

*Danny & Lily:  
Recollections of a Son*

By Jack Zaraya

A man of great physical and emotional strength, Danny stood just five feet two and a half. He was slight, weighing possibly 112 pounds, a veritable flyweight had he been a boxer, which, in fact, he had, an amateur, with just a few fights under his belt during his early 20s. He had good posture, which made him appear taller. And he walked fast, as if always in a hurry. He talked kind of loud, and on the phone he was louder, as if there was some urgency to overcome the distance to the unseen party at the other end. When he conversed in person, he tended to gesticulate.

Nonetheless, he possessed a calm demeanor and was largely unruffled by simple human shortcomings, his own as well as others'. Mainly uneducated, he took pride in his common sense. Above all, he felt a need to help others.

I knew him roughly from the age of thirty-eight until his death at seventy-four. For most of his adult life in America, he worked as a presser of garments in Manhattan, a repetitive, laborious job situated in a sweatshop. Yet, this brought him a good living, and his reputation as a fast and efficient worker spread throughout the New York City garment district, where he was in demand in factories that, at times, were short of help.

In addition, he was self-taught in the knowledge of electricity and would come to work early to repair the sewing machines that broke down regularly. He never asked to be paid for this service and rarely took a vacation or missed a day of work. Simply put, this was the way he was.

I worked in the same factory, Hazan's Sportswear, in the summer of 1963, my first job as I transitioned from high school to college. I was an "assorter," whose function was to bundle various

materials, buttons, belts, and labels, needed by the sewers to turn into a marketable skirt or, in the particular style of that summer, a culotte. I disliked the work, resenting that I was not instead lying on the beach in Rockaway as I had done daily throughout every previous summer of my life.

Danny, who worked on the other side of the shop, would now and then saunter to my station. "How ya doing?" he would ask, sweat dripping down his arms in his tank-top undershirt, a smile always creasing his face. Had I not been a self-absorbed 17-year-old, I might have felt a twinge of guilt. Danny complained very little, except about Mr. Hazan, whom he despised. Why? Because the boss showed little respect for the sewing machine operators, virtually all Puerto Rican women, whose slightest transgression in the workplace would set him off on a rant of epithets. Though Mr. Hazan admired his star presser without reservation, Danny possessed an uncommonly fair sense of justice and could not tolerate this dichotomy.

"God bless America" was an expression Danny used more than any other. Once, many years after his death, I rode on the ferry to Ellis Island. Passing the Statue of Liberty, I imagined with all my might how Danny, as a 14-year-old boy emigrating from Greece by himself in 1923, must have felt when his eyes set upon this site. I have no doubt he was overwhelmed with emotion. If ever there was one, he was born an American patriot in a foreign country.

His mother and four siblings had arrived on Ellis Island more than a year before Danny. As the middle child and the most self-sufficient, he was left behind with his ailing father. When his papa died, he was sent his ticket to America on the ocean liner *Acropolis*.

He joined his family on the Lower East Side of Manhattan, went to school to learn English, and quickly adapted to the New York City life he would always cherish.

Danny's mother, Rikula, whose immigration to America was spurred by her refusal to allow her oldest son to be drafted into the Greek army when he came of age, was, indeed, a matriarch, all four feet six of her. Rikula's four resourceful sons worked in the manufacture of batteries, each making an exorbitant \$100 a week during the throes of the Great Depression. She demanded their total earnings, then gave each son back \$5. Danny – remember his fair sense of justice, albeit in this case to himself – would go to a print shop to have his pay stub changed from \$100 to \$80, and present that to her.

Rikula held a tight rein on her only daughter, Vicki, the youngest sibling whose beauty commonly drew the whistles of the young men on the streets of Spanish Harlem where the family was now living. When Vicki began a flirtation with a handsome Latino in the neighborhood, Rikula ordered her sons to follow her and break up the assignations. Danny, however, took no part in this effort, bearing no prejudice toward anyone and knowing that his sister was doing nothing wrong. Eventually, Vicki and Eddie became serious and eloped. At once, Eddie was accepted as an endeared member of the family.

In due time, Danny began to feel constrained in the spacious railroad apartment on Lenox Avenue where he was living with his brothers, their wives, several boarders, and, of course, the autocratic Rikula. He missed the old country and the friends he left behind when he was a boy but never forgot. Danny decided to join the U.S. Merchant Marine.

For the next year, he worked shoveling coal in the boiler room of a Merchant Marine ship. He also revisited his native land and saw a good part of the world, including sailing through the Panama Canal where he swam in its murky waters.

Now truly “Americanized,” Danny became the first in the family to own and drive a car, a 1934 Packard that seated seven. He often took a car full of relatives and friends for outings in the country, including the amusement park in Rye Beach that his young niece, Matilda, enjoyed so much. Subsequently, he taught many of them to drive.

Meanwhile, his mother had something in store for him. Every week, Rikula held poker games in her apartment where other immigrants from their community in Salonika gathered, as much for the gambling excitement as for the social interaction. Bertha and her husband, David, were two such participants. Rikula and Bertha got to talking, and soon they were trying to match-make Danny, still a bachelor now in his late 20s, with Bertha’s younger sister, Lily, who was living in Paris with her mother and near two married sisters.

Danny was not averse to the idea and soon Rikula set in motion the communications toward that end, demanding, at the outset, to see a photograph of the prospective bride. Duly mailed and received, the black and white photo portrayed in full length a young woman wearing a long dress and standing at a slight angle to the right. Because of that stance, her right arm was almost totally hidden.

No surprise that Rikula was not satisfied, suspecting that something was amiss with the young woman’s right arm. Thus, another photo was ordered, this one with all major body parts in evidence. Danny and – more importantly – his mother were pleased

with what they saw. In the autumn of 1936, he set sail for Paris with the help of David, his future brother-in-law, who bankrolled the voyage.

A petite, pretty woman whose physical appearance was compatible with Danny's, Lily had lived with her widowed mother, Luna, in Salonika and sadly witnessed the emigration of her three older sisters, Bertha to America and Elvira and Mary to France. Suddenly, in 1928, things changed. In Paris, Mary became pregnant, was promptly abandoned by the father, and, after giving birth to a boy, wrote to her mother, with great shame, summoning her to her side. Consequently, Luna and her youngest daughter permanently left their native country for France.

They resided in a small apartment in Paris on Rue Rochechouart, and Lily, who was very good with figures, worked in a bank. Although unquestionably attractive, Lily was somewhat timid and shy and led a sheltered life. Nevertheless, after seven years in France, she recognized that marital opportunities were diminishing with the passage of time. Encouraged by her mother, Lily allowed herself to embrace the idea of meeting Danny. After all, he was an American citizen who was from the same part of the world as she, and he came with the recommendation of her sister Bertha.

A whirlwind two-week courtship – granted, with chaperones always present – resulted in a wedding ceremony. From the start, Danny loved Lily, but not Paris. He found that city to be in sharp contrast to New York. Though he had a small command of the language, Parisians were not always friendly or accommodating. Moreover, living in 1930s New York, he enjoyed the freedom to ride the subway at any hour and to see a movie on 42<sup>nd</sup> Street in the

middle of the night. In Gay Paree, the Metro shut down at midnight and a late movie was out of the question.

Aside from leaving Lily behind for the time being, Danny departed Paris with no regrets. Within a few months, Lily, along with her mother, arrived in America.

While Luna went to live with Bertha's family, Danny and Lily settled, although not very comfortably, in Rikula's expansive apartment until they could find one of their own. Because of Danny's unease in having to share living space as a married man with other members of the family, he refused to sleep in the same room with his new wife. This created an indelicate atmosphere, primarily for Lily, who at first felt deeply rejected until she began to understand her husband's reticence. Shortly, the couple moved to an apartment "uptown," in the Bronx, and began the routines of marital life.

Danny now joined his brothers in the garments trade, starting out as a sewing machine operator and bringing along Lily, whom he was teaching to sew. Soon, she proved to be a whiz, outproducing all other employees. Meanwhile, Danny transferred his labor and skills to that of a presser.

They enjoyed spending time with family and friends and often went to the movies, which helped Lily, already fluent in three languages, to learn English. A significant annual experience was spending the summer in Rockaway Beach where brother-in-law David owned a boarding house that attracted many immigrants from Salonika.

The tenants who dwelled in the three-story frame house lived virtually as one extended family, rarely keeping their doors shut during daylight hours, with the aromas of ethnic cooking wafting into

common hallways. Danny and Lily lived on the top floor along with Luna, Bertha and David and their two young sons. The women cooked in tandem and the family ate dinner together. Danny would arrive home in early evening after a scorching day at the factory and immediately go for a dip in the rough Atlantic surf, then briefly bask in the sun from the porch of the house at 158 Beach 71<sup>st</sup> Street.

The conversations at dinner ran the gamut, from family to old world reminiscence to politics and current events to the Brooklyn Dodgers who were beloved by Bertha's boys. After dinner, Danny would gravitate to the pool room on the boardwalk, next door to the candy store that David owned and operated. Danny was a carom billiards shark, and many an evening he took the measure of would-be hustlers from the city. Afterward, he rewarded himself with a black and white ice cream soda at his brother-in-law's store.

Meanwhile, Bertha and Lily hosted a nightly poker game in Bertha's one-room apartment. Six or seven other women would trudge their way up to the third floor, congregate around the multi-functional dinner table, and play cards for nickels and dimes for the next few hours. It was miraculous that Bertha's sons were able to sleep just a few feet away from the game, lights shining in their faces and, yes, cigarette smoke swirling above their heads.

Several years passed, the world war was raging, and Lily became pregnant. However, she suffered a miscarriage at about the same time that Danny received his induction notice into the U.S. Army. Danny was eager to serve his country, but it was a terrible time for Lily. She became disconsolate, and while Danny was stationed 3,000 miles away in San Diego, California, she moved in with her sister Mary's family which, just a few years earlier, had escaped Europe at the eleventh hour.



During the first weeks of basic training as a private, Danny was notified that his younger brother, Morris, who suffered from tuberculosis, was dying, and the Army would allow him to go home to join his family. After learning that upon his return he would have to start basic again, Danny reluctantly turned down the offer. Eventually, his brother recovered.

Danny was a good soldier, but there were times when you had to wonder. He often told the story about the day he saw his name on a notice for KP duty. Oh, Kitchen Police, he thought; I can handle that. He showed up at the assigned location and, believing that he was meant to literally police the kitchen, kept watch as the other GIs peeled potatoes, boiled water, and washed pots and pans.

Shortly, the sergeant walked in, looked at Danny, who did not appear to be very busy, and barked, "What's going on here, private?"

"Oh, everything is in order, sir. I'm making sure of that!"

The word was now out that his battalion would be shipped to the South Pacific. Danny looked forward to making a contribution to the war effort, but his health took a bad turn. He was found doubled over in pain several times with appendicitis attacks. Though he tried to resist medical attention, it was out of the question, and he was given an honorable discharge.

This development cheered Lily, and her despondency ended as soon as Danny returned to New York as a civilian. Every day, he arrived early in the morning to pick her up at Mary's house, and they would go visit other family and friends, see films on 42<sup>nd</sup> Street, and look for a new apartment. For Lily, it was the honeymoon they never had.

Before long, they found a one-bedroom apartment at 1425 Grand Concourse in the Bronx, on the top floor of a five-story walk-up. Although it was a daily grind to climb the many steps, especially for Lily, who did the grocery shopping and carried heavy bags and bundles while always wearing high heels, there were advantages to living in apartment 5K. Not the least of which was being able to take outdoor pictures on the roof, as well as on the fire escape, in the days before indoor flashes. Acknowledged as the family photographer, Danny often corralled guests to march up the stairs to pose for rooftop snapshots which were captured by his trusty Kodak accordion-style camera.

In addition, their new residence was located on a central subway stop for the D train, which took Danny to 34<sup>th</sup> Street to work every day, a commute of half an hour. Yankee Stadium, the legendary Loew's Paradise, and Alexander's were also in close vicinity.

And it was here, to this environment, accompanied by fanfare, celebration, and some trepidation, that I was brought home by my parents, Danny and Lily, following my birth in Bronx Hospital in March of 1946.



Luna, who following her husband's death in 1921 dressed in black for the rest of her life, came to live with Danny and Lily to help with the new baby, whom she called Jackito. Never having learned English, Nona, as she was known by her adoring grandchildren, spoke to her new grandson in Ladino, the language of the Sephardic Jews, thus making a lifetime impact on the boy who would go on to speak it like a "Salonikli." Lily was not a confident mother and needed the

help of Nona, as well as her sisters Bertha and Mary, who doted on Jackie. Whenever there was some sort of crisis, Lily would hand her baby over to one of them.

Danny, naturally, was very proud of his newborn son, naming him after his own father, Yaakov, whom he helped lay to rest in the old country as a boy.

With their lives and responsibilities centered on the baby, Danny and Lily took Jackie everywhere. Barely four months old, he spent the first of many summers in Rockaway Beach where he was also cared for on a daily basis by Nona and Aunt Bertha, while his much older cousins got a big kick out of their new infant relative.

Throughout those initial summers, Danny's Kodak camera worked in overdrive to snap the hundreds of photos the new dad took of his son, on all sorts of surfaces and in all kinds of situations, including atop the ping-pong tables in the pool room on the boardwalk. And he was typically captured in one of Danny's favorite settings, the beach, digging in the mud at the edge of the surf.

Most evenings, Nona tucked in Jackie to sleep because Lily, whose passion for poker had not diminished by one iota since she became a mother, was fervently involved in a nightly card game. On many occasions, Cousin Louie took part in the bedtime ritual with their grandmother, never failing to bring joy to the little boy in the crib.

In 1951, Danny acquired the first automobile for the family, a black Chevrolet Bel Air which he treated with kid gloves. Though he used it only on weekends, Danny would frequently take the car to his brother Albert's private house in the suburban part of the Bronx and make good use of the garden hose to wash the sparkling Chevy.

Danny took great pleasure in his cars, trading in the old one virtually every year or two for a new one. After a while, he favored the Ford Fairlane, until a curious event in 1957 made him the first on the block to own a push-button automatic transmission car.

As it happened, Lily's cousin Gabe and his common-law wife, Gertie, bought a raffle ticket in the name of their frisky labrador, Buster. Lo and behold, Buster won! The prize? A new, long-finned Plymouth Belvedere. Neither Gabe nor Gertie drove a car, so they sold the automobile to Danny at a price satisfactory to both parties.

In the late winter of 1952, during Jackie's first-grade year at P.S. 64, the boy came down with nephritis, a serious kidney disease that was a complication from the mumps, and he was confined to Bronx Lebanon Hospital for a month. Danny and Lily visited daily for the allotted time – one hour – and worried themselves sick over the fate of their son. Jackie recovered but was prescribed a restrictive diet and lifestyle for at least a year. During that time, he was not allowed to eat chocolate or have salt in his food.

The most painful sacrifice Jackie endured occurred in Rockaway Beach where he was prohibited from going into the salty ocean water for the entire summer.

Upon falling ill, Jackie had to be taken out of school at just past the midpoint of the year and, following his discharge from the hospital, the doctors did not permit him to return for the remainder of the term. Consequently, school authorities notified his parents that he would have to repeat first grade in September. This did not sit well with Danny and Lily, who summoned Uncle Morris, considered the "intellectual" and most articulate member of the family, to talk to the principal. Indeed, Morris was successful in

persuading the powers-that-be to advance Jackie to the second grade.

Seldom entertaining in their small one-bedroom apartment, Danny and Lily were frequent visitors at the homes of their large extended family and many friends. Danny's oldest brother Albert's house was a focal destination of these visits, especially on the weekend, where the grownups engaged in boisterous conversation in the living room, dining room, and kitchen, while the cousins played in whatever spaces remained. Albert owned the family's first television set, and it was here that Danny's love of boxing perpetuated through the new medium's broadcast of many famous fights, including the controversial Louis-Walcott heavyweight championship bout in 1947.

Albert's house also served as a networking salon for newly arrived Greek refugees, most of whom were Holocaust survivors. Danny and Lily befriended several of the new immigrants, helping to ease their way into American society. Through Danny's assistance, Leon and Sarah, along with their two young children, moved into an apartment next door at 1425 Grand Concourse. In addition, Danny guided Leon into starting his own business as a butcher on the Lower East Side, taught him to drive, and helped pave the way to citizenship for him and his wife.

For the next several years, Danny and Lily extended similar assistance and mentoring to three of Sarah's brothers and their families, as well as to other refugees from Greece, and many became lifetime friends. Furthermore, Danny periodically sent care packages to relatives of these new friends who were still in Greece, people he had never known. And when Danny and Lily visited their native

country in the late 1960s and early '70s, they hand-delivered packages.

In a similar spirit, Albert and his wife, Esther, were instrumental in facilitating the immigration of Dr. Albert Menasche, Esther's uncle, who was one of the first Holocaust survivors to chronicle his experience in the camps, which he scribbled on brown paper bags that were smuggled to America and published as a memoir, *Birkenau: How 72,000 Greek Jews Perished*. Dr. Menasche and his wife, Julie, lived with Albert and Esther for several years, and Cousin Matilda helped prompt her great-uncle in his studies in order to acquire his medical license in the U.S. He went on to a distinguished career as the resident physician at the Sephardic Home for the Aged on Cropsey Avenue in Brooklyn.

During the summers in Rockaway, on most Friday nights, after a full day of work in the factory, Danny would drive Lily and Jackie, as well as Aunt Bertha on occasion, for a series of social calls in the Bronx. Jackie, who always sat in the front of the car in the days before seat belts and child-safety laws, loved these excursions, especially traveling over the Triboro Bridge.

First, they visited Grandma Rikula in her apartment on Morris Avenue, then went to Leon and Sarah on the Grand Concourse where Jackie played with their children, Loretta and Ino, and finally to Albert and Esther's house. On the way back to Rockaway, though it might be past midnight, Danny would park the car just before the Cross Bay Bridge that connected to the Rockaway Peninsula, run across the wide boulevard, and buy his son a frankfurter or an egg roll at Weiss's, a landmark restaurant in its day.

Following the summer, another regular visitation was to Bertha and David's house in the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn.

Though they were six years apart – the oldest and youngest of four sisters – Bertha and Lily were very close, beginning in their birthplace of Salonika and now in New York, despite a separation of ten years when they lived on different continents. Weekends, Danny drove his family to Brooklyn from the Bronx. During the week, Lily and Jackie took a long subway ride, with several requisite train changes.

The small, homey apartment at 235 Roebling Street had much to offer. In addition to Bertha and David's hospitality, the presence of Nona, who, after helping to raise Jackie, went back to live with Bertha's family, was a source of comfort and joy to all. An utterly selfless woman who did not arrive in this country until the age of 66, Nona possessed a great sense of humor and regaled everyone with her stories and anecdotes. Totally dedicated to family throughout her life and requiring very little care or attention, she lived with each of her three daughters in America depending on their needs, and in many instances slept on the living room couch.

As for Jackie, the presence of Cousin Louie was the main attraction. Ten years older, Louie showed the boy infinite patience and affection, and served as a mentor in scholastic questions and cultural subjects. He took the boy, later the teenager, to museums and Broadway plays, and introduced him to "exotic" cuisines, such as Chinese lo mein. Both he and his older brother, Bobby, were influential in the boy's incipient love of baseball. It was through the thoughtfulness and generosity of Bobby that Jackie attended some of the greatest events in New York sports during the golden age of the 1950s and '60s.

In 1950, Bobby married a daughter of Sam Goody, the record impresario, at a sumptuous wedding in Brooklyn that was attended by many family members, including Danny and Lily and the 4-year-

old Jackie. Bobby, who cut short his academic career to enter the workplace and soon became a general manager in a Sam Goody store, was a physically powerful man, and he and Danny amused everyone with their tests of strength. When Bobby and his wife, Midge, visited in Rockaway or Williamsburg, uncle and nephew would compete by trying to lift a chair from the bottom of a leg with one hand. Invariably, Bobby lifted the chair straight up. A strong lefty but nevertheless a flyweight, Danny reached a certain point, started to waver, and, finally, to the laughs of everyone around – including himself – the chair would begin to tumble and then totally capitulate. A good time was had by all!

Another popular visit was to Mary and Marc's house in Mount Vernon, always a highly anticipated event for the entire extended family. There was grass and a backyard and kittens and a Christmas tree. French, Ladino, and English were spoken, contingent on who was conversing with whom.

Uncle Marc, a highly enlightened and talented man, cooked delicious omelets, crepes, and, for a special occasion, a leg of lamb or lobster. Born in France and a self-educated engineer, as a young man Marc sailed around Cape Horn at the tip of South America all the way to the Yukon. He later became a naturalized American citizen and was drafted into the U.S. Army. He served as an interpreter within the intelligence unit in France during the First World War, was poison-gassed, remained in his native country following the war, and married Mary in 1934, adopting her son, Alfred. Cousin Mimi was born a few years later. Thereafter, the Nazi noose began to tighten on France and Marc decided it was time to leave.

When the transatlantic ocean liner arrived in New York in the fall of 1941, Lily and Bertha, along with their husbands and Nona,



eagerly awaited their sister and her family at the port. When Marc and the two children disembarked without Mary, the greeters panicked.

Marc, perpetually unflappable, said calmly, “She’ll be on the next boat. She needs more time to straighten her papers because she’s not an American citizen.”

Significantly, little Mimi, who cried during the entire voyage without her mother, brightened when she caught sight of her two aunts, apparently visualizing her mama in their faces.

Indeed, Mary made it to America, but it was not on the next boat or an easy trek. First, she traveled from Paris to Lisbon, a neutral city, then talked her way onto what was to be, miraculously, the last boat to cross the Atlantic before Pearl Harbor.

The reunited family lived in the Bronx at first, but Marc’s sophisticated tastes led them a little north to the house in Mount Vernon. They remained there until 1952 when Marc’s career as a mechanical engineer made it necessary to relocate, initially to Bogota, Colombia, and ultimately to Mexico City. They returned to New York sporadically over the next several decades, residing for brief periods on West 95<sup>th</sup> Street just off Central Park. Danny and Lily would sorely miss them.

In addition to his love of new cars – albeit affordable ones – Danny was passionate about televisions. He boasted about the sharp picture of the first set he acquired for his family, an RCA console (without doors). The pedestrian rabbit ears antenna prevalent in this era was not good enough for Danny, who mounted his own outdoor antenna on the roof. And, in the days of picture tubes, Danny went to night school to learn to repair TVs and replace tubes. It gave him

great satisfaction to fix a set for family or friend, invariably at his own expense.

A memorable event for Danny and Lily was Jackie's bar mitzvah. The boy had attended Hebrew school for five years, and it culminated in a festive reception on March 7, 1959, at the Elsmere Hall in the Bronx, just a few blocks from their apartment. A highlight of the evening was the lighting of the thirteen candles by close family and friends. Lily insisted that the thirteenth candle be lighted by Nico, the Puerto Rican governess who lived with Albert and Esther for more than three decades and helped raise Matilda and her younger brother, also named Jackie.

It saddened Lily that her mother, the beloved Nona, who died on Christmas Eve, 1956, at the age of eighty-five, could not be present for this occasion. Upon reflection, Lily wished that her sister Elvira were there, too. Elvira, her husband, David, and their three children survived the war in a camp accessible to South American citizens in the south of France, for which David qualified because he lived in Uruguay as a young man. Several years later, they moved to Buenos Aires, Argentina, bypassing a stop in New York where Elvira could have reunited with her mother and three sisters. Lily had last seen Elvira in Paris just before crossing the Atlantic to join her new husband, and in the interim years exchanged frequent letters and always spoke wistfully of her long-lost sister.

In the Bronx, after residing for nearly twenty years in the five-story walk-up, Lily had had enough. Danny found another apartment just a block south at 1398 Grand Concourse on the second floor during Jack's senior year at Taft High School. Their windows faced busy 170<sup>th</sup> Street and the vast Taft schoolyard and from which Jack watched men play serious softball games on Sunday mornings.

After graduating from high school, Jack obtained working papers, and Danny was pleased that his son now had a summer job at the Hazan's Sportswear factory. Together they would drive in the early morning from Rockaway Beach to Euclid Avenue in Brooklyn, usually parking five or six long blocks from the subway that took them to 34<sup>th</sup> Street. For lunch, they went to the Horn & Hardart automat located in the Macy's department store basement across Seventh Avenue. Jack, the assorter, worked until 4:30 and took the subway all the way back to Rockaway, while Danny, the presser, rarely left before 5:30.

That fall, Jack entered City College and eventually became a journalism major, working as a cub reporter on *The Campus* newspaper. In his junior year, he got a job with the Associated Press in Rockefeller Plaza where he worked nights, first as a copy boy in the newsroom, then as a clerk in the sports department, following the day in school. Lily never went to bed until Jack got home at 2 o'clock in the morning.

In the summer of 1965, a tragic incident occurred that would haunt Jack for many years and also greatly affect Danny and Lily. One of Jack's closest friends, Lewis, was killed in a fire at a hotel in the Catskills where he was working as a bus boy. An only child, Lewis had lost his father to a heart attack less than two years before. To say that his mother, Bea, was devastated would be an understatement.

Lily knew Lewis well as her son's good friend, but because she was self-conscious in speaking English, her relationship with him and most of Jack's many other friends had always been limited. However, she felt her son's pain and told Danny that they had to do something to help Bea, whom they had never met. A few days following a heartbreaking funeral, Lily and Danny paid a visit to Bea at her brother's house on Long Island. Danny left a large monetary

donation, and for the next decade he and Lily befriended Bea, spending a good deal of time with her despite having little in common.

A few years later, Bea helped Jack. After Jack graduated from college, he was immediately classified 1A by the Selective Service and certain he would be drafted imminently and headed to Vietnam. He was resigned to this fate until the day he attended an activist anti-war meeting in a church in Washington Square where he learned about qualifying as a conscientious objector. Jack spent the next few weeks filling out forms, writing essays, and acquiring letters from family and friends vouching for his character. Subsequently, he was called to appear before his draft board on Gerard Avenue, just up the street from Yankee Stadium.

Bea wrote one of the letters and volunteered to be present as a witness in front of the board members who would determine his status. They refused to see her, but the refusal was recorded and could be used as evidence in Jack's favor upon appeal if necessary. Ultimately, the entire process became moot as the national lottery was implemented and his number was too high for the draft.

The summer of Lewis's death also marked the end of life for Grandma Rikula at the age of eighty-five. Despite her reputation as a controlling and calculating woman, Danny's mother commanded deep respect from her middle child, and her death was a blow to him. Danny was well aware of her resourcefulness in bringing her children to America, and always thankful for the opportunity and way of life it had given him. Furthermore, had it not been for his mother, he would not have met Lily.

She was buried in Cedar Park Cemetery in Paramus, New Jersey, alongside her youngest son, Morris, who succumbed to TB in

1956. Beginning with these early family deaths and burials at the relatively new cemetery, Danny took it upon himself to ensure that the plots were properly maintained. He paid many visits to the graves of his own relatives, as well as those of the relatives of his friends, whom he notified if something was awry and needed attention.

With Jack pursuing his career in journalism by landing a job with *The Morning Telegraph* on West 52<sup>nd</sup> Street and now living in Forest Hills, Danny and Lily found themselves less encumbered by the demands of a son living at home and began to travel. They took a trip to Mexico to visit Mary and Marc, whose daughter, Mimi, had married a French engineer – just like her father – and now had four children. The highlight of their travels, however, was returning to their birthplace of Salonika, now more commonly called by its Greek name, Thessaloniki.

In addition to visiting the families of their American friends, to whom they brought many presents and necessities from home, they spent time with Danny's childhood friend, Raphael, who had never left Greece. It was upsetting for them to learn that Raphael and his family were among only a few thousand Jews remaining in a city that at one time was referred to as the "mother of Israel" because of its vibrant and thriving Jewish population, which had come to an abrupt end with the Holocaust.

While in Greece, Danny and Lily also toured Athens and the beautiful island of Rhodes, where their friend Sarah's brother, Barouh, lived and owned a nightclub, the Flamingo, near the walled old city. One evening, they dined with the proprietor as his guests. There was a lively crowd and at a nearby table sat two men. After finishing their meals and before the waiters could clear their table, the men began to throw their dishes on the floor, shattering them to

pieces. This was the Greek custom to express culinary satisfaction, of which Danny and Lily were quite aware, but the scene nonetheless transfixed their attention. Barouh, a colorful, one-of-a-kind character, had a broad smile on his face.

As the staff quickly and efficiently picked up every last shard, he leaned over to Danny and said, "Don't worry, the gentlemen will be happy to pay twenty times the price of the meal!"

Their excursions within Greece entailed many flights since there was no direct air transportation between destinations that did not involve Athens. It was very tiring for Lily, whose health had declined in the last few years. She was already having hearing problems and, more seriously, had been diagnosed with Parkinson's disease. Regardless, she proved to be a trouper, enjoying the adventures and connecting with new friends, and knew how much it meant to Danny, who, by the same token, tried to make it as easy as possible for his wife.

A three-day trip to Israel was mixed into one of their Greek vacations, as Danny learned that another boyhood friend, Dario, was living in a rural area not far from Tel Aviv. Danny and Lily stayed with Dario and his wife in a tiny, ramshackle house, and during each of the three mornings there, they were awakened by the crows of a rooster at precisely 4 o'clock.

Jack accompanied his parents during the summer of '71, when they attempted to match-make their bachelor son with a young woman in Salonika and another in Tel Aviv. He enjoyed going out with them but did not take the process seriously enough as he knew there would be an ocean separating him from a second date. A year later, however, he met and fell in love with a girl from the same borough. Danny and Lily were delighted with Rena, and a lavish

wedding was held on July 15, 1973, at Terrace on the Park along the Grand Central Parkway near the site of the two World's Fairs.

Rena was not the only new member of the family. The bride came with Peggy, an adorable runt of a miniature pinscher who weighed barely nine pounds and was a venerable 12 years old, yet exhibited the charm and actions of a puppy. Red colored, though graying, Peggy was so obedient and well trained by Rena's dad that she never needed a leash, crossing wide Manhattan streets just alongside her masters. Jack and Rena took Peggy everywhere and she was always welcomed back.

Preparing for a vacation in California, the couple needed a dog-sitter for two weeks and Danny and Lily were selected.

"You got to be kidding," Danny, who never owned a dog, said.

"Peggy takes care of herself. You'll all be fine."

Two weeks later, when it came time to give Peggy back, Danny and Lily did, reluctantly, so captivated were they by their new best friend.

The same year that his son married, Danny turned 65 and decided to retire. He had worked from nearly the beginning of his teenage years in America – the last forty years as a presser – and his heavily calloused hands were proof of his onerous job. Yet, he had no regrets. He had always made a good living and saved and invested wisely. Now reaching the full Social Security retirement age, he felt entitled to the fruits of his labor.

Following a friend's advice, Danny had invested in Con Edison stock, receiving a very good return. In 1973, however, financial

markets crashed, and Con Edison went from trading at \$21 to the low single digits. In addition, the dividend was temporarily eliminated. Danny and Lily had been living off the Con Ed dividends as well as Social Security benefits. What seemed like a major catastrophe turned out to be a boon due to Danny's nerve and resourcefulness. When the stock plunged to \$4, he bought another one thousand shares. His reasoning: you can't do without electricity! When the market recovered, Con Ed stock rose rapidly, so well that it had to be split several times over the next five years.

Danny never worried about money, but when Lily, whose Parkinson's had steadily progressed, fell in the house one day and broke her hip, he was utterly distressed. She was taken to Bronx Lebanon, where Jack had stayed twenty-three years earlier for his kidney disease. In the hospital, the interference of the medication for her illness with the recovery from surgery to mend her hip left Lily, at times, disoriented. Though it was vital for her to get out of bed as much as possible, she lacked the strength and will to do so. Danny and Jack felt the medical treatment and nursing care were deficient, and complained emphatically to the administration. Ultimately, she suffered an embolism and, just a few weeks after breaking her hip, died, on April 7, 1975, two days after her 64<sup>th</sup> birthday.

The funeral drew a large gathering, following which Lily was buried in Cedar Park Cemetery, not far from her dear mother, Luna. The full seven-day shiva was held in Jack and Rena's apartment in Rego Park where achieving a daily minyan of ten men was not a problem. Danny and Jack, as well as Lily's sisters Bertha and Mary, sat on cardboard boxes during the entire ritual. The many people who paid their respects provided a distraction for the mourners, as did the presence of Peggy, who never failed to lighten the mood.



But it took a long time for Danny's melancholy to lighten. Though they never discussed it, he and Jack felt that the tragedy could have been averted. Only the passage of time diminished the negativity of their reflections. What was undeniable was the outpouring of affection from all who knew Lily. In the ensuing years, whenever Jack came across an old friend of hers, he would always hear, "Your mother, I can't tell you what a lovely person she was." And, depending on whom he ran into, "She was some sharp poker player."

One significant condolence came from Lily's sister Elvira, who wrote from her home in Argentina. They had last seen each other in 1937, and Elvira stated that she would always visualize and remember Lily as a young woman of twenty-five.

Danny missed her terribly. He surrounded himself with photos of Lily, putting up framed portraits of her on the walls in every room of the apartment. He became reclusive, passing up invitations from family and friends on holidays and social occasions. He kept himself occupied by preparing his signature care packages that he mailed to people in need in Greece.

It was about two years before Danny came out of his funk. And when he did, he emerged as the vibrant and active man everyone knew. He began to travel again to Greece, staying for a good part of the spring and sometimes almost the entire summer. He visited his brother Davey in Florida and spent time there with his niece Allegra. He moved out of the Bronx and rented a room in a friend's apartment in Rego Park. He was by no means penurious, yet now did not require any more space than a bedroom and use of a kitchen and bathroom. He even shared an apartment with Jack for a while. Despite advancing age, he was always on the go.

His need to help others, especially family and friends who were down and out, continued to guide him. He traveled by subway to visit Victoria and Simon, Bertha's niece and her husband, who had lived a hard life, including suffering from Holocaust survivors' guilt and caring for their severely retarded son, Dennis, until his death at the age of 25. They resided just off Ocean Parkway in Brooklyn, and Danny would come over, have a cup of coffee, seldom staying more than an hour or so, but he hoped his visit demonstrated that someone cared.

Following the death of Esther, Danny's cherished sister-in-law and first cousin, his brother Albert found himself alone in the same house he had bought for \$20,000 in cash in 1950. Danny would take the subway to visit Albert, chat a little over coffee, then do some housekeeping. He washed dishes, dusted the furniture, and vacuumed the rugs to help out his older brother. In fact, throughout his marriage, Danny was ahead of his time by periodically helping Lily with the household chores, never viewing housework as the exclusive task of his wife.

Danny also dropped by the Hazan's factory at 260 West 35<sup>th</sup> Street now and then, anticipating that there might be a broken sewing machine needing repair. Everyone was always glad to see him.

In the late spring of 1977, he returned from Greece to learn some regrettable news from his son. Jack and Rena had separated and were getting a divorce. This was a profound disappointment for Danny, who was very fond of his daughter-in-law and thought his son had settled down with a good wife and job. He found it difficult to express his innermost feelings of sadness and displeasure to his son, but was able to open up to Rena. He visited her several times in her

new studio apartment to express his dismay, as well as to encourage her that they give the marriage a chance. It was to no avail. Yet, he took some solace in the knowledge that the split would be amicable.

It was ironic, then, that Danny had just begun a serious relationship with a woman in Salonika whom he and Lily had met years before during their trips. Leonora, a widow, had been part of a group of friends that Lily and Danny socialized with. Jack's response was absolutely positive, viewing it as a telling sign that his father's mourning had concluded. In each of the next several years, Danny spent four months in Greece with Leonora. Once, she accompanied him back to America and they lived together for two months. Although marriage was out of the question because of his desire to be buried next to Lily, there came a point where Danny wanted to spend all of his time with Leonora, and he was amenable to dividing it between both countries. However, she had a daughter and grandchildren in Salonika and did not want to live in America. This issue led to their eventual breakup.

In April of 1978, through Danny's encouragement, Jack decided to take a trip to Argentina to meet his Aunt Elvira and all three of her children. Danny also urged Aunts Bertha and Mary to make the trip. It turned out to be a grand reunion, full of reminiscences and good cheer. Jack had met Elvira's daughter, Renee, and her husband and son, Bebe and Fabian, when they visited New York in 1966. He now stayed in their home in San Isidro, a suburb of Buenos Aires, where they owned a clothing store business. He also got to know Elvira's two sons, Jacques and Michel.

Most intriguing was seeing his mother's three sisters together, and, in his eyes, the resemblance between Lily and Elvira. In addition, he learned about Lily's life as a young woman in Paris in

the '30s. Renee, who was a little girl at the time, unburdened herself of some innocent guilt over once kicking Lily in the shins during a tantrum. Jack was treated wonderfully by his newfound family, bearing out all the lovely things his mother had told him about Elvira and her children. Years later, when Fabian visited him in America, he returned the favor.

A smoker all his adult life – of unfiltered Camels – Danny began to experience health problems during Lily's time in the hospital. It turned out he was suffering from bladder cancer and needed to have a cystoscopy performed periodically to remove malignant tumors. One week after returning home from Greece in the early fall of 1981, he did not feel well. He saw a doctor who prescribed antibiotics for his chronic fever, but he did not get better. Now sharing the apartment on West 26<sup>th</sup> Street of an elderly woman named Rose, who had come to depend on Danny for his willingness to shop and perform household chores, he felt weak and lethargic and could not get out of bed. This frightened Rose, who contacted Jack, which led to Danny's admission to Cabrini Hospital.

Initially, the doctors could not make an accurate diagnosis while his fever rose and his condition deteriorated. Then, the infectious disease specialist who had been away returned, interviewed Danny, and, after ordering some tests, determined that he was suffering from typhus. That summer, during a visit to Israel, Danny had been in the presence of people who were extremely ill, and the doctor concluded that he caught the disease from them. As soon as the specific antibiotic was administered, Danny began to get well. Within a few days, he was discharged from the hospital. Consequently, he enjoyed telling the story of this ordeal and how he came back from the dead.

A year later, he was not so lucky. When Jack picked him up at JFK Airport in late August, he looked dreadful, drawn and emaciated. He told Jack that he had felt sick just three days before his flight, but resolved to return home for medical attention. Moreover, he needed to persuade the flight attendants to let him stay on the plane after they got a look at him. Jack immediately drove to the Cabrini Hospital emergency room, and Danny was shortly admitted. The next day, on further examination, it was established that his chest cavity was filled with fluid and that he was a very sick man. Jack had to sign the authorization for a delicate procedure to drain the fluid from around his heart.

That summer, Jack had moved from Queens to a condominium apartment near his job at the *Daily Racing Form* in East Windsor, New Jersey. He and Danny had exchanged letters and were looking forward to spending time together at his new home. Of course, that was now put on hold. The day after the medical procedure, Jack came back to the hospital to see his dad in the intensive care unit with several nurses hovering over him. Though Danny felt better, he was agitated because he could not immediately recompense the nurses for their attentiveness. As soon as Jack walked in, Danny asked him for some five-dollar bills in order to tip the nurses. This is just the way he is, Jack thought.

For the next three months, Jack left work early and drove to the hospital in Manhattan to be with Danny, as well as to talk to the medical and nursing staffs and make difficult decisions. His father had lung cancer that had metastasized and the prognosis was bleak at best. A dose of chemotherapy made Danny sicker, and it took weeks before it was determined that the procedure had caused a stomach ulcer. When that was treated, he had a remission.

During the depths of his illness, which he referred to as a spot on his lung, Danny often talked about how he had lived a good life, had no fear of dying, and was looking forward to being with Lily. Jack marveled at how his father, who, as far as he knew, did not have a religious bone in his body, actually believed, if you will, in a hereafter. At least the one that contained Lily.

On the other hand, while in the midst of his remission, Danny reflected that he'd like to live another seven or eight years. It was this voice that Jack had heard all his life, positive and filled with vitality.

In mid-November, Jack was told by hospital administrators that there was nothing more Cabrini could do for Danny and they had to discharge him. Undoubtedly, he still needed constant care, and Jack learned about Calvary Hospital in the Bronx, which was one of the first medical centers in the United States focusing on end-of-life hospice care. It was there – in a large, modern and private room – that Danny spent the final two months of his life. He often joked to callers on the phone that the hospital was like a country club.

Father and son shared many special moments during the five-month illness. Danny was pleased about Jack's new home and sorry that he had not yet been there. There was no thought that he would never see it, as Danny always lived in the present moment.

Jack encouraged others to visit Danny. One day, Cousin Matilda brought her father, Albert, who now resided in an assisted living facility just a few miles away near Pelham Parkway. It was moving for Jack to see the aged brothers talking and reminiscing. It reminded him of when he witnessed his mother's three sisters together in Argentina, though that reunion lacked Lily. It also gave

him pause at the richness of both sides of his family, the wonderful uncles and aunts he had and the cousins they produced.

Another visitor was Elvie, a dedicated private-duty nurse who attended to Danny at Cabrini and came to Calvary outside of her professional obligations. Nikki, whose family Danny had befriended and assisted in many ways, lived just a few blocks from Cabrini and often visited Danny there and later traveled to the Bronx to see him at Calvary. Jack appreciated their efforts and concern, though his dad dissuaded visits when his condition worsened.

In the middle of the night on January 27, 1983, Jack was awakened by a phone call with the sad news from the hospital. The funeral for Danny was held the following day at the same location on the Grand Concourse where Lily had been memorialized, and he was buried alongside his wife at Cedar Park. Two days of shiva were observed at the home of Jack's cousins Arlene and Bob in Washington Heights.

Months later, when Danny's side of the double headstone was engraved, the year of death was incorrectly marked as 1982 instead of 1983. Jack was upset, but gave the engraver a pass, even though the subsequent correction was poorly inscribed and obvious. Instead, he chose to focus on and was most proud of the last line that he provided for the stone which read:

**"A FRIEND TO ALL"**