

Can you ever leave your past behind?

The Last Goldfish



A DANGER TO SECURITY
By Manfred Goldfish
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... for the pa...





SYNOPSIS

The Last Goldfish documents a daughter's search for her lost family. Rich with archival images, this suspenseful and surprising story – stretching from Australia to Trinidad, North America to WWII Germany – reveals the impact of war and displacement across generations.

Manfred Goldfish tries as hard as he can to hide the trauma he has experienced. But his filmmaker daughter suspects there is more to the Goldfish tale than her father is willing to reveal.

A gripping and deeply-moving story of one person's search for the story of her life.

#WithRefugees

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"A poignant portrait"

REALTIME

BACKGROUND

Millions of people have forced migration in their family history. *The Last Goldfish* is one of those stories.

Manfred Goldfish was 27 when he fled Germany. He'd been arrested in the Kristallnacht round-ups of November 1938 and miraculously released. He and his first wife Martha bought tickets to the only place that would take them in without a visa: Trinidad, a small island under British rule in the Caribbean. They travelled on documents for stateless people known as 'Nansen passports'.

Two weeks after they arrived, the British government, concerned at the influx of refugees from Europe, changed the law and boats carrying refugees were turned away.

When war broke out, all Germans in Trinidad were arrested as enemy aliens, even those who had fled the Nazi regime. By August 1940, 279 Jewish refugees of German and Austrian descent were interned in Trinidad. Manfred and Martha and their baby son Harry were in detention for three years.

In 1962 Trinidad and Tobago gained independence from Britain, but racial and class tension brewed until in 1970 Black Power riots erupted leading to an attempted military coup. The political instability prompted the Goldfish family to look for a new safe haven.

When Su's mother made enquiries at the Australian Consulate she was asked whether her husband was white. "It will be easier to get in", the official explained. In the early 1970s Australia still adhered to its White Australia Policy.

In today's world, the racism Manfred experienced in 1930s Germany is heard in the growing rhetoric of anti-Muslim feeling. The turn-back-the-boats policy of 1939 resonates in the current political climate. The kosher hotel Su's grandparents owned in Germany is now home to Kurdish and Iraqi refugees. The impact of racism, war and displacement continues.

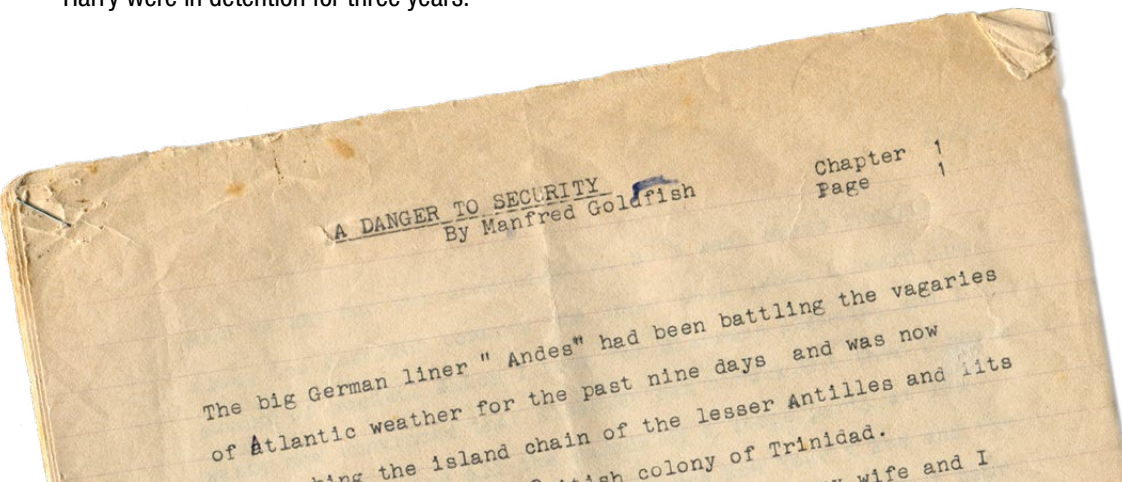
DIRECTOR'S NOTE

I always wanted to tell my father's story.

Only 600 Jewish refugees made it to Trinidad, an unusual destination. My father made a new life there and like many refugees he re-invented himself. When I was a child he told me he drew a line when I was born and made a decision to never look back. He never talked about the uncomfortable truths of his past, his previous marriage, his other children and the persecution and murder of his family in Germany. I understand now he was trying to protect me, and himself, but we need the stories of our family. They are what shape us and connect us to the world.

Visually I was fascinated by my father's photos from 1930s Germany, my mother's war-time documents, and our home movies from the 1960s in Trinidad and 1970s in Australia. They became clues helping me on this search for my family. I'm lucky I have this intimate archive to help tell this story. Many refugees arrive in a new land with very little that holds the traces of their past.

The search for my family is a lens through which I look at the impact of race and nationalism. Who gets to belong? I explore our ability to forgive, to remember, to accept. It's about friendship and family, traditional and alternative, and ultimately, *The Last Goldfish* is about love.





THE MUSIC OF TRINIDAD

Manfred and Martha experienced their first Carnival only a few weeks after arriving in the capital Port of Spain. It was Manfred's introduction to the music and culture of Trinidad. But it was the last Carnival they would see until after the war as the street parade was banned until 1945 when the steel bands returned to the streets in celebration.

Steel pans, originally pounded out of old steel drums, create the iconic sound of Trinidadian music. They emerged in the 1930s and have become more refined across the decades. They are sometimes called drums but are in fact finely-tuned percussion instruments.

Emory Cook, a renowned sound engineer, set up Cook Records in Port of Spain in the 1950s. Cook was experimenting with unique audio-recording and record-pressing techniques, taking his portable recording machine out into the pan yards where new music was being made. He distributed Trinidadian music throughout North America and the Caribbean. Manfred worked for Cook Records and the International Recording Company in Trinidad until the family left in the 70s.

In 1990 Emory Cook donated his collection of master tapes, patents, photographs, and documents to the Smithsonian Institution in Washington DC.

Image Courtesy of the Ralph Rinzler Folklife Archives and Collections, Smithsonian Institution.



AN INTERVIEW WITH SU GOLDFISH, WRITER AND DIRECTOR

When did you get your first stills camera?

My father gave me my first camera when I was ten. It was a little instamatic and I immediately started taking photographs of my ten-year-old life in Trinidad – my best friend Caroline, my dog Rusty, our car in the driveway, my mother in the garden, our house and the street.

You've been taking photos for a long time, and so had your father, Manfred. At what point did you start to think that there was a film in your family story?

I had to make a short video for a course at university. I was driving to class, listening to a woman on the radio talking about how she survived Auschwitz. It dawned on me that my father, who was also in his 80s, was part of this history. I knew he didn't like talking about all this, so I asked him if I could interview him about his love of cameras and the photographs he'd taken in Germany in the 20s and 30s as a young man. I started with innocent questions: who gave you your first camera? Why did you take all these photographs? What did they mean to you? And then I started asking him questions about the people in the photographs: who are these people? Are they your friends? Are they your family? What happened to them? Maybe it was the presence of my video camera but for the first time he began telling me things. I filmed his responses. And that's what I took to the class.

Once my curiosity was set in motion, I had to find out more.

You went on and made a short film called *Trace* when you were in Cologne.

Trace came from the experience of retracing my father's steps. I went to Germany with the idea that I would find the places that he and his family had lived. I took his photographs with me and I went looking for where he had taken them. Sometimes I'd find the exact spot where one had been taken, I would frame up my camera exactly as he had done and take my own photograph. I found it connected me to place and history and to him; it was a very intimate and very moving experience. That I could come back and find these places from the photographs he'd taken seventy years before, was incredible.

I often used to tell the story of where I came from at dinner parties. It began with the fact that because I am white and have an Australian accent, people always assume I was born in Australia. When I say I was born and raised in Trinidad the questions would begin and the story would unfold.

So I was tying together my interest in photography, personal documentation, history, philosophy, memory and delving into questions of identity, the politics of difference and who is allowed to belong where in this world. I believe racism often starts when people make assumptions

about other people. I began thinking that I could make a film countering some of those assumptions, whether they be about religion, identity, gender, or sexuality. *The Last Goldfish* grew out of this whirlpool of ideas.

Manfred had a large collection of photos and moving footage. Tell us about Manfred's relationship to his own photos?

My parents kept their photos in a box and as a child I would often go through them. I was interested in looking at people's faces, the moments that had been captured from their earlier lives. I never thought to ask questions. I just looked. As an only-child I was often entertaining myself by searching in hidden places and seeing what I could find.

Home movies were also a part of middle class life in the 60s and 70s and I grew up with the sound of the projector and my father filming. He was always interested in editing and storytelling. My parents had both moved countries twice and the photos always came with them and not much else.

The film spans your father's lifetime and your own. What was it like condensing all that into one 81-minute film?

Well it did take quite a while! The trick is to have a good team. Our core team was the editor Martin Fox, script editor Louise Wadley, producer Carolyn Johnson, and



myself. We enjoyed many hours of robust debate! We worked through what should be in and what to leave out and how to order it all to tell a cohesive story. We also consulted with others along the way who had fresh eyes and gave incredibly valuable feedback. It was the only way to keep perspective. It was quite a weird experience to be discussing the on-screen character 'Su' with the objectivity of a director.

One of the questions we kept asking ourselves was why tell this story to the general public? We spent a long time discussing that.

What did you decide? Why tell this story?

There is a huge refugee crisis unfolding across the world. I wanted to remind people that many of us are the children and descendants of displaced people. That the kindness and protection my father was shown ultimately saved his life. It's also a good story and many people with a similar background relate to it very strongly. Knowing what came before us really grounds us in the world.

The film reflects on the impact my father's experience had on all his offspring, particularly on his oldest child, my brother Harry, who was detained in an internment camp in Trinidad until he was four. Harry then had to move countries at the age of 12. He survived his parents' messy marriage break-up, and then had a mental breakdown later in his life.

The film is also about family secrets, the stories children are told and not told, and why we need our families and how my idea of family has changed over the years. For me as a queer person my community is also my family. It's where I am always accepted.

What was it like growing up in Trinidad?

Growing up in Trinidad was wonderful. It was the best childhood anyone could wish for. My mother used to open the gate and I was free to go wandering, hanging out with other families. Trinidad was an amazing place in terms of music and art-making and food.

Even now if I hear the sound of calypso I immediately want to start dancing. I say this very humbly, but growing up with all that music makes you a great dancer. You can't help it.

It was only recently I made the connection between the Trinidad Carnival and the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras where I worked as a workshop artist for many years. I've always liked making things; I was a carpenter and a set-maker. Going back to Trinidad and visiting some of the workshops where things were being made for Carnival, it suddenly clicked, those workshops in Trinidad were just like the Mardi Gras workshop in Sydney.

Tell us about coming to Australia.

Leaving Trinidad to come to Australia was a huge adventure. It involved going first to Europe, where I saw snow for the first time, and then four weeks on a ship to Australia. It was all very exciting until I had to go to school and the reality that I was never going home to Trinidad sunk in. Even though I was white I had a West Indian accent, so I was teased at school.

I'm not the only one whose story is like this. There's a very human need to connect with someone who has been through what you've been through. To be able to say "Oh, I get that, I know how that feels", but also to understand why Manfred needed to not talk about it and why, of course, the next generation does. And how important it is to get our stories out there. It's what connects us as human beings, our stories.



*“My father
tells me stories ...
not always the truth.”*





EXTRACT FROM AN INTERVIEW WITH CAROLYN JOHNSON, PRODUCER

The film is told through an archive of photos and home movies that stretch across a century. What made you believe it was good material for a documentary?

Hundreds of thousands of people have come to Australia as refugees or because of forced migration in the years since WWII, including Manfred Goldfish, and including the many recent arrivals who are just beginning to build new lives for themselves and their descendants.

As a country dominated by migration I feel it is incumbent on us to understand the deep complexities migration brings. Many Australians, while getting on with their lives, carry pain and sadness from the past, as Manfred did, trying desperately not to inflict it on his daughter Su, but of course it has an impact on the next generation. Secrets do. We felt it was time to talk about this type of experience, which is widespread but rarely spoken of.

There are millions of second and third-generation Australians who will relate to Su's journey because they too have felt the need to understand the reasons behind their parents' migration to Australia, even if those reasons are traumatic. For refugees, they usually are. We came to realise that the way to look at the long-term impact of displacement is to follow the story of one family: the Goldfish family.

The film has a striking emotive soundtrack. Can you tell us about working with the composer Liberty, and Sound Designer, Yulia Akerholt?

Liberty came on early. She composed sketches at the assembly stage which our editor Martin Fox cut with. It was very symbiotic. Later, once the pictures were locked off, she recorded the score with an orchestra.

Then Yulia Akerholt joined the team. The spine of the film is the narration by Su. The words we worked on with script editor Louise Wadley over a long period, then Yulia, Louise and Su headed into the recording studio with Louise directing the voice performance. Yulia is a dialogue expert and she was attracted to the poetic potential to draw the audience through the story with the voice-over, backed by the music and atmos tracks. It's masterful storytelling through sound, music, and images. I'm extremely proud of the whole team.

The film speaks largely to the displacement and trauma on refugees and their families. What do you hope that audiences will learn from Su's journey?

When we ask migrants to leave their past behind, in many ways they do. But at a deep level it is impossible. Our past is part of who we are. There will be many viewers who relate to that.

THE TEAM

SU GOLDFISH | WRITER | DIRECTOR | NARRATOR

Su Goldfish is the manager of the Creative Practice Lab at the University of New South Wales. Between 2011 and 2014 Su co-produced the adaptation of three of artist William Yang's performance works into television documentaries screened on ABC-TV and in film festivals locally and internationally. Su studied documentary at AFTRS (2010). As writer/director her short films include *Trace* (2011) and *Ciao Meow* (2009) which screened in film festivals and exhibitions in Australia, Spain and Germany.

CAROLYN JOHNSON | PRODUCER

Carolyn Johnson produces award-winning dramas and documentaries including *Son of a Lion* (2007), and *Tanna* which was nominated in the 2017 Foreign Language Academy Awards®. Her documentary credits include *A Sense of Self* (ABC1, 2016), *A Law Unto Himself* (ABC1, 2012), *Stumbling in Hillary's Footsteps* (ABC1, 2013), the 4 x 1hr series *First Footprints* (2013, ABC/Arte), *Over The Edge* (NITV), and *Are You My Mother* (2 x 52mins, 2009, SBS).

MARTIN FOX | EDITOR

Martin Fox has worked for over thirty years in the film and television industry including editing three feature films and many TV documentaries for ABC and SBS. Martin Fox and Su Goldfish have been working together for years on projects at UNSW including the William Yang films which he directed as well as edited.

LOUISE WADLEY | SCRIPT EDITOR

Louise Wadley wrote and directed *All About E*, a drama feature which put a lesbian spin on the road movie genre. She has written, directed, produced or EPd a range of drama and documentary including the award-winning *Burning Soul* in 2016.

LIBERTY KERR | COMPOSER

Liberty Kerr is an accomplished electronic artist, guitarist and experimental cellist. Liberty's music and soundscapes provide the sonic environment across art forms including performance, film and installation. Her commissions include Serious Theatre Collective, The Street Theatre, Rakini Devi, DeQuincey Company, Platform 27, Liz Lea Dance, Urban Theatre Projects, Melbourne Workers Theatre, Film Australia, SBS, ABC, BBC, Belvoir St, Pact Youth Theatre, Akira Isogawa, and Performance Space.

YULIA AKERHOLT | SOUND DESIGN

Yulia Akerholt has worked in sound post since graduating from AFTRS in 1996. She has worked as a dialogue editor or sound effects editor on over 30 feature films. She was co-supervising sound editor with Andrew Plain on John Curran's *Tracks*, and she was one of the supervising dialogue editors on George Miller's *Mad Max: Fury Road*. She has been nominated for six AFI awards, and won two (for *Little Fish* in 2005, and *Samson and Delilah* in 2009).

Photographer: William Yang





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THE LAST GOLDFISH
A CREATIVE DOCUMENTARY
TECH SPECS

Country of Production: Australia
Language: English
Runtime: 81 min
Format: DCP
Aspect Ratio: 1.85:1
Sound: 5.1 surround
Classification: PG

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“Connections with the current world refugee crisis are inevitable. Watching The Last Goldfish, we can’t help but be reminded of the repercussions of displacement and just what’s involved in putting the pieces back together again.”

REALTIME

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