

Harry I. Goldsmith

Mr. Goldsmith was ninety years old when I met him in Old Town. He was complaining about lazy people. He had worked hard from the time he came from Grodno, Gebornia, in Russia at age fourteen until the previous year when he was confined to a wheelchair existence. This made him very mean, said his second wife, who tried to supplement his recollections. Indeed he had worked hard and suffered many failures, but now he said, "*Mir felt nit*" (I need nothing). He is doing all right in his eleven room house with a heated garage.

The large dining room reflected the good taste of his antique-loving wife. She insists on keeping a kosher home, which he resents. When he met her in Auburn, she was Miss Miller, working for the Shapiro Shoe factory at the unheard of salary of \$100 per week. Now he says, after living in the same house thirty-five years, "Where in the Moses did I see a house like this? It shines."

Harry came with his mother and sister Kate (Adelman) to New York, where they stayed for two weeks. His father had come two years before and brought them to his shack on the oceanfront between Calais and Eastport to adapt to life in America. After a year in the first grade Harry got a job cutting heads off fish for five cents a box. Soon the family moved to a "rent" in Bangor. Harry described the house as a dump on Hancock Street that has since been torn down. From there he went to school to fourth grade with evening courses at the YMCA.

He sold newspapers and shined shoes while his father collected and sold junk. He still has the shoe shine brush.

From Bangor the family moved to Old Town, where he worked in a pulp mill for two years—six days a week, twelve hours a day for eight dollars per week. In Old Town Harry and his sister opened a combination jewelry and candy store that prospered for four years. He sold the store to a “Syrian,” he said. His sister Kate married Hiram Adelman, who started a department store in Mars Hill. Harry moved there, and when Hiram’s sister married a man from Bridgeport, he went to work for him. For three month’s work he received a suitcase.

Back to Old Town he moved again where he said, “I saved ninety-nine cents out of a hundred.” He bought Mrs. Murphy’s candy store on Main Street and stayed three years. He made ice cream that was so popular he sold the business at a good profit. His father bought a house with an extra lot behind it. (He had been shoeing horses, but that did not cover his needs.) He suggested that Harry and he could build on the empty lot—forty-five feet front and fifty-five feet deep—two stores in one building with a stairway in the middle. They were able to build a brick building for \$5,500 in 1916. His father gathered second-hand furniture for his store. Harry started a restaurant in the other store. By 1919 Harry was bankrupt. He owed the bank \$12,000. His brother-in-law took the building and gave it back to Harry. “There was no such word as tired—it was work, work, work!”

Harry married Dora Friedman, a ladieswear saleswoman, when he was thirty-five years old. They had a son and daughter after they could afford to move from her parent’s home. The son was injured in the U. S. Army. When he recovered enough to work in a furniture store with the aid of a helper, Harry and Kate gave him \$2,000 to set up a cast iron stove business. His daughter, Natalie, is an architect for the U. S. Navy, divorced from Howard Gevertz. She went into real estate and made a fortune. Dora, his first wife, was ill for twelve years before she died.

Harry bought apartment houses, started furniture stores, and “tried to do my best” with the help of relatives—close and remote. He could always take care of himself, thought Harry, because he had an A-1 credit rating. And he did because somehow he worked, paid his creditors, and started again and again.