

# ONE OF THE FIRST WOMEN TO STAND FOR PARLIAMENT IN AUSTRALIA

Welcome to my Sukkah, I say, looking around our decorated, sparkly, sunny but shady indoor/ outdoor space. I'm hoping I can invite my guest to sit and have a cup of tea with me. And talk. I want to ask so many questions that I'm afraid I won't leave time for answers.

Vida Goldstein was an activist. A suffragette, one of the first women to stand for parliament in Australia, before women in Victoria even had the right to vote (that would only happen 5 years later, in 1908). Born in the goldfields and growing up in late 19th century Melbourne she was amongst those debating the creation of the commonwealth, fighting for women to be represented, arguing for a living wage for all, for a society that cared for the needs of all. She was a writer, a speaker, a teacher. For a few years she and her sisters ran a co-ed school, at a time when most private schools were single sex, around the corner from me on Alma Rd.

I want to ask her, sitting here in my 2020 Sukkah, does she feel a sinking disappointment that gains in women's rights are so hard fought for and so easily lost? Does she wonder where we went wrong, as I do? Does she see the beauty of this city, made more beautiful by the stilling of the cars and the slowing down of movement as we sit waiting for a virus to pass. Does she recognise it? Do the women who claim to speak for women in Australia speak for her?

How important was her Jewish heritage to her? She chose to fight her fights in our name, clothed in a name that would not hide that heritage, but she herself was not Jewish. Her mother, also a socialist and a suffragette, was of good Protestant stock. It would have been easy to change her name to something less obvious as so many around her were doing. Why didn't she?



Have we let you down? Should we be fighting harder? You were a founding member of the National Council of Australian Women (among many other organisations). Do you feel that the Jewish affiliate group NCJWA is doing the work you'd have wanted to see us do?

As a woman who was internationally engaged internationally in pacifist organisations what do you think of the violence inherent in 2020? What has changed on the ground since the end of the Great War to bring hope that peace could be more than just an ideal?

We sit in the spring afternoon, in a Sukkah in a Melbourne that has morphed from the one she lived in a century ago. We have so much in common but yet the years and the experiences separate us. Her; the single woman who has spent so much time as an activist, me; a mother of four who has strayed only to the edges of politics and activism. I grew up in a post holocaust world, a world with a Jewish state. She grew up before there was even a commonwealth of Australia.

The sukkah represents the transient nature of life. It is our home for a week, and then dismantled for another year. It is a good space for conversations like this one.