on the pages of a book.



Fig. 2: Gary Goldstein, drawings from the series *Milkwood* (2011), 24.5x34 cm, ink, pencil and an oil felt-pen, painted on the pages of a book.

