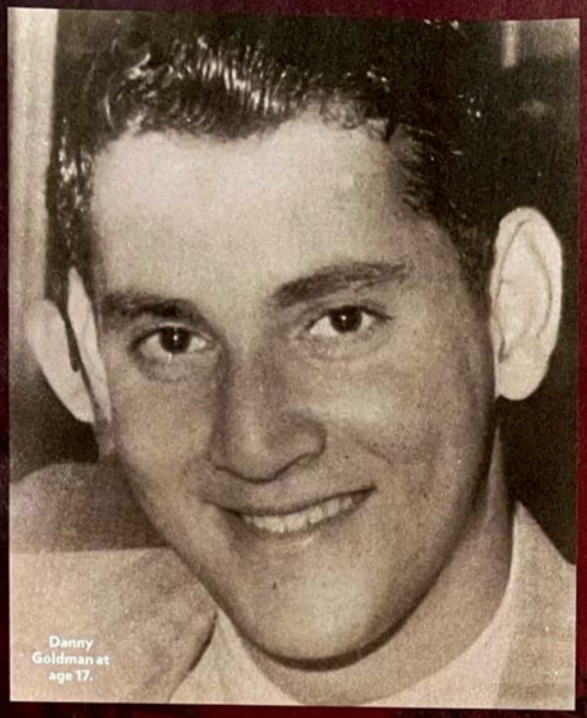

Danny Goldman at age 17.

The Kidnapping Case Had Long Ago Gone Cold. Then Friends Stepped In

JUSTICE FOR DANNY

MORE THAN 50 YEARS AFTER DANNY GOLDMAN WAS TAKEN FROM HIS HOME AND NEVER SEEN AGAIN, A TEAM OF DEDICATED NEIGHBORS SOLVED THE TEEN'S MURDER

By SANDRA SOBIERAJ WESTFALL *and* CHRISTINE PELISEK

CAREFREE CHILDHOODS "We were always outside biking and exploring," says Joe Graubart (far right, with Danny, center, and David Graubart in 1961).

For the Graubart boys, David and his "tagalong" little brother Joe, growing up in Surfside, Fla., with their buddy Danny Goldman was a snapshot of Americana: bikes and boats and "fishing right out your back door," remembers David. It was the 1950s and '60s. The Vietnam War was a fixture of the evening news as the boys hurtled toward age 18 and the dreaded military draft. But the guys only knew Surfside as a place where no one locked their doors and where Danny's mom, Sally, would cook breakfast for the gang. "It was very sweet," says Joe.

That blissful image was shattered on March 28, 1966, the day before Danny's 18th birthday, when a husky man with a limp entered the Goldman home through their unlocked sliding doors around 4:30 a.m. and kidnapped Danny after his parents, startled awake, could not meet the intruder's demand for $10,000 cash. "I'm going to hold Danny for security," the man told Aaron and Sally Goldman, using their first names and doubling his demand to $25,000 for the apparent inconvenience of having to take the boy. "If you don't get it for tonight, the price will double. I'll call at 6 with instructions."

That call never came, and no one in Surfside—or anywhere else—ever saw Danny again. "We thought he'd be back in two or three days somehow, with this crazy story to tell," David, 73 and living in Boynton Beach, Fla., says now. "The days became weeks, and the weeks became months." There was some speculation that Danny's disappearance had been a draft-dodging stunt—he was supposed to register on his 18th birthday—but Sally's abject grief made that seem unlikely. "Danny was her only child, her true love," says Joe. "I don't think she was ever the same after he was gone."

Today there is a story to tell about what happened to Danny Goldman—thanks to the boys of Surfside and their friends. Led by Paul Novack (who

FROM LEFT: COURTESY PAUL NOVACK; COURTESY JOE GRAUBART (BACKGROUND): STATE ARCHIVE OF FLORIDA

was 8 when Danny was kidnapped and grew up to become an attorney and a six-term mayor of Surfside), the Graubarts and Anthony Blate and Harvey Lisker, two other locals, the team spent 10 years reexamining the cold case. Calling themselves "the posse"—"Paul's the sheriff, the rest of us are the posse," says Joe, 71, a former vice mayor of Surfside—the group interviewed hundreds of people, reviewed tens of thousands of documents and unearthed new evidence. Late last year they announced their findings in collaboration with the Miami-Dade Police Department: that Danny was taken by since-deceased mobsters George Defeis and Joe "Chicken" Cacciatore and killed as part of an organized-crime money-laundering scheme related to the bank where Aaron Goldman served as an officer. "Paul was a hero here," retired Miami-Dade PD sergeant Robert Hoelscher said in a January interview. "The cold case squad is more than happy to accept credit, but they had not very much to do with it. Paul supplied them with all the intelligence information and detailed typewritten reports. And he didn't give up."

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Paul, almost 10 years Danny's junior, didn't know him as a boy, though the kidnapping made an enormous impression. "What I remember, from the very beginning, was that the mothers in town were afraid," says Paul, now 63. "They didn't know what happened and who might be next." The abduction—dubbed "FBI No. 1 Mystery" by the *Miami News*—was the biggest story to hit Surfside until the collapse of the Champlain Towers condo building there last June. For years, Paul would drive home past the old Goldman house and see its sliding doors from the road. "I would think to myself, that mystery must not be an open, unknown question forever," he says.

Long fascinated by the case, Paul got serious about investigating it after Danny's mother died in 2012 (she and Aaron, who died two years earlier, divorced in 1991). Sally had given one of Danny's cousins a Ziploc bag of papers that included a carbon copy—"1966 technology," Paul says with a chuckle—of an open letter asking people not to forget Danny. "When you pick up this oily copy in her own handwriting, a public plea all those years ago, it hit home," says Paul.

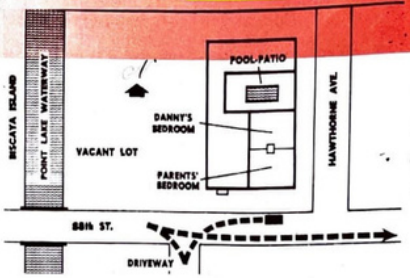
He enlisted Joe and David, who knew the Goldmans well, having spent countless days at their backyard swimming pool and in Danny's room taking apart TVs and radios. Paul "decided he was going to solve this thing come hell or high water," says David, who went on to own a successful TV-repair business in Miami Beach. "Every day, email after email. Paul started getting all sorts of stuff from the FBI and didn't take 'no' from them when legally he had a right to information."

Using his own money to chase every lead, Paul linked Defeis to the crime scene by tracing an unremarkable rubber glove fragment in evidence to a Brooklyn clinic where Defeis had been a patient—the only place in the country that used these gloves, which were made in Canada. It was just one puzzle piece the guys ran down. Another: Four days before Danny's abduction, information from his father was presented to a grand jury investigating illegality at Miami's Five Points Bank. Aaron, a board member, had noticed some suspicious loans; what he probably didn't know was that associates of union boss Jimmy Hoffa and mobster Santo Trafficante used the bank as a money-laundering front.

In the banking case, 19 federal indictments came down, but no one was charged in Danny's disappearance. The posse learned from unnamed informants that he was murdered on Miami Beach and his body was taken by boat offshore, dismembered and thrown overboard.

Everyone implicated in the posse's findings is now dead, Paul says, but he finds satisfaction in providing closure to the community. And there's more to come, as the Surfside team also turned up leads in 39 other unresolved deaths. "We came up with a huge amount of new criminal intelligence information," Paul says tantalizingly. Still, solving more crimes isn't the primary legacy he wants to leave. "It would be completely wrong for Danny to be forgotten," he says. "We decided it wasn't going to go down like that." ●

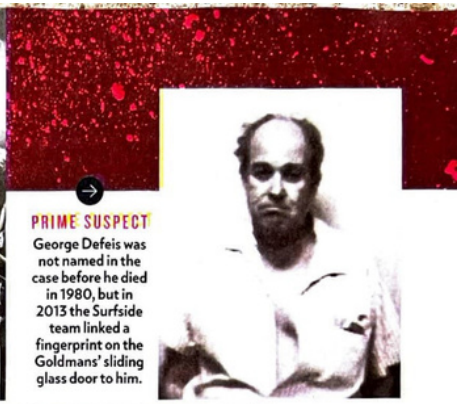
HUNT FOR CLUES



KIDNAPPER'S TRAIL
A newspaper map of the getaway car's path from the Goldman house. "We were able to see them drive away," Danny's mother said.

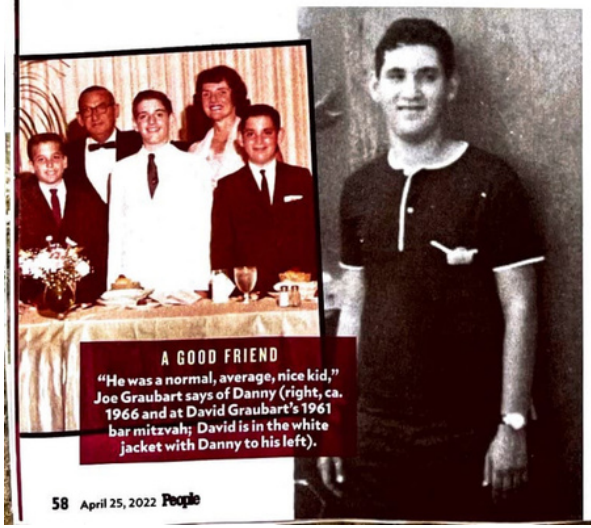
NEIGHBORHOOD ON EDGE
The kidnapping was "a shocker," says Joe Graubart, who remembers police "swarming" the Goldman house (right, March 29, 1966) and the entire town.

RENEWING THEIR PLEA
With no leads in Danny's disappearance, the Goldmans went on TV on May 2, 1966, to ask for community help.



PRIME SUSPECT
George Defeis was not named in the case before he died in 1980, but in 2013 the Surfside team linked a fingerprint on the Goldmans' sliding glass door to him.

MOBBED UP
Joe "Chicken" Cacciatore, a cousin of Florida crime boss Santo Trafficante, is also believed to have participated in Danny's murder.



A GOOD FRIEND
"He was a normal, average, nice kid," Joe Graubart says of Danny (right, ca. 1966 and at David Graubart's 1961 bar mitzvah; David is in the white jacket with Danny to his left).

'WE ACTUALLY KNEW MORE ABOUT THIS CASE THAN ANYBODY'
– PAUL NOVACK

ON THE CASE
Det. Jonathan Grossman (left) says that Surfside's Paul Novack (above) and Joe (far right) and David Graubart (near right) were critical to solving the crime.

CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT: MIAMI-DADE POLICE DEPARTMENT; COURTESY PAUL NOVACK; BILL SANDS/SOUTH MIAMI HERALD; COURTESY PAUL NOVACK(2)

(Bottom right) Photograph by SCOTT MCINTYRE