

# My Cousin Danny and his Mysterious Box

A Journey from Darkness to Freedom



Cantor Max Sternthal



## **Chapter 1: Danny's Mysterious Box**

The first time I saw my cousin Danny's mysterious box was in a grainy photo he sent of himself from a refugee camp in Europe. He was dressed in shorts and a shirt and under his arm he was holding a shoe box.

The second time I saw that shoe box was on a Sunday in early May, when my family was at the Ottawa railway station to meet Danny on the train coming from Halifax, Nova Scotia, where Danny's ship from Europe had docked two days earlier.

The third time I saw Danny's shoe box was every time I saw Danny. Danny was never apart from the box. When he went to school, he carried the box. When we sat and watched TV or played card games, the box was beside Danny. It even lay on his pillow when he was asleep! I asked him about it more than once but each time he simply shook his head, indicating that he didn't want to talk about it.

I started high school in September, 1946. When I came home from school one day near the end

of October, my father and mother told me about my cousin Danny.

“Danny is the son of my brother in Germany” said my father. “In the terrible war that ended one year ago, both of Danny’s parents were killed, and now Danny is alone in the world. He is thirteen, just a year older than you. Your mother and I have made arrangements for Danny to come to Canada and to live with our family. He will arrive in the spring. We are the only family that he has left now. We are hoping that you will welcome Danny into our home. He has lived through some very difficult times and needs a lot of love, support and understanding. Would you be willing to share your room with Danny and be a friend, a brother to him?”

My heart beat with excitement. I had no doubts!

“It will be fun to have someone near my age to talk to and play games with,” I exclaimed. “I hope he likes soccer. He can join my team.”

Later, my mother and I then went into my room to plan for Danny’s moving in. I picked up my books, neatly arranged my clothes, leaving room in the drawers and closet for Danny when he would arrive. At the start of the New Year we

bought a new bed and placed it along the wall  
facing my bed.

## Chapter 2: Danny Arrives

On a sunny day in May the big moment finally arrived! I was filled with excitement as the station gates opened and I saw Danny walking slowly with the shoe box under his arm, while the other train passengers went rushing by.

“Danny, Danny, over here!” My mother and father and I shouted.

He was taller than I had expected, about 5’2” and had wavy dark brown hair like my father. His eyes, too, were brown and he looked about nervously as he approached us. When at last we stood face to face, he mustered a smile and held out his hand.

When my parents shook hands with Danny, I did the same and said: “Hello, I’m glad you are going to live with us. I hope you like soccer.”

“I am pleased to meet you. And, yes I like soccer.”

Danny answered in perfect English but with a German accent.

It was soon clear that Danny was very shy. He answered “yes” and “no” to questions with a nod

or shake of his head and others with only a few, quietly spoken words. That evening during dinner, since Danny seemed reluctant to speak about himself, my mother and father told him about our family life: our routines, the school he would attend, the parks we visited on the weekends. I told him about playing soccer in the field across our street and my friends at school.

He seemed excited when I introduced him to my friends on my soccer team and he agreed to join us for the next game.

“I can play goalie,” he said.

On the day of the game, I gave him a pair of my shorts, a T-shirt, and he put on the pair of brand new sneakers that my parents had bought for him a few days earlier. The clothes fit well enough and we walked to the soccer field. Danny carefully placed his shoe box beneath a bench at one side of the field. The box was safe there, yet always in sight. We practiced kicking goals, and were delighted with the “saves” Danny made.

“You’re good!” shouted my friends.

We then lined up on the field opposite our opponents. I looked up to wave encouragement to Danny, but I was astonished to see a suddenly

empty net and no Danny! I desperately scanned the field. I couldn't believe my eyes! I saw Danny running out of the park, his shoe box under his arm! I shouted his name but he did not stop running. My stunned friends looked at me.

"I'll be the goalie. Johnny, you take my place." I said in a shaky voice.

We then played our match and, even though we won, I went home puzzled and upset. I was angry with Danny. When I demanded an explanation from Danny about his strange behaviour, he just shook his head, hugged his brown shoe box closer to his chest, and refused to speak.



## Chapter 3: “Why do you act the way you do?”

That was only the first of many such strange behaviours. My friend, Billy, told me a few days later of an incident in their classroom. The class was studying *Henry V* and the teacher asked each pupil to come to the front of the class and read a section of the play. When it was Danny’s turn, he sat in his seat and refused to stand up. When he didn’t move after the teacher asked him to come forward, the teacher called on the next pupil and the class went on. After class, Billy and some of the students tried to talk to Danny, but he would not speak and ran home as soon as school was over for the day. I was greeted with the same silence when I again asked him to explain.

Other than Danny’s strange behaviour on these occasions, and the fact that his shoe box was always under his arm, I enjoyed having Danny around. It was fun watching TV together, playing games or hiking the paths near our home. I now had the ‘brother’ that I had always wished for.

A few weeks later, my father announced that he was leaving on a business trip for a week. When he was at the door, with his suitcase at his feet, my mother and I kissed him and wished him success on his trip. I saw my father look around, searching for Danny. When I caught the disappointment in his eyes at Danny's absence, I ran to the stairs and called up, reminding Danny that Father was leaving. There was no response. How could he not come to say goodbye after all father had done for him? I called again and again, but Danny did not come out of our room upstairs.

"It's alright," my father said quietly and left.

Danny's behaviour maybe "alright" with my father, but it was definitely not "alright" with me. I was fed up. I stormed up the stairs through our open bedroom door.

"I try to be your friend," I lashed out at him, "but you act so strangely. You make it impossible to be your friend. It's time you explained yourself. Why do you act the way you do? Why do you carry that silly box with you everywhere? My father loves you and he shows it in so many ways, yet when he is leaving for a

week, you won't even come down the stairs to say goodbye. Why?"

Danny was sitting on his bed. As always, his mysterious brown box was close beside him. At my angry outburst, Danny bit his lip and coughed to clear his throat. He then spoke in a voice barely above a whisper:

## Chapter 4: Danny Tries to Explain

“I’m sorry,” he said, “it’s just that my memories of everything that happened in the past are too powerful at times. It’s almost like I’m back in Germany re-living the same events over and over again. I’m sorry,” he repeated. “I guess I should try to explain so that you can understand. Perhaps after that you will not think so badly of me.”

“Yes,” I nodded, “I would like to know everything that happened with you.”

I sat down on the bed and faced Danny. I waited.

“I was born in a lovely town in Germany,” Danny began. “Many people in the town were Jewish like us. My father owned a shoe store and my mother and I were happy with our life. Then this terrible man called Hitler became the leader of the German people. He hated the Jews and persuaded the people to hate the Jews too. One night, some of the people and the police came and smashed the windows of my father’s store. They looted all the shoes. That night, they smashed the windows of every

Jewish-owned store and then burned down our synagogue. That night is called “Kristallnacht” in German, “the night of broken glass.” My mother, father and I held each other tightly trying to comfort one another.

“That was only the beginning of our fear. Two weeks later, my father received a letter ordering him to report for forced labour. He tried to smile when he kissed us, and said: ‘Don’t worry, I will do the work they assign to me, and when it is done, I will be back. I love you. Look after each other until I get back.’

Danny’s voice broke when he said: “That was the last time I saw my father. He never came back from the forced labour camp.”

Neither of us spoke for a long while, then Danny continued: “I love your father, but when he called me to say goodbye, that terrible scene with my father flashed before my eyes....I couldn’t move. I love your father. I don’t want to hurt his feelings. I hope he understands.”

I felt my heart beating rapidly.

“I’m sorry, Danny, I had no idea. I didn’t know how your parents died. I’m sure my father isn’t upset with you. He has told me that terrible

things happened in Germany to Jewish people but he never mentioned any of the details. He probably thinks I'm too young, but I want to know. I want to understand.”

## **Chapter 5: Danny and the Policeman**

Danny sat silently for a long time and I began to think that he wouldn't say anything more.

"I like you and I want to be your friend," I prompted. "The boys on our team like you too, but it is difficult to ignore that you act so strangely sometimes. Like when you ran off of the soccer field. Were you reminded of another memory then?"

Danny nodded.

"I was frightened. Shortly after that night of the looting of the Jewish stores, after 'Kristallnacht', I went to the nearby park to sit on a bench. Soon after I sat down, a policeman came by. He yanked me off the bench, pointed to a makeshift sign stuck into a flower bed, and shouted "Can't you read? No Jews allowed in this park." He then kicked me hard and I fell down, bruised. He yelled at me. "Get out and if you come back I'll put you and your stinking family in jail." I got up and ran home as fast as I could.

"When you asked me to go to the park to play soccer I was happy, as I like soccer and I was

eager to get to know your friends. But then, just as we were about to begin to play, I noticed a policeman get off his motorcycle and approach us. I remembered that incident back in Germany. I couldn't help it—I panicked and ran.”

“Danny,” I said, “things are different here in Canada. Our policemen are trained to protect us from harm, not to hurt us. They are our friends. The policeman you saw knows our team. When he's on duty and we are playing he often comes over to say hello and watch for a while. However, I can understand why you ran away after your terrible experience in Germany. I think I would have done the same.”

Danny nodded and seemed to relax.

“It does feel good to be able to talk about all that happened,” he said. “It somehow makes it easier to bear, knowing that you understand.”

Encouraged by his words, I continued my questions.

“After your father left for the forced labour camp, what happened with you and your mother? How did she die?”

Danny took a deep breath before continuing.



## Chapter 6: Danny in the Classroom

“Of course mother was very upset when father left. She worried that she too would be forced to leave. And then things got worse for me at school. One day my teacher asked me to stand in front of the class. With his long ruler he pointed at me and said: ‘Children—learn how to recognize the Jew. See how his hair, his eyes, his posture—everything about him is different from you beautiful German boys.’ When he said the word ‘posture’ my teacher hit me across my back with the ruler, making me cry out in pain and totter forward. ‘He doesn’t fit in,’ he went on. ‘Do we want a Jew in our class?’ Then all my classmates, including those that I had thought were my friends, laughed at me. They threw their erasers and chalk at me and shouted ‘get out—get out!’ I ran from the room and planned never to go back. A few weeks later all Jewish children were banned from German public schools.”

“That is terrible!” I exclaimed. “And it’s untrue. Jewish people are not all the same. They look very different from one another—like most

people. Just look at you and me. You have dark brown hair and eyes while my hair is red and my eyes are grey. And Julia in my class has blond hair and a cute turned up nose.”

I felt myself blushing as I said that, and looked down at my hands. Then suddenly I thought I understood another of Danny’s strange behaviours.

“Was it because of that memory that you didn’t want to go up in front of your class here, and read from Shakespeare?” I asked.

“Yes,” Danny answered. “I know it is different here, but when I was called to come forward, that scene in Germany flashed before my eyes and I couldn’t move.”

I shook my head in sympathy.

“I’m so sorry that you had to go through that,” I said quietly. “And I’m sorry that we didn’t understand. I wouldn’t have joked about it with my friends afterwards, if I had.”

“Well it is partly my fault,” said Danny. “I never explained.”

“At any rate, after school was forbidden for the Jews,” Danny continued, “my mother started

hearing horrible stories about what was happening to Jewish people in the other European countries invaded by Hitler's Nazi army. She wanted to protect me. She didn't seem to care about herself."

## Chapter 7: The Kruger Farm

“There was a family that used to visit Father’s store, Mr. and Mrs. Kruger. They lived on a farm just outside our village. They had a son, Tomas, the same age as me. Unfortunately he was mentally handicapped. My parents were kind to them every time they came to the store to buy new shoes for themselves and their son. My mother encouraged me to share my toys with Tomas while they shopped. One day the Hitler government ordered that the “handicapped” boy be sent to a “special” school for instruction. Three weeks later, Mr. and Mrs. Kruger received a letter from the school informing them that Tomas had died from ‘pneumonia’. The parents were devastated. They questioned how their son, physically well and active, could develop ‘pneumonia’ in three weeks and die. But there were no further communications from the authorities.

“The Krugers heard whispered rumours that many otherwise healthy, handicapped children died suddenly while in government

control. They realized that the rumours must be true; the new 'Master' race of Hitler's Germany had no place for physically or mentally handicapped children, and so their lives were cut short by the Hitler government.

"I was eight years old when Mother took me to the farm and asked the Krugers to protect me. They gladly accepted the responsibility. They said that it would help to ease their own sorrow. My mother cried when she kissed me and said goodbye. She put this shoe box in my hands. It is one of the boxes from my family's store and it contained a few items that my mother said would serve as a reminder of her and my father as well as aid me in the future should they not return. I never saw my mother again.

"Since I was in hiding at the Kruger's, I couldn't go to the local school, and had to disappear to the coal cellar whenever someone came to the farm. I spent a lot of time alone. However, there were some school books that were left behind by the Kruger's older son, who had been forced to join the German army.

"I taught myself from those books. Also, the radio was my main companion. On it I could

listen to programs not only in German but also in other languages as well. Though the only language that I spoke fluently at the time was German, I taught myself to speak a little English with an English grammar book I found in the house and an English radio station.”

Danny sat up a little straighter as he said those words, clearly proud of his achievement.

“You know, there are several English words that sound quite similar to German. Father always said that I had a natural gift for languages and he had occasionally taught me some English words like ‘hello’ and ‘thank you’ just in case one day we were to join his brother, your father, in Canada.”

“It was a good thing you did,” I laughed. “Can you imagine how much harder your life would be now if we couldn’t talk with each other? If you couldn’t understand anyone at school and they couldn’t understand you?”

Danny nodded in agreement.

“In time, I was able to figure out the progress of the war, in spite of the propaganda announcements of the Nazi government. As I listened, I understood that the war was turning

against the Germans. I was overjoyed when, after playing mournful music all-day, the radio announcers spoke of a lost army of 350,000 men in a place in Russia called Stalingrad.

## Chapter 8: The War is Over!

“Four years after I entered the farm, I waved happily at a convoy of trucks carrying American soldiers as they rode by the farm. The war was over! I was free! I could follow the soldiers and search for my parents. But I turned and walked back to the farm. I was needed there for a short while longer. Poor Mr. Kruger had developed a terrible cough and only left his bed for the short times I was able to help him get up. I had taken over doing all of the farm work he had taught me previously. Just days before, Mrs. Kruger had told me, with tears in her eyes, that she had sold the farm and arranged for Mr. Kruger and herself to go to a sanatorium in the Austrian Alps after the end of the war. ‘We may be there for years, but it is the only chance for Mr. Kruger to get well,’ she had said. ‘In a few months, hopefully, he will be able to travel. Bless you for helping us. I pray that your mother and father will come back to get you before we leave.’

“I, too, wiped the tears from my eyes. ‘You have treated me like your son. You have saved my life and risked yours by hiding me. Even if my



parents come for me, I will stay with you until Mr. Kruger is well enough to travel.’ Though I longed to follow the soldiers immediately, I was determined to keep my promise.

“Two months later, I said ‘goodbye’ to Mr. and Mrs. Kruger at the railway station. My parents had not returned but I assured the Krugers that I would be fine. The plan was for me to go back to my home and wait for them there. I had grown to love the Krugers and missed them already, but I put my knapsack on my shoulders, my shoe box under my arm and turned towards my town. I cried as the train pulled away with the Krugers on board.”

Danny paused and sighed. He had a faraway look in his eyes as if instead of seeing me, he was watching the Krugers again, mounting the steps of the train. Then he shook his head and continued.

“Mrs. Kruger had given me some money to help me get by till I found my parents and filled my box with food. But just in case things didn’t turn out as I hoped, I was reluctant to spend money on train tickets. I remember walking along the streets leading to my home. I passed collapsed

buildings and the large craters left behind by bombs.

## **Chapter 9:**

### **“I’m looking for my parents”**

“I was pleased to see that the building that housed father’s shoe business and our apartment upstairs was largely intact. I took a deep breath, stood up tall and knocked on the door. After a time, I heard a voice from the other side of the door say: ‘What do you want?’ I cleared my throat, and declared in a loud voice: ‘I was born in this house. I am looking for my father and mother. Please let me in.’ The voice inside said: ‘Go away. This is my home. It was empty when I came here and nobody will cause me to move now. You are probably a phony trying to fool me.’ When I shook my head and tried to insist, the voice commanded me to show my identification papers. I had to admit I didn’t have any proof of who I was or where I had lived at the start of the war. ‘Just as I thought you’re a liar,’ said the voice behind the door. ‘Go away or I’ll call the police.’

“The voice retreated. I was shaken. I sat down, hugging my shoe box close to my body. It was the only thing from the past that I had left in the world. I didn’t have identity papers and I didn’t

know how to get new papers to prove who I was. I didn't know what to do or where to go."

Tears sprang to my eyes at Danny's words. What would I have done in that terrible situation?

"I'm beginning to understand you better now," I said, hoping that Danny didn't notice the tremor in my voice. "But tell me, what happened after you were turned away from your own home? What did you do? How did you manage to come to Canada?"

Danny smiled at the eagerness in my voice. For the first time since his arrival he seemed pleased by my curiosity. His voice however was serious when he spoke.

## **Chapter 10:**

### **“Show me your number.”**

“It was a very bad time. I was turned away from my home and was wandering without direction in my ruined city. As the sun started to set, I realized I was exhausted. I needed to lie down, but where? Then I noticed that the house I was passing looked empty. The front door was lying in the dirt. I peeked in cautiously, and then entered. After making sure that the house was empty I sat down on a torn sofa and soon fell asleep.

“I felt someone shaking me violently and shouting: ‘Get up, get up and get out of here.’ I opened my eyes and saw a tall, thin man with a bandage on his head, shouting: ‘This is my place now and for any Jews that are still alive after your stinking concentration camps. Go before I wrap my stick around your head.’ I was now fully awake and shouted back: ‘Wait I am a Jew too!’ ‘Oh yeah!’ he sneered, ‘with those clean clothes and good shoes? You can’t fool me. You’re not a Jew. ‘But I am a Jew,’ I insisted.

“The man pulled up the sleeve of his shirt and pointed to the tattooed number on his arm. ‘If you are a Jew, show me your number.’ I hung my head. ‘I don’t have a number,’ I said, almost ashamed that I had avoided his horrible fate of being imprisoned in a concentration camp. ‘A couple hid me on a farm.’ ‘A likely story,’ he said. ‘Why don’t you go back to them then?’ He scowled and pointed the way out. Dejected, I picked up my shoe box and slowly moved to the open door. First I couldn’t prove that my home had indeed been my home, and now I couldn’t even prove that I was Jewish. Suddenly I had an idea. At the empty doorway I turned and shouted: *‘Ma nishtano halayla hazeh michol halaylot — Why is this night different from all other nights?’*

“It was the customary first question, in Hebrew, that I, as the youngest person present, had to ask my father on the night we celebrated the Jewish Passover so many years before. ‘I don’t remember the other three questions I was taught in Hebrew,’ I continued quickly when I saw the look of surprise in the man’s eyes, ‘but I remember we drank wine and ate matzos and when I found the piece of matzo hidden by my

father, he gave me a coin as reward, and then we sang a song with the word *Dayienu*. My name is Daniel Fineberg, I am a Jew. I was hidden by a Christian family for four years. I don't know where my parents are. I have no papers. I don't know where to go. Please, don't turn me away!'

The tall man hurried over and wrapped his arms around me. 'I'm sorry. I believe you now. I am Shlomo Grynzpan. I hope that somewhere I still have a son who is around your age. You can stay with me for now. I will look after you.'

## **Chapter 11: “I am an orphan.”**

For the next few weeks I walked with Shlomo who was also looking for any survivors of his family. We entered several former camps, where surviving Jews were living while they waited for a country in Europe or the world to accept them as citizens. Returning to our former homes was not an option, because we had lost our families, our homes were occupied by others, and we faced the same hatred as before. On the walls of the camp buildings were dozens of notes from survivors, with this information: My name is... from... (name of Town). I am looking for anyone in my family still alive. If you know anything, write it here.

“On one wall, I saw a note from Samuel Milstein, a man from my town. I remembered that he worked for my father. I hastily scribbled a message under his saying that I was Danny Feinberg and would be waiting for him in that spot every day at noon. He showed up the next day. I asked him what he knew of my father and mother.



“He shook his head slowly, then told me the news I dreaded to hear. ‘Your father never returned from the forced labour camp. Some months later, my wife, your mother and I together with the other Jews of the town were ordered to assemble for resettlement. The train went directly to the Auschwitz concentration camp. All the women and children were sent directly to the gas chambers when we arrived.’

“I shuddered when Sam finished speaking. Shlomo put his arm around me to keep me from falling. Sam, with a faraway look in his eyes, turned slowly and walked away. I tried to catch my breath. Like hammer blows to my head, I thought of my mother and father. An inner voice cried out: ‘I am an orphan, I am an orphan!’”

Danny paused and took a deep breath. I waited silently not knowing what to say. I could not imagine how utterly alone and frightened Danny must have felt in that moment. After a minute, Danny composed himself and continued.

“Shlomo also found out that his wife had died but there were no records of his son. ‘He might have survived together with some other

relatives,' he said hopefully. 'I must continue my search.'

“It was then that I remembered about the envelope in my shoe box. It was one of the items my mother had put in there for me with the instruction that I should open it if she and my father did not survive the war. I had not wanted to consider that possibility so I had forgotten about it. With trembling hands I opened it. Inside was a sheet of paper with your father’s name and address on it. Shlomo found an office of the Red Cross and told me to trust them to look after me and to connect me with my family in Canada. Then he left. I was sad to see him go”

## Chapter 12: The Red Cross

“The Red Cross people read my letter and wrote to your Father. They looked after me in the next year, with shelter, food, some English lessons by other DPs (Displaced Persons) as we were officially called. While we waited for the Red Cross to arrange a connection, we played a lot of soccer.

I was stunned by Danny’s account of the difficulties he met during his search for his parents. I couldn’t even imagine myself in these circumstances. My admiration for Danny’s courage reached a new level. I wished I could do something to show him how I felt.

I said: “It’s amazing that a Hebrew quotation you learned as a child stayed with you during the years you were parted from your parents.”

As we sat there both contemplating all that had been said between us, I had an idea.

“You know that I am deep into Hebrew studies for my Bar Mitzvah next November,” I said with sudden excitement. “After I read from the Torah, I am expected to speak to my parents and

the entire congregation to say that I willingly assume all my religious responsibilities as an adult. Then, according to custom, as a demonstration of my desire to share the joy of my special day I am supposed to announce my support of a charitable organization like the Food Bank or the Children's Hospital."

I paused and took a deep breath, wondering what Danny would say to what I was about to propose.

"I know that because of what happened, you are only now beginning your preparations for your own Bar mitzvah. But for years now you've acted like a courageous adult. If it's OK with you, I want to recommend to my parents and Rabbi Morais that you share my Bar Mitzvah day. I want you to stand beside me when we declare to the congregation that we willingly accept adult responsibilities. I want you to stand beside me as we announce the organization we will help. I will be proud to introduce you as 'my brother'."

Danny's eyes filled with tears. He was silent for a moment then he put out his hand and said in a husky voice:

“Thank you. It means a lot to me for you to call me, ‘brother’. You and Uncle Fred and Aunt Ingrid make me feel safe again. It will be an honour to stand beside you and share your Bar Mitzvah celebration.”

I glanced down at the small brown box that had lain on the bed between us all this time.

“Can you tell me what is in there now, besides the letter?” I asked. “And why you still carry that box everywhere you go?”

## **Chapter 13:**

### **“What is in your box?”**

Danny carefully, lovingly, picked up the box and held it out to me.

“Open it,” he said.

I did as I was told. To my surprise it only contained a few items. Puzzled, I took out a cookie, a chocolate bar, an apple, a photo of Danny’s parents, a gold chain that held a small six pointed Star of David, and a yellowed envelope which I now knew had contained my father’s name and address..

“Why these things, besides the envelope? I asked.

“As I told you earlier, when my mother left me with the Krugers, she cried bitterly. Before she kissed me and said goodbye she put this shoe box in my hands. After telling me about the letter, my mother told me to always keep some food in the box so that I will never be hungry. ‘Then, once you feel safe again,’ she said, ‘wear the Star of David proudly on your neck. It belonged to your father. It is a sign to others that you are a Jewish boy!’

“I never saw my mother again. But I wanted to make sure that I never forgot her last words to me and so I always tried to do as she said. To have some food in the box and to keep it always at my side. The box itself is a reminder of my parents and the shoe store that they so proudly owned.”

“I can see now why that box is so important to you” I said. “That it was important to you to always keep something to eat in it – especially in a bad time. And why you always wanted to have it with you. I understand.”

Neither of us spoke for a while. Slowly, one by one, Danny started putting the items on the bed back into his shoe box. When he picked up the gold chain with the Star of David, he paused. After a moment, Danny undid the clasp on the chain and fastened it around his neck.

“It is time that I obeyed my mother and started to wear this,” he said with a shy smile. “I truly feel safe again.”

Then to my surprise, he reached back into the box and removed the photograph and all the food, leaving only the envelope.

“I think I will ask your mother for a frame and keep the picture of my parents here on the table beside my bed. That way I can see them always. As for the food, I really don’t think I need to worry anymore about not having enough to eat – not with your mother’s cooking.”

Gently he put the lid on the box and slid the box back under the bed.

I sat, lost in thought. After a while I said, “Danny, your story is similar in some ways to my father’s story. Just like you, he was an immigrant from Germany. But he came before I born, so I am a born Canadian citizen. If he had not come to Canada, I would have been born in Germany and my father and I could have suffered in the same way your parents and you did. I’m thankful that Canada’s doors were open for my father. I’m glad I was born in Canada. This is a great country. And we’ll have a great celebration when you too will become a Canadian citizen.”

“Yes, we both have good reasons to be thankful to Canada,” Danny said. “I wish there was some way for us to show how lucky we are. Do you have any ideas?”



## **Chapter 14: “I thought of a new use for my shoe box.”**

“Well,” I said, thinking fast, “maybe we can choose an organization where we can work directly with the people in need. I know that my mother and the ladies at the synagogue often send clothes to an orphanage downtown. Would that interest you?”

“Yes, yes!” said Danny, more excited than I had ever seen him. “Everyone knows I am an orphan living with a wonderful family. I would love to help other orphans who are not as fortunate as I am. We could visit regularly with these children, to be their friend, and to organize games.”

“Terrific! Maybe we could even get the guys on our soccer team to come around to help organize some soccer matches with the children.”

Danny nodded vigorously, then bent down and brought up his shoe box back out from under the bed.

“I just decided that I don’t need my shoe box any more. I have thought of a new use for it. On our visits to the orphanage, I can fill the box with

fruits and candies like my mother did for me. With the games we organize, and the treats in the box, we can certainly brighten the orphans' days."

"Danny," I said filled with excitement, "you've put us on the right track! I like your idea of putting your shoe box to a new use. As a matter of fact, I like the idea so much, that I am going to get a shoebox of my own."

I jumped off the bed and rummaged around in the bottom of the closet until I found an empty shoe box.

"I can imagine the kid's excitement when we show up," said Danny. "They will be jumping up and down and shouting happily, 'The guys with the boxes are here!'"

"It will be fun working together," I said. "I can't wait to get started. Let's shake on this."

Danny put his shoebox under his arm and I picked up mine and placed it under my arm. With our arms around each other's shoulders we walked down the stairs. Mom was looking up at us, with a smile on her face.

Danny and I shouted together: “The Feinberg brothers are here!!”

Tears of happiness filled Mom’s eyes as she embraced us both.

“My boys, your father and I were hoping for this moment. Now we are a real family!”

## **Discussion:**

1. Have you ever met a Danny (survivor of the Holocaust)?
2. Was anyone in your school born in another country?
3. Learning to speak English is hard for new Canadians. How can you help?
4. What can you and your classmates do to make the 'Danny's' you meet become part of the Canadian family?