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2005
REV LEOPOLD GORAN

by Trudie Collins

My father, Leopold Goran, was born in Lithuania (I am not sure where) towards the end of the nineteenth century. His mother died in childbirth, so consequently he had a stepmother who ignored his existence, and when not yet nine, he left home to avoid being pulled into the Russian army. He resided with an uncle who lived in Königsberg, near the Polish and German borders. There he learned Polish and German and of course his native languages were Yiddish and Russian. He had begun Talmud studies at the age of four.

I don't know how he arrived at his uncle's house; he probably walked. At fourteen or fifteen he left for England, his destination being London. Later on he met my mother, and they eventually married.

About two years later, the 1914–1918 war broke out. Father joined the British forces and served in France, Belgium and near the Italian border. He had a gift for languages, which he spoke like a native. He had no accent with his English. He suffered gas poisoning and mustard gas burns on his legs. This affected his health in the middle years of his life. If we did not hear him coughing at night, we wondered what was wrong.

After about two years he was transferred to an intelligence corps, as his knowledge of languages came in very useful. He interrogated Italian prisoners; his French was also found to be useful.

In 1918 he was demobilised and doctors advised him to leave England as the gas poisoning was affecting his lungs. So he took his wife and family, two boys and two girls, by ship to Hobart, Tasmania. I was one year old when we arrived in Hobart, where my father's knowledge of all things Jewish was put to good use. He conducted services at Hobart Shule and sometimes at Launceston.

He was then Mr L Goran. After approximately three years he decided that his family needed more Yiddishkeit, so our new home was Georgina Street, Newtown. At the Newtown Shule my father was Rabbi Lenzer's assistant. He did the *davening* as cantor, and the Torah reading (his singing voice was very pleasant), and taught the children. He also studied *shechitah* and qualified as a *shochet*, so he did the slaughtering at Homebush abattoirs. He was then given the title of Reverend L Goran.

He would have then been in his late twenties. He was a very handsome man, tall, and with a pleasing personality.

I accompanied him to Homebush one morning (not without some trepidation). I was about five years old going on six, but I was pleasantly surprised; the place was spotless and the animals suffered very little because of my father's skill. Watching him sharpen the *chalafim* (knives), was fascinating, one about six inches long for

chickens, one about nine or ten for sheep, and the one for bullocks was about fifteen inches long. The blades were rubbed round and round on a rectangular grey stone very slowly so there were no nicks in the edge. We were not allowed to touch the knives.

There was some jealousy at the helm as my father was very popular and I can remember him saying to my mother, "I don't want to cause Rabbi Lenzer any stress; he is an old man. There is an offer at the Shule in Ballarat. Let us go!" (Poor mother!) So our new place of abode was the house next to Ballarat Shule. I really loved that place.

The people were so nice to us and we had our own bedrooms. That was really a big plus, but the congregation was seventeen families and as another child was expected, we had to think about another change, not only because the Shule could not afford a larger salary, but my mother needed specialist obstetrical treatment.

Our next port of call was Melbourne. My youngest brother was born two months prematurely. We watched over him very carefully, as at seven months he was still very tiny. He was actually the sixth Goran child, but my oldest brother whose name originally was Rogerginsky, was legally adopted by my father. (Mother had been married before in Poland.)

In due course, my father was inducted into the Carlton Shule, but things did not work out as planned. There was a disagreement about an elderly couple who were married by my father; evidently the marriage should not have taken place.

To cut a long story short my father started a Talmud Torah in a hall in Amos Street, North Carlton. It was very well attended and quite popular as they were mostly Russian and Polish people, and they enjoyed the way my father conducted Shabbat and Yomtov services as well as the way the children were taught.

Conditions were very difficult because of the big depression. I think it started about 1928. My father helped things along by teaching Barmitzvah boys privately, some at our house, some at Melbourne Grammar and some at Wesley College. Also he was appointed Crown Interpreter for the State of Victoria in French and Italian court cases, but cheques for this task were spasmodic. Nevertheless they were very welcome financially.

It gave me a bad image of Melbourne from about third class primary to third and fourth year high school. Still my father brought immigrants home for Shabbat dinner on Friday nights. My mother had to measure our share of beef, which was a luxury for Shabbat. Fortunately she was very good at raising poultry, which I think she learned from her grandmother in Karlsh, Poland. So we had chicken soup and *lockshen* that she made herself. The *challot* were made with eggs from the chickens and they were delicious. The kitchen was full of Shabbat odours.

In 1938 my father decided we were returning to Sydney. He had a brother and his family who had migrated to Sydney a few years previously. He, his wife and sons lived at Bass Hill, which in those days was like the bush.

My father had remarked to his brother, who was nine years his senior, that his children would not be mixing with Jewish people. He replied that his wife was happy in her little mixed business, and he did not intend to move. Uncle Mark Goran's older son was quite a well-known accountant. His younger son was Judge Goran. My father was right: both married non-Jewish women. They are now all deceased.

However this is supposed to be my father's story, so to get back to the story. My father's health was not wonderful, with the constant coughing from the gas poisoning. He did some journalistic work, and had some short stories published, and even had some read on the radio.

Then World War II started in 1939, and of course he wanted to be useful to the Australian Government, so once again he was a soldier. He used to meet small ships in the harbour and as they were mostly French or Italian, they were interrogated as to what they were carrying. In most cases it was wine.

Being in the army, he was required to do guard duty at Eastern Command. They alternated once per week. There he was standing for hours, but the mustard gas burns on his legs had weakened the arteries, and he was taken to Concord Military Hospital, where he spent nine weeks, and that was the end of his army career.

He was not one for giving up. He contacted the *Sydney Morning Herald*, and they installed a short wave radio, and my father transcribed the news from "Pravda" with much groaning from us because this took place at 2 am. We became used to it after a while.

My brother Phillip was involved with the Strathfield Shule. I think it was started by Mrs Fanny Robinson in a double-storey terrace on the corner of Florence Street and Albyn Road. My brother was elected president and we all worked raising funds to build a nice new Shule. My brother approached my father to see if he would conduct services there. He did so, and the Shule grew with people from Austria, Germany, Poland, England and a few Australians. My brother was president for ten years. My late husband Frank kept his seat at the Great, but we both became members at Strathfield Shule. When my father passed away at 67 we rejoined the Great.