Chapter 20. Freshman Year

I

College started in early September, 1942. With the war on, Penn held the reception for incoming freshmen women during a blackout.

A few days before classes began there was a weekend retreat for the newcomers. The Pocono Mountain setting was beautiful, with forest cabins overlooking a lake. The girls slept in screened-in bungalows, twenty to a cabin. A social hall with dining facilities stood atop a wooded rise, and here they all met for meals. Numerous activities were packed into three days: hikes, a hayride, lectures and, on Saturday night, a dance with freshmen boys attending a similar facility across the lake. The weekend concluded with a songfest, counselors teaching everyone the school songs so they would know them at football games. Josy arrived home hoarse from all the singing.

The only girl she knew there was Mollie Potash, her classmate from Gratz High. Flora Kaplan, who also entered Penn that fall, declined to attend because it involved Saturday activities, breaking the Sabbath. The other girls she knew from Gratz also starting at Penn were Evelyn Aaronson (a German refugee who had lived also in France) and Isobel Rutenberg (known to her high school classmates as "the Snob"). Evelyn declined to come because of the cost, and Isobel, Josy supposed, because it was beneath her dignity. By the end of the weekend Josy had met many new people but, even after the shared activities, most still seemed like strangers. Since Penn was at that time mainly a commuter school, and a large one at that, she would find it hard to get to know many people really well.

The following Monday she went to Bennett Hall (the College for Women) to get her class schedule. Eagerly she explained to the Dean that she wanted to take Astronomy, the History of Art, and Oriental Studies. The Dean stopped her at once.

"That may be possible in your junior year," she announced in clipped tones, "but for now, this is your schedule." She handed Josy a slip of paper listing English Composition I, English Literature, Sociology, Psychology, Fifth-year French, General Math, and Physical Education.

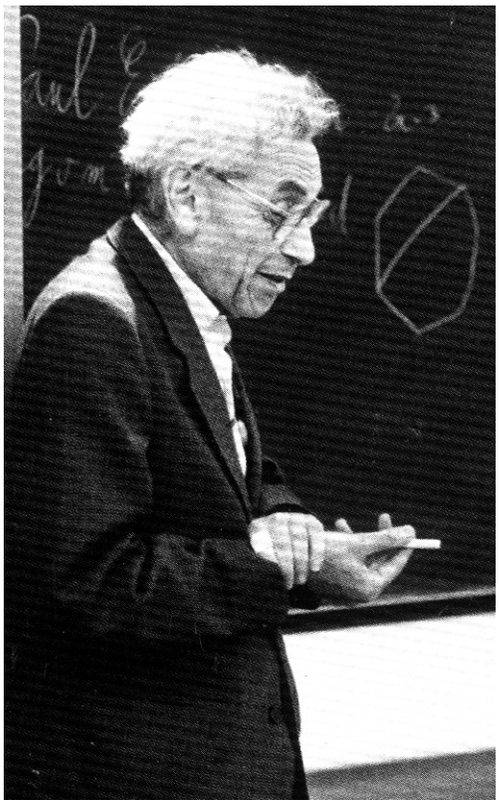
When Josy came home and showed it to her father, he scowled. Next morning he phoned the Dean. "I'm an engineer," he explained, "and no daughter of mine is going to get by with just General Math!"

He explained that Josy had already taken Solid Geometry and Trigonometry in high school, and demanded that she now continue with College Algebra, to be followed by Solid Analytic Geometry and then a full year of Calculus.

"I think that would be a mistake," the Dean responded. At Jacques's insistence she reluctantly assigned Josy to a freshman class of fast-track math. This was College Algebra taught by the legendary Dr. Paul Erdos. Erdos was only twenty-nine years old at the time. In future years, he would become renowned as one of the foremost mathematicians of the twentieth century, indeed one of the most prolific in history. He would publish over fifteen hundred articles, and other mathematicians would boast of their "Erdos number" (1 if co-authoring a paper with Erdos, 2 if publishing with someone who had published with Erdos, etc.). By the year 1996 Dr. Erdos would have 458 collaborators. Many regarded Erdos as surpassing even Einstein in the field of Mathematics (he had worked with Einstein at Princeton before coming to Penn). With World War II now raging, Erdos was unable to return to his native Hungary. Instead Princeton sent him to join the Penn facul-

ty. Here, in addition to doing research, he was assigned to teach freshmen at the College for Women. For those students requiring some semblance of pedagogical guidance this turned out to be a disaster.

Erdos was a gentle and charming man, but he assumed that few details ever needed explaining. When a student put a question to him, he would usually shrug and answer, "But it is obvious!" On one occasion, after he had finished presenting a thirty-two-step theorem, Josy raised her hand.



Dr. Paul Erdos.

"Dr. Erdos," she began, pointing to the four blackboards covered with writing, "I understand everything up to Step Number 8, but there I get stuck."

"Good, vee help you," he responded genially in his heavily accented English. "Step 1" (and he read it aloud word for word from the board) "You understand this–yes?"

"Yes," replied Josy.

"Good. Step 2, you understand?"(again reading from the board).

"Yes."

"Good. Step 3?" and he continued in this manner until he came to Step Number 8.

"Step 8, you understand, yes?"

"No. I'm sorry, I don't," she replied.

"Good, vee try again," he responded. "Step 1", and once more he read from the board, reciting step by step until he got to Number 8.

"You understand now, yes?"

"No", replied Josy.

"Good, vee try again."

After two more such attempts, when he again looked at her questioningly, beaming in expectation, she nodded helplessly in mute resignation. Defeated, she saw no point in holding up the class any further, though she remained as confused as ever. Dr. Erdos cheerfully continued with his lecture.

His only departure from the material occurred one day when, seated at the platform table, legs crossed, displaying a huge hole in the sole of one shoe, he suddenly sniffed the

air around him, glanced out the open window, and declared, “Peculiar odor, isn’t it?” Then he went on with the lecture.

Once a couple of the boys, intent on diverting him, presented him with what they assured him was an insoluble mathematical progression.

“Can you solve it, Dr. Erdos?” they asked, showing him the numbers 2, 5, 8, 11, 13, 15, 19, 30, 36, 40, 46, 52, 56, 60, 63, and 69.

Squinting through his glasses for several minutes, he finally replied, “Leave it vit me. It is more puzzling than I expected. I vill try by myself.”

Three weeks went by. Then, after declaring that he had stayed up many nights devoting every spare moment to the problem, he conceded defeat.

“So vot is it?” he demanded.

“The street numbers where the Market Street El train stops!” they guffawed, loudly slapping each other on the back.

“Ach, such a vaste!” he snorted. “Such a vaste of time!” while the class laughed in glee.

When mid-January arrived, everyone panicked at the prospect of the final exam. At 9:00 that Thursday morning Dr. Erdos arrived, test booklets under one arm, sheets of exam-questions under the other. Distributing everything, he signaled for them to begin. The exam was scheduled to take two hours, but by 1:00 in the afternoon it was still going on.

The noise in the room was deafening. Erdos, moving from student to student, openly discussed the exam questions with anyone who raised a hand. From time to time he stopped to write an equation on the blackboard, muttering to himself, then conferring with groups who had gotten out of their seats to peer over his shoulder. Once in a while he glanced up, turned around, and called out to the class, "Sh!! Be qvi-et, vill you!! You are all making too much noise!" Everyone was talking, comparing notes, discussing possible solutions with one another and, whenever they could catch his attention, with the professor. At 1:30 somebody from the Dean's Office arrived.

“Where are the exam papers?” she wanted to know. Ordering the students back to their seats, she collected the answer sheets over a flood of objections, announcing, “This test is now over!”

Shouts of protest broke out from all parts of the room. These got so heated that she called the Dean, who arrived several minutes later. Raising a hand for silence, she announced, “This exam will not count. You will be given a retest Tuesday morning.

Report back to this room at nine o'clock sharp!"

Everyone sighed with relief. But what seemed like a reprieve really presented no solution at all. Josy pored over her notes and textbook to no avail. She used every spare moment between other final exams trying to make sense of the math, but got nowhere. Finally at eight o'clock Monday evening, the night before the re-exam, she recalled that José, whom she had met recently, had taken advanced math. Hurrying to his house a few blocks away, she brought along a copy of the exam questions, which Professor Erdos had allowed them to keep. In a few succinct terms José explained what she needed to know.

The whole course of an entire semester became clear in just fifteen minutes. The next morning she went in to take the retest and came out with an A.

Two days later the Dean of Women called Jacques. "Mr. Feldmark," she explained, "I feel I've misjudged your daughter. She got an A in the College Algebra final! Perhaps you were right after all. She does belong in the advanced track math. You know, we really have very few women here at Penn majoring in Mathematics. Your daughter should definitely consider this as a possibility in her junior year when it comes time to declare a major!"

II

Josy's other first-term courses at Penn proved less tumultuous. Psychology was an entirely new subject, and she loved it. Twice a week she attended lectures in the large amphitheater at College Hall, and once weekly they met for laboratory in the basement. One of their early experiments involved dissecting a frog to observe the reflex action in its severed limbs. For an experiment on perception, students got into line and sketched a copy of what they remembered from a pattern just shown to them for only a few seconds by the previous student, then held up their own drawing for the next person in line to copy. Afterwards they studied how the picture had continually changed as it moved along the chain. Josy found it intriguing that the children's game "Whispering down the lane" could be presented in visual terms, permitting analysis of the changes that occurred as the picture moved down the line.

Once just before a test, she spent her lunch hour studying with a group of girls from psychology class for their two o'clock exam. While they ate in Bennett Hall's basement lounge, they quizzed one another to review the material. At one point she asked a question.

"I know the answer to that one," one of the girls announced. "But I'm not going to tell you."

"Why not?" Josy asked.

"Because then you might get it right, and that could give you one point over me in the exam," came the answer.

Dr. Miles Murphy was their psychology professor. A kindly looking gentleman with a twinkle in his eye, he seemed the very personification of Santa Claus. One day about six weeks into the course Josy happened to be seated ten rows up in the amphitheater. The topics for that lecture were Conditioned Response and Memory Span. Seated next to her were two girls she had never met. Once the lecture began, they started gossiping merrily, laughing, and exchanging remarks, growing more and more animated. Josy tried to ignore them, but found it harder and harder to concentrate over the buzz of their conversation.

Suddenly Dr. Murphy stopped in mid-sentence. He bounded up the steps, three at a time, charging directly to Josy's row. She gasped and caught her breath. It seemed as if he were coming straight at her. Looming over her like a hurricane, glowering, face bright red, he stood there trembling in fury.

"Get out of here," he thundered, shaking both his fists above his head. "Get out of this room and never come back!"

Terrified, she suddenly realized it was the two girls beside her he was addressing.

"Get out of my class," he roared. Josy had never before seen anyone's face go so crimson. "If I ever see you in here again, I'll--!" Shaking from head to foot, he shrieked even louder, "Talking during my lecture! How dare you! You can go to the Dean, you can leave the University, you can go anywhere you want, but don't you ever dare come back in here again!"

Frightened, the two stood up, shakily picked up their books and sobbing, slunk up the steps and out of the hall. Then, just as suddenly as he had begun, Dr. Murphy beamed, turned, and descended the steps back to the lectern. In mellow tones, eyes again twinkling, a genial smile on his face, he continued his lecture as if nothing had happened. Blithely proceeding from the topic of Conditioned Response to Memory Span, he described how people had a limit to the number of units they could recall, and emphasized that digits such as "3" and "5" were to be counted separately, and not as the single unit "35". Asking the students to test their own memory spans, he called out lists of numbers in a merry voice. The startling contrast between his behavior before and after the incident left everyone dumbfounded. Josy, having been seated so close to the confrontation, found herself shak-

ing for the rest of the period. Several days later she noticed the two girls slinking up to Dr. Murphy, timid and contrite, carrying a note that must have come from the Dean. Dr. Murphy addressed them sternly, finally motioning them to take seats so he could begin his lecture. Neither one opened her mouth in class after that, but neither did Josy ever again regard Dr. Murphy as a kindly old Santa Claus.

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She took two courses of Freshman English, one in Composition, the other on Literature. All incoming students were required to take a placement exam to determine whether they got assigned to Composition I, II, or III. Most, including Josy, ended up having to start with English I and then follow up with the others. She found all three undemanding, simply a matter a grinding out one composition per week. A graduate student taught Composition I, and Josy gained only two insights from him: first, that the wording of popular songs was usually general rather than specific (it had to be, she realized, to appeal to the greatest number of listeners), and second, that using the title "Mr." before the name of a political figure (as in "Mr. Roosevelt") often implied a negative view of that person. Otherwise she considered the course a total waste of time.

Second semester Composition II was taught by Dr. Boll. Though a full professor, he proved not only less effective than the graduate student from the term before, but actually negative. The few observations he scribbled on Josy's papers discouraged her without ever being constructive. His only comment on her first paper read, "In light of the fine verse you write, this is extremely disappointing!" Another was the boldly printed word "Sibilant!" penciled into the margin of her second composition. She decided he must be referring to her phrase "The surface of the water shimmered in the afternoon sunlight", something she considered hardly worth mentioning. The harsh tone of his criticism, accompanied by little specific feedback, was disheartening enough to discourage her from writing any poetry of her own, even for pleasure, that semester.

The Survey of English Literature course, however, was very rewarding. Dr. Havilland taught the first half. Especially memorable was his account of how Christianity had arrived in sixth century Britain. By including the psychology underlying the history, he brought the course vividly to life.

There was one topic, however, on which she strongly disagreed with him. In dis-

cussing Wordsworth's poem "Daffodils", he insisted that the poet's conclusions in the following lines had been dead wrong:

And oft when on my couch I lie
In vacant and in pensive mood,
I see within that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude.

"Here," Dr. Havilland proclaimed, "Wordsworth is describing how inspiration comes to a poet afterwards from scenes he recollects. But that is not how it happens! A poet draws his inspiration immediately and only directly from what he sees at the moment. Wordsworth was mistaken."

From her own modest attempts at writing poetry, Josy disagreed. She had often experienced exactly what Wordsworth described, a complete reliance on past images, and she was sure this must happen to many poets.

"But who am I to contradict the professor?" she asked herself. She never spoke up, yet she always maintained that personal conviction.

In the second semester Dr. Stine, Assistant Head of the English Department taught the course. One section included a description and comparison of several of the world's languages and language families. Someone asked Dr. Stine which of all languages he considered the most beautiful. To everyone's amazement, he answered, "Swedish".

"Why Swedish?" they asked.

"Because it's the most musical," he replied.

No one in class quite understood what made Swedish more musical than Spanish or Italian, for example, and he never bothered to explain.

III

In her sociology class there were close to a hundred girls. The one time she got called on Dr. Hottel asked, "Should the fines for a particular crime be identical for every offender, or should these penalties be based on a sliding scale according to the perpetrator's income?"

Josy, finally getting recognized after having waved her hand in the air persistently for several weeks, replied, "Since we live in a democracy, the same fee should apply to everyone."


Dr. Althea Hottel.

As soon as she heard the argument from the next girl, though (also waving her hand wildly to get called on), she reversed her opinion.

"What seems like an insignificant fine to one person," this girl remarked, "could be excessively high to another, in which case it wouldn't really act as a punishment or a deterrent at all!"

Examining ideas like this made the course stimulating. But because of the large size of the class, no student could ever get deeply involved in any of the discussions. Josy never got to explain that she was reversing her opinion and why. She wished the class had been structured more as a seminar, but since it was a requirement for all liberal arts freshmen, the likelihood of this ever happening seemed remote.

Soon she realized that Dr. Hottel's lectures were simply elaborations on the textbook, a volume eight hundred pages long. The reading assignments covered fifty pages each week. Josy found the material interesting but generally self-evident, so with the heavy demands of her other classes, she postponed reading sociology until just before the final exam. Then with over seven hundred pages to go, she realized how impossible it would be to finish in the time remaining. Panic-stricken, she warned her father that she would fail the course.

"What makes you think so?" he asked.

When she explained the situation he sighed, then told her, "Well, just do the best you can. At least this will be a lesson for you in the future."

Afraid to appear a total fool at the exam, she constructed a brief outline from the book's table of contents and studied that. She came out of the course with an A. She was unable to convince her father that she had actually been unprepared. Afterwards, whenever she expressed doubt about how she would do in an upcoming exam, he smiled knowingly and replied, "I know! I know! You're going to fail! I know all about it!"

The following semester Dr. Hottel was promoted to the position of Dean of Women and Josy never had contact with her in school again. But twenty years later, while attending a reception, she noticed Dr. Hottel among the guests. Timidly she approached, introduced herself and explained, "My maiden name was Josephine Feldmark. I was a student

in your sociology 101 class way back in 1942. You probably don't remember me."

To which the genteel lady graciously replied, "But of course I do, my dear. How have you been?"

Later Josy often compared the elegance of this simple reply with the brusqueness of Dr. Siever, her French professor, when she met him again several years after leaving college.

IV

Dr. Siever was an outstanding professor, and excelled as a pedaogue. Josy was in his class seven of the eight semesters she took French at Penn. Most of his classes were small, some with no more than ten students, so he got to know all of them well. Josy admired him enormously. A tall, darkly handsome man, he resembled the film idol Charles Boyer and fluttered the hearts of many girls in the class, though he never, as far as she could tell, seemed fully aware of this.

He mentioned that he had been born in Hungary and knew several languages, but French was, in his estimation, the most elegant.

Dr. Georges Siever.

"I avoid becoming bored with my subject," he explained, "by arranging to switch every five years from teaching grammar to teaching literature. I advise those of you who want to become teachers to do the same."

Insisting that his students write with precision, directness, and clarity, he once referred scornfully to those who try to discuss "the history of the world in one paragraph!" Often he interspersed his lectures with well-delivered anecdotes, knowing exactly when to insert a joke to break the routine and keep his students on track. He stressed that native-like pronunciation had to be mastered the first year. To illustrate, he related how one particular immigrant who had been in the United States for a long time finally decided to work on improving his pronunciation. Devoting himself conscientiously to this aim, the man drilled on basic phrases, diligently practic-

ing them day after day to acquire native-like proficiency. After a year of this, he finally presented himself at the neighborhood diner and, drawing himself up to his full height, proudly addressed the waitress with the carefully studied but incomprehensible phrase, "Geeve me ba' nah-naswisream!" ("Give me bananas with cream.") The waitress remained completely at sea.

In his lectures on literature, Dr. Siever was particularly eloquent. He held the class spellbound with descriptions of Gargantua in Rabelais' *Pantagruel*, the sly hypocrisy in Moliere's *Tartuffe*, the depths of passion in the tragedies of Corneille and Racine, and the irony in La Rochefoucauld's maxims. In all his classes, literature as well as composition, there were lengthy discussions (mainly in French) and students came away with new ideas as well as improved conversational fluency.

When Josy got to the second half of her senior year, she was elected President of the French Honorary Society, which meant that she had to meet with Dr. Siever every week to discuss activities, finances, and other club business. By then she had declared a minor in French, so throughout her time at Penn she had a great many one-on-one meetings with him.

In those days candidates for a teaching certificate did their practice teaching in the first half of a fifth year. When Josy reached this point, she was assigned to Upper Darby Junior High School, and there she happened to get Dr. Siever's twelve-year-old daughter Rebecca as one of her eighth-grade pupils. One day while meeting with the professor to discuss an upcoming French Club project, Josy was startled when he remarked, "Miss Feldmark, I understand that my daughter Rebecca is in your class at Upper Darby."

"That's right," she replied.

"Well," he continued, "You be sure to give her an A, and I'll see what I can do for you."

She gasped in disbelief. Then she replied, "Dr. Siever, I'm going to pretend I never heard that."

Immediately he changed the subject. Rebecca was a fine student anyway, and Josy never understood what prompted him to make such a suggestion.

After Josy graduated from Penn, twenty years would pass before she saw Dr. Siever again. Then one evening when she and her husband (now a professor at the University) were having dinner with another couple at the Faculty Club, she noticed a group of four people entering the dining room. One was Dr. Siever. His black hair had turned completely white, but there was no mistaking the aristocratic face, distinguished bearing, and elegant voice.

"Look!" she gasped, "there's Dr. Siever, my French professor! It's been twenty years! How wonderful to see him again!"

She recounted how excellent a teacher he had been and how much she had learned from him in so many ways.

"Why don't you go over and say hello?" her husband suggested.

"Oh, I don't know," she replied diffidently. "He's a full professor, Head of the Department. And I was only a student back then."

"So? Go on over! Say hello! He'll probably be happy to hear that you remember him!" he urged. The other couple agreed, and Josy hesitantly walked across the room, shyly approaching the group at the other table. The four had just been served their soup.

"Dr. Siever?" she began.

"Yes?" he replied, looking up at her. All four sat with spoons poised halfway to their mouths.

"I don't know if you remember me," she continued. "Back in the forties I was in several of your French classes. You were my professor all the way through college. You were one of my favorite teachers. My maiden name was Josephine Feldmark. I was President of your French Club then, remember?"

Raising the spoon to his mouth, he replied dryly, "No, I can't say that I do," and continued eating.

Josy stood there dumbfounded, unable to believe her ears. The others at the table glared at her as if she were an imposter.

Retreating, she returned to her own table

"Well, how did it go?" everyone wanted to know. "What did he say?"

Uncomfortably, she recounted what had happened. They all stared in disbelief.

"How awful!" they exclaimed. "Even if he didn't remember your name, he should have at least pretended, not to embarrass you in front of the others."

"But he did remember me, I know!" Josy insisted. "How could he not have? He taught me for four years! I was his French Club President for two terms. I had so many personal sessions with him. I even taught his daughter Rebecca, and he knew that!"

What a contrast, she mused, from Dr. Hottel, the sociology professor who could scarcely have remembered Josy, yet who had had the tact and delicacy to pretend that she did.

Prompted by this experience, in future years, Josy would always make it a point to respond warmly and with positive recognition to any young people who ever approached her saying, "Mrs. Rabinowitz, you used to be my teacher. Do you remember me?"

V

All undergraduate students at Penn took physical education each semester. To qualify for a bachelor's degree, everyone had to take one team sport, one individual sport, and enough courses in the pool to pass a swimming test. No one was permitted to graduate without this. For her individual sport she chose tennis (then later also badminton, and eventually archery on the open field at Spruce Street by the Schuylkill River). For her group sports she selected basketball and then square dancing, a class that met on the stage of Irvine Auditorium and turned out to be a great deal of fun.

It took five semesters in the Weightman Hall pool to prepare her for the swimming test. She kept postponing it until two weeks before she was due to graduate. Then in the midst of a city-wide transportation strike that forced her to hitchhike to school, she finally took the test. She passed it, but just barely.

Once when she was climbing the steps with a group of girls at Thirty-third and Spruce to enter Weightman Hall, the front door was flung open as a male student inside, with the shout of a bacchanal, displayed himself in the nude. From that time on, she kept her eyes firmly planted on the ground every time she entered that building.

During her freshman year, the swimming class met at nine o'clock, her next class (History of Education) at Eisenlohr Hall six blocks away at ten. (Eisenlohr was at that time the College of Education; later it would become the residence for the President of the University. Though she invariably arrived late at Eisenlohr because of the distance she had to walk, the professor never seemed to care. Dr. Woody, a world authority on the History of Education, was extremely liberal in more ways than one. Somehow he often managed to interject his political views into his lectures, regardless of which period of history he was discussing. He spoke in lofty tones, seemingly from a dream world all his own. When asked by students what they, as future teachers, should do when discipline problems arose in their classrooms, Dr. Woody retorted, "What discipline problems? In teaching, there are no such things as discipline problems!" Because he enjoyed such a distinguished reputation, nobody dared contradict him or press the issue.

VII

Early in her freshman year Josy became friendly with two girls who also commut-

ed to school. Mary Denman came from Woodbury, New Jersey, and Anna Benjamin from Media, just outside Philadelphia. Off campus the three of them went to concerts and the theater together. One evening they went to see Paul Robeson in *Othello*, with José Ferrer (still an unknown) in the role of Iago and Uta Hagen as Desdemona. It was an electrifying performance. Some fifty years later Josy would come across a compact disc featuring this historic memorable cast.

Right before Easter, they heard that Wagner's opera *Parsifal* would be performed at the Academy of Music. Mary expressed no interest in going, and neither Josy nor Anna had tickets, but Anna suggested that the two of them enter the building just minutes after Act I began.

"There are always empty seats," she reasoned, "and that way we won't have to pay. Ticket prices are astronomical! Even if we get caught, nobody should object to two students trying to improve their musical education."

It sounded like an intriguing adventure, but an attendant spotted them immediately and unceremoniously ushered them out.

Anna Benjamin always expressed a deep interest in classical languages; she later became Professor of Latin and Greek at Rutgers University in New Jersey. When she first began studying Sanskrit, her mother became so intrigued with the shapes of the symbols in Anna's textbook that she purchased wallpaper containing these same patterns for Anna's room.

Mary Denman was Josy's closest friend at school. It had been Mary's grandmother who brought her up, and her family was so poor that she refused to invite anyone to her house. Instead, she visited Josy's home often, and they saw each other in classes every day. Mary was exceptionally bright, one of the most intelligent and well-read people Josy ever met. They had many interesting discussions on books, literature, and life in general.

Eventually, though, she began to find Mary's company depressing. There was no such thing as love, Mary asserted. Men only wanted one thing from a woman. Parents bonded with children only because animal instinct demanded they do so. Friendship was essentially a matter of who could do what for you. Happiness was nothing but an illusion; nobody was ever really happy; only a few fools thought they were. As time wore on, Mary grew ever more cynical. She seemed to take morbid pleasure when people reacted with shock to her dismal view of life. Although Josy genuinely liked and admired her, she eventually found it more than she could bear. The following year when their schedules diverged, she made little effort to pursue the friendship and they drifted apart.

Mary first introduced her to a new school activity called *MSS*, a student publication just starting at Penn. Unlike the University newspaper *Daily Pennsylvanian*, *MSS* devoted itself entirely to creative writing. Its membership began with about twenty people, freshmen through seniors. Many had extreme views on a variety of topics, and exhibited unusual and eccentric behavior.

One member of that group was a highly talented girl named Ruth Levine. She wrote skillfully, and her short stories in *MSS* were among the best pieces in the magazine. Her behavior, though, was so pretentious that Josy could never get close to her. Years later, she would come across Ruth again, surprisingly, in a synagogue on a Saturday morning following a bar mitzvah. She was amazed to see Ruth there, especially after learning that Ruth was unacquainted with the bar mitzvah boy's family or anybody else present. Never having taken her for a religious person, she asked if Ruth had changed her beliefs.

"Oh, no," came the reply. "I go to synagogues every Saturday morning, doesn't matter which one. I don't have to know anybody there. After service there's always bound to be wine, so I can drink all I want and nobody bothers me!"

A couple of poems Josy submitted got included in the earlier issues. One of her submissions was the following:

A quiet country-side, the falling snow,
And slate-blue shadows on the frozen land—
These would I see with you beside me so,
Breathless at beauty, silent, hand in hand.

And we would stand against the meadow gate
And watch the fields fill silently with snow
Until the sun was down and time grew late—
Oh tell me, oh my dear, it will be so.

After reading it, the student editor publicly accused Josy of plagiarism. Shocked, Josy demanded to know why.

"Because," the girl answered, "the second line of your last verse reads straight out of a Robert Frost poem."

"Which one?" Josy asked.

" 'Stopping by the Woods on A Snowy Evening'. 'He will not see me stopping here to watch the woods fill up with snow.' It's identical."

Josy had never knowingly imitated the Frost poem. She realized that it might have subconsciously influenced her, yet she saw enough differences to distinguish her line from

the one in the Frost poem (her double alliteration “fields/fill, silently/snow”, the addition of the extra word ‘silently’, and her reference to “fields” instead of “woods’). All this, she argued, gave her poem enough originality to stand on its own. But the editor disagreed. The accusation delivered in front of the entire staff stung deeply. As time wore on, Josy grew put off by the arty manners, affectations, and self-importance of several of the people at *MSS*. Eventually she dropped out, preferring to write her poems privately.

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On some Saturday afternoons she ushered during Penn’s football games. Jacques tried to explain the rules to her.

"A football game is just like life itself," he philosophized. "There will be people who are for you, running alongside of you, trying to counter the interference from your opponents and protect you. Then there will be the others who run against you and try to block everything you want to do and try to achieve. That’s how life is! Football is exactly like life!"

He also advised Josy repeatedly, "Enjoy your school days! Some of the best friends you'll ever make will be those you make in school."

On first coming to Penn Josy had attended several functions of the Jewish group Hillel, but few of the activities or people there appealed to her. She was also approached to join a Jewish sorority, but soon found that they preferred dormitory students to commuters. Word was that joining a sorority would limit her to this group, so she was hardly disappointed when she failed to get accepted. Dissatisfied with most of the people she met during her freshman year, and with ties to her former classmates from Gratz gradually disappearing, her social life began to leave her feeling disappointed and somewhat isolated.

VII

She had met José in December 1942. His mother had come into Jacques’s store, bringing José and his brother Mario (then age six) with her to buy a refrigerator. Hearing that they were from Mexico, Jacques invited them to the house to meet his family. In the few short months that followed, José and Josy saw each other often. With his help she

came out with that unbelievable A in Dr. Erdos's math course, while with the assistance she gave him, he managed to pull his English mark of 69 up to a barely passing 71 (enough, though, to satisfy the demands Philadelphia College of Pharmacy and Science had made when he first enrolled). Then on April 23, 1943 he left for the army.

Three days later Josy became ill. She arrived in class Monday morning feeling out of sorts. By afternoon, Anna Benjamin remarked, "You look terrible. Your skin is all yellow. Even the whites of your eyes are yellow!"

Mary Denman piped in, "You look just the way my uncle looked when he got back from the South Pacific with malaria!"

It turned out that Josy had come down with jaundice. This left her so sick that she found it impossible to complete the semester at Penn. She remained bed-ridden for almost two months. Family friend and physician Dr. Michael Wolkowicz took over her medical care.

A couple days after making his diagnosis, he admitted her into Northeastern Hospital, just a few blocks from his home and office on Richmond Street in Kensington. Every day he visited her there, ordering continued bed rest and a procedure to drain her bile. This was done by inserting a tube, usually down her throat, but occasionally through one of her nostrils. The treatment was messy and painful, especially the nasal insertions; each drainage lasted close to an hour, leaving her completely spent. Afterwards she lay on her bed weak and listless, gazing dully out the window, caring little for anything she saw or heard.

Just outside, in the narrow street joining Allegheny Avenue she could see a line of small row houses. On one occasion a block party was in full swing there. Through her window she heard band music. As the hours passed she watched while the street filled with neighbors, singing, dancing, joking, and laughing well into the night. Later she learned that the flurry of banners, flags, and balloons had been set up out there to celebrate the furlough of a soldier home on leave. Even here it was impossible to forget the war.

She remained in the hospital for two weeks. One evening the nurse who had cranked her bed up to a sharply vertical position left for the night, and the night nurse had trouble getting it back down flat.

"You'll just have to sleep sitting up tonight," she told Josy.

"But I can't sleep that way!" Josy objected.

"Well, you'll just have to make do," came the unconcerned reply.

"Can I go to another room?" Josy asked.

"There are no more women's beds free anywhere in the hospital."

"Then I'll go sleep in the men's ward if I have to!" Josy retorted, growing more and more angry at the nurse's callousness and indifference. "Show me where it is and I'll go there!"

Flustered, the nurse disappeared.

After two hours passed and nobody came, Josy dragged herself to a telephone and called Michal. It was almost ten o'clock at night. She caught him at the office with his last patient. Explaining the situation, she assured him that she would sleep anywhere, just as long as she could lie down. Five minutes later the night nurse returned, glaring. Without a word, she approached the bed and again tried to crank the handle. After about ten attempts it finally gave way, returning to a horizontal position. Scowling and without a word, she left, and Josy finally lay down to sleep.

Malvina had contacted the University and they arranged for Josy to receive an "incomplete" in all her courses, with the understanding that she take her freshman final exams in the fall. Back home from the hospital, she spent day after day listlessly on a cot that Jacques had set up outside on the tiny back porch behind the kitchen. She felt too weak even to read. Her only distraction came at night when she lay back watching the stars. They appeared even brighter from the lack of street lamps nearby, and she would lie there gazing in wonder at their mystery. Malvina would come outside after the supper dishes were done to sit with her. Together they remained talking, resting, and waiting for Jacques to come home from his evening hours at the store.

VIII

At the end of June her parents decided that some time at the shore might do her good. They rented a small room with cooking privileges for six weeks in the inlet section of Atlantic City. It was two blocks from where the boardwalk turned west toward the bay. Late every Friday night Jacques came by train and stayed till Sunday evening, while Malvina remained at the shore all week with Josy, trying to force a nourishing diet on her to restore her strength.

Josy brought her textbooks with her. Each day on the beach she tried to study for her final exams, but her concentration remained halfhearted. Though her skin no longer looked yellow, she still felt exhausted and despondent.

The first Saturday night there Jacques took her for a walk on the boardwalk. Nothing seemed to cheer her up. The crowds, the swirl of activity, her father's attempts at humor all depressed her even further. Everything looked disheartening. Her future, and that of the world, seemed bleak. Desperate to shake her mood, Jacques steered her into an arcade, hoping to distract her at one of the slot machines. Suddenly at the far end of the hall he spotted Shirlee and Millie Granoff. It had been over a year since Josy had seen these friends from her earlier Wildwood vacations.

"Look who's over there," he cried. "Let's go say hello!"

"No, no, I don't want to." Josy shrank back. "They haven't called me since I started college. They probably don't want to see me anyhow, and I certainly don't want to see them."

"Oh, come on," Jacques coaxed, pulling her along.

"Well, promise you'll stay with me, that you won't leave me with them," she insisted.

"All right, all right, come on," he urged, pulling her along, afraid to lose sight of the girls.

Shirlee and Millie squealed with delight when they saw Josy. Chatting happily, they were more friendly than ever. It turned out that they were staying at a rooming house just one block from where she was living. Suddenly without warning, Jacques cried out, "See you back at the house!" and, before Josy could reply, disappeared. Shocked that he had broken his promise (yet not altogether disappointed), she had no recourse but to spend the rest of the evening with Shirlee and Millie. By the time they parted at eleven o'clock, it felt as if they had never been away from each other. They made arrangements to meet at the beach the following morning and, for the next six weeks they remained inseparable.

Spending time in their company was exactly what Josy needed. Her depressed state of mind cleared as she recovered, slowly regaining strength. She scarcely bothered to even look at her textbooks. Instead, she lolled on the beach with her friends, exchanging confidences, swimming, laughing, rebuilding old ties. Both sisters were beautiful, tall brunettes. The younger, Millie, was especially striking. With full-blown dark hair reaching her shoulders, she cut a spectacular figure in her one-piece bathing suit of vibrant orange. Despite their beauty, they remained remarkably modest and unaffected, always warm and friendly. The days progressed languidly, with a dreamlike quality. In the evenings they walked together on the boardwalk, once or twice attending USO parties for servicemen in one of the meeting halls on the boardwalk. Most of the time they just sat together watching the ocean and talking. They chatted incessantly, comfortable in each

other's company, never entirely able to catch up with everything they wanted to say. Her friends filled the void that Josy had been feeling at school during the past year.

One time, as a lark, they investigated a red light blinking at the top of the Claridge Hotel. Feeling naughty (they had all heard the term "red light district", they told each other in sophisticated voices), they entered the building. They took the elevator up to the roof, giggling, but were somewhat disappointed to find nothing up there but the light itself (a warning signal for airplanes.)

By the time she left leave Atlantic City, Josy felt confident and completely refreshed, both in health and mood. Sad to leave Shirlee and Millie behind, she nevertheless knew that from then on that they would remain in steady contact, even if not on a daily basis. The last six weeks had helped her realize that she still had warm, sincere companions of her own age, even if not at school.

Earlier that summer, before leaving for Atlantic City, Malvina had accepted an invitation to stay for a few days with the Wolkowiczs in Island Heights. This was a small seaside resort near Toms River, New Jersey, where Halina and Michal were renting a summer cottage. Their baby Sandy was now a year and a half old, and Josy, who adored and fussed over her, looked forward to the visit. When the six weeks in Atlantic City were up, she and her mother took the bus from there directly to Island Heights.

Two summers earlier, when Halina was pregnant, Jacques had surprised Malvina and Josy one Friday night by bringing the Wolkowiczs by train, unannounced, to Wildwood for the weekend. The Feldmarks were then renting a tiny one-bedroom apartment three blocks from the beach. When he walked in the door with them, Malvina and Josy were overjoyed. Immediately Malvina made room in the apartment by having Josy give up her bed and sleep on the floor. That weekend turned out to be a jolly time for everybody. They had spent both days on the beach, Jacques and Michal regaling everybody with jokes, occasionally lapsing into French when they wanted to keep Josy from understanding. Everybody sang, swam, played ball, and went shell hunting. On Saturday morning, while Malvina shopped for picnic supplies, Josy, then seventeen, and Halina accompanied her, at one point standing together over the grocery-store pickle barrel inhaling appreciatively. Malvina teased them, saying, "You either have to be a teen-ager or pregnant to enjoy the smell of pickles that much!"

Later, in 1943, Halina's invitation to spend time at Island Heights seemed an attempt to reciprocate. But when Malvina and Josy arrived, she appeared startled. The following morning, the day before Jacques and Michal were due to arrive, she called Josy

into the kitchen alone. She explained in a low voice that Michal was bringing other guests and there would be no room for the Feldmark family. When Josy told her mother, Malvina immediately announced that they were leaving. They took a bus back to Philadelphia that afternoon, disappointed and hurt. That night, when Jacques arrived home from the store, he was surprised to find them sitting outside on the back porch.

Michael, Helena, and Sandy, and Helena Wolkowicz.

"It must be a misunderstanding," he insisted when he heard the details. "Let's not let a thing like that ruin our friendship. Just ignore it."

They did, but afterwards Josy noticed a certain coolness in her mother's eyes every time she was with Halina.

The two women loved each other dearly, but sometimes they got into discussions which turned turbulent and bitter. Usually these were over trivialities. One time they disagreed about whether Balzac should be remembered more for his short stories than his novels (they argued fiercely about this for over an hour). Another time it was about the vitamin content of freshly squeezed orange juice, as opposed to that of juice squeezed and refrigerated the night before. On one occasion Malvina referred to the son of a friend as a "genius", and Halina hotly contested her use of the term. Halina was probably right, but Josy thought that since she had never met the boy, she should have refrained from voicing this opinion. The close friendship between the families continued, but Josy never knew when a ridiculous argument between the two women might flare up unexpectedly and become vehement.

Malvina had been instrumental in bringing about two strange coincidences in the Wolkowiczs' lives. Back during the years that she had lived in Chicago, she had often sat patiently listening to her friend Yetta Davidson unburden herself about the hardships and events of her early life. One of the things she particularly remembered was how Yetta nostalgically reminisced about her grandfather's home back in Poland, his many unusual possessions and especially his old clock, which she always referred to in Yiddish as his "zager". It must have been an imposing and unique timepiece, impressing the children of his family with a sense of awe, for Yetta spoke of it often.

After the Feldmarks had moved away to Philadelphia, Yetta, too, left Chicago. Now divorced and with a small son to raise, she had moved to New York, where she took up with an eccentric artist whom Malvina never met but heard about constantly. She and Yetta would continue to visit each other through the years, but the artist came in and out of Yetta's life, never appearing at those times that Malvina visited New York.

As for the Wolkowiczs, they often reminisced to Jacques and Malvina about their lives back in Europe, something both families had in common. One day Michal, alluding to his boyhood, happened to mention his grandfather's "zager". Something stirred in Malvina's memory, and she wrote to Yetta, who had last visited the Feldmarks in Wildwood the summer Josy was in seventh grade, inviting her to come meet Wolkowiczs. When they got together and shared stories, it became apparent that Michal and Yetta were first cousins!

There was another family that the Jacques and Malvina had recently met through a cousin of the Liphs from Chicago. Kalmen Motiuk, an engineer, and his wife Gutta were refugees, the only ones in both their families to have escaped from the Nazis. They had just recently arrived in Philadelphia by way of Belgium. Thinking that they might enjoy meeting the Wolkowiczs, Malvina invited them all over for dinner.

Halina and Michal arrived first. As they sat chatting with Jacques in the living room, the doorbell rang. Gutta Motiuk walked in first, followed by her husband. Entering the living room from the long front hallway, she suddenly spotted Michal. With a cry of recognition, she threw up both her hands and screamed. It turned out that she and Michal had been classmates in the same elementary school back in Poland. Gutta having lost her entire family in the holocaust, had no idea that any of her friends or schoolmates had survived either. To come to America and meet her childhood classmate unexpectedly there was both a shock and a joy. A deep friendship developed between the Wolkowiczs and the Motiuks, both thanking Malvina for bringing them together.

Then early in 1944 an urgent call came for physicians to join the army, and Michal was drafted. He left for Fort Carlisle, Pennsylvania late in the spring. Malvina stayed with Halina the few days after his departure, helping her pack and seeing her and the baby off to join him at his army post. The Wolkowiczs were away for almost three years, mostly in the Midwest. They remained in close touch all this time. Late in June of 1945, when Halina's aged Uncle Bucky suddenly died, Michal got a short leave from the army to come back to Philadelphia to tend to family matters. He stayed in the Feldmarks' home this whole time.

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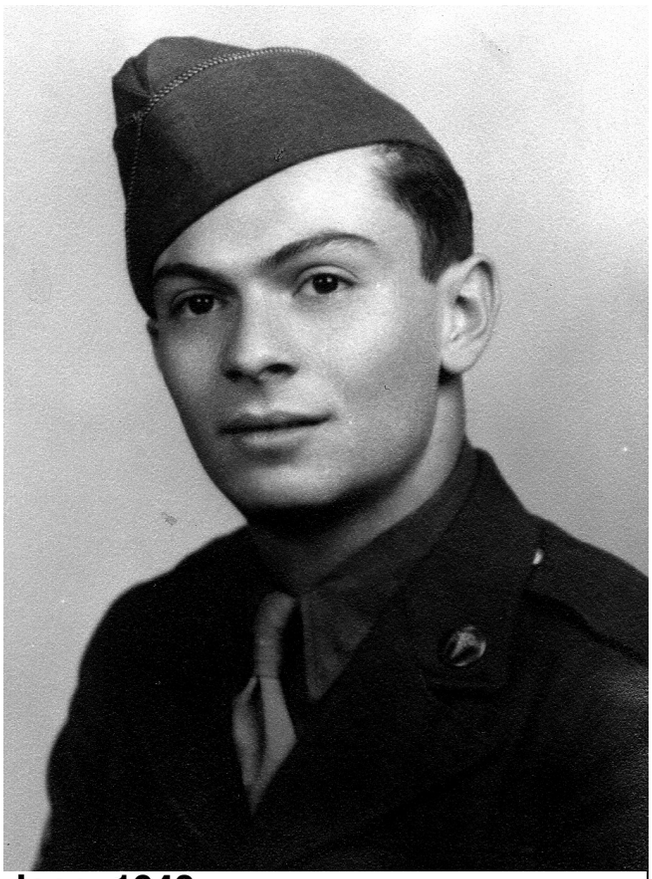
Several weeks after José left for the army, his father Laib got transferred from Philadelphia to Washington State. Kaiser Shipbuilding had moved its plant and workers from Philadelphia to Vancouver, a small town just across the Columbia River from Portland, Oregon. Laib set out late in the spring, with his family due to follow. After he left, his wife Rachel and their six-year-old son Mario visited the Feldmarks often. Malvina invited Rachel to bring Mario and come to the shore for a visit, but before they could do so, they got word to join Laib and left for the west coast. By the time Malvina and Josy returned from vacation, they were already gone. Josy thought she would never see José again.

But early in October he got a one-week furlough from his army camp in New Orleans. Instead of going to Vancouver where his parents now lived, he came to Philadelphia. During that week he and Josy agreed to write to each other every day after he went back to New Orleans. Their letters continued throughout the war.



Jose, 1943.

IX

Towards the end of summer Josy got a job wrapping the purchases of customers at Charles David, an elegant women's clothing shop on Chestnut Street. She went outside one day with the other employees to watch a war bond rally driving past. In the parade were Lucille Ball and Dick Powell, popular movie stars. They rode by not ten feet from where Josy was standing. She found them even more photogenic than in the movies.

The job of wrapping packages was extremely boring. The store manager was displeased with her work, unhappy that her ribbons were either too loose or too tight, her bows less than artistic. During her second week there, on her supper break (they worked till nine o'clock on Wednesday nights) Josy bought a newspaper and scanned the help-wanted pages to look for a new job. To her surprise she saw an ad for a package-wrapper at Charles David's. How nice, she thought, they're looking for an extra worker to help me in the back room. But when she returned from supper, the store manager told her, "You're fired." The ad had been for someone to replace her!

She soon got hired at Postal Telegraph. Here her job was to remove the paper strips containing incoming messages from the teletype machine. After sorting these by destination, she had to insert them into slits on a huge vertical board for the next operator to edit. She worked there for the few weeks till school started again in the fall, and after returning to Penn, on Saturdays for the next several months.

A woman in her late fifties working there grew especially friendly with Josy. She had the same job, and took Josy under her wing. Later Josy found out that she happened to be the best friend of a couple Malvina and Jacques had recently met. For a while the husband (Mr. Stein) would come to the house every Thursday night to play chess with Jacques. The friendship between his wife and the lady at Josy's job had lasted since childhood, which Josy found touching. After a while, though, her co-worker began to ply Josy with numerous personal questions every time she came to work. It seemed she was intent on marrying off her forty-year-old brother and had selected Josy as a possible candidate. The more Josy shied away from her, the more persistent the woman became. But then after she heard that Josy would soon be quitting the job, her attentions diminished. After leaving Postal Telegraph, Josy never saw her again, but always recalled how impressed she had been to learn that this woman had kept up a friendship with Mrs. Stein that had lasted from childhood all through their lives.