



When Emil Goldfus / Rudolf Abel / Willy Fisher was living in Brooklyn, he made friends with other artists. They all shared studio space at Ovington Studios in Brooklyn.

One might think that a Soviet spy would refrain from making friends, but Goldfus / Fisher mingled with other artists. Many of them were young men with left-wing, socialist / communist views.

One of the spy's friends was Burton Silverman. He and Goldfus / Fisher / Abel became particularly close. Silverman even created paintings of his older friend, like this one which depicts Goldfus surrounded by his canvases and art supplies.

How did Silverman view his friend? Burton's son, Robert, tells us more in an article he published (on February 8, 2014) with *Salon*. "[The Russian Spy Who Duped My Dad](#)" provides us with interesting information about Goldfus / Fisher / Abel while he was living in Brooklyn.

Silverman had no idea that his friend was a Soviet spy. Over a period of three years, or so, they shared stories and talked about their respective love of (and views about) art. But at no time did Silverman ever have an inkling that his friend was an illegal alien whose primary responsibility was reporting events about America to his superiors in Moscow.

There was one time, however ...

Silverman and Goldfus / Fisher / Abel were in the studio together, late at night, sharing conversation in Goldfus' room. His short-wave radio was on which didn't mean much [to Silverman](#):

*They were in Goldfus's room and his shortwave radio was on, sputtering an unfamiliar, Strauss-like tune along with an indecipherable, Central European-sounding commentator.*

*The phone rang in Silverman's studio. He answered it, and the voice on the other end asked why he was working at such a late hour. Jokingly, Silverman responded, "Oh, Emil and I were just listening in on Moscow."*

Goldfus / Fisher / Abel was [not amused by the joke](#):

*When Silverman hung up the phone, Goldfus's affable, easygoing demeanor had vanished completely, replaced by a cold, hard glare—the only one he had ever evinced in the three years they were friends. He snapped, "Don't ever say such a thing like that on the telephone again. Not even in jest."*

Although Silverman never suspected anything was amiss with his friend, others wondered about [what was up with Goldfus](#):

*There were other odd moments as well: nagging details and incidents that just didn't make sense.*

*To Silverman, Jules Feiffer said, "You know, Emil gives me the feeling of a guy who's been on the bum. No matter how much of a fat cat they get to be, they never lose that look."*

*Danny Schwartz agreed. Upon first meeting Emil Goldfus and hearing his story about working as a photofinisher, he said that Goldfus was too worldly and too educated for that particular trade, saying, "You know, the whole thing sounds fishy. This guy isn't what Burt [Silverman] takes him to be."*

*Silverman's brother Gordon had his suspicions as well. He was an electronics engineer, and one day, while visiting Silverman's studio, he got into a conversation about physics with Goldfus, finding that he possessed a degree of expertise that was surprising for someone that wasn't a professional.*

Goldfus / Fisher / Abel, of course, was—in fact—very educated. He knew about physics because he'd studied the subject.

More than anything else, however, Silverman's friend was a master at hiding his real identity from his Brooklyn friends.

No one was more surprised than Burt Silverman when the facts came out. He learned about the unraveling of Goldfus' life in the newspaper:

*On August 7, 1957, my father, Burton Silverman—a young artist fresh out of the Army—was walking down the street on the way to his layout and graphic design job for the then-liberal New York Post when he caught a glimpse of a blaring headline at a newsstand: "RUSSIAN COLONEL IS INDICTED HERE AS TOP SPY IN U.S" and the sub-header, "Suspect Said to Have Used Brooklyn Studio to Direct Network."*

Beyond those shocking statements was something else. This suspect was:

*"The most important spy ever caught in the United States."*

How did Burton Silverman react to such unbelievable news?

*For my father, it was a moment of extreme unreality. The face staring back at him from the newspaper was his good friend Emil, not some KGB spook. How could Emil be a "master spy," or even a common, everyday spy? He was an amateur painter, a fine guitar player and a charming older gentleman. How could that man be the enemy?*

*He was frozen in his tracks, transfixed by the image, unable to reconcile the contradiction of the man he knew (or thought he knew) with the words in print staring back at him. It was as if a hole in the fabric of his universe had suddenly opened up under his feet.*

The mark of a dedicated spy, among other things, is to keep his own counsel. That is something which Goldfus / Fisher / Abel did—not just with his Brooklyn friends but throughout the course of his arrest / trial / incarceration in America.

Click on the image for a much-better view.

Credits:

Portrait of Emil Goldfus / Willy Fisher / Rudolf Abel, by his friend, the artist Burton Silverman, circa 1958. Image online via Salon, courtesy Silverman Studios Inc.

See [Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:](http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/Emil-Goldfus-Rudolf-Abel-An-Artist-in-Brooklyn)

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