Chapter 4. Chicago, 1924-1930

I

When Malvina was ready to leave the hospital after Josy was born, Celia Kirson and her sister Frieda came to help Jacques bring her home. Frieda was the one to carry the baby. Although long married, she never had a child of her own. Being the one to hold her best friend's infant on this trip home meant a great deal to her.

On February 17, 1924, twelve days after Josy was born, Malvina's cousin Elizabeth Tecotzky gave birth to her first child, a boy they named Melvin. Although to Josy he was only a third cousin once removed, she would come to feel as close to him as to any of her first cousins and he became a very good friend as well. They would remain in frequent contact even in their adult lives, though by that time they would be living in different cities. As young children growing up in Chicago, though, they played together often, since their parents visited each other every couple weeks.

As an infant Josy remained bald until she was four months old. Then one morning

Malvina noticed the beginning of a curl. In excitement she phoned Jacques at the office. Without saying hello, she shouted into the phone, “She has hair! She has hair! It's red!”

On Josy's first birthday, the Tecotzkys came to visit. Melvin was only eight days shy of his own first birthday, so the two families decided to celebrate both birthdays together. Arriving with his high chair, bags of diapers, toys, and baby paraphernalia, Elizabeth and Sam set Melvin up in the kitchen facing Josy in her own high chair. Malvina brought out two cakes she had baked for the occasion, lit candles, and everybody sang “Happy Birthday” to the two babies. After cutting the cake and serving a piece to each child, Malvina placed an additional dish of ice cream with a spoon, a cup of milk, and a napkin on each high chair tray.

Suddenly, for reasons known only to herself, Josy picked up her cake and dangled it over the edge of her tray, allowing it to drop. Melvin, seeing this performance, stared mesmerized for a moment, then proceeded to do the same. Watching him drop his own cake onto the floor, Josy then grabbed her cup of milk and deliberately let it tumble over the edge. Melvin immediately followed suit. Before long, all manner of objects went flying around the kitchen (dishes, spoons, napkins, whatever the two could reach). For the next several minutes the parents had all they could do racing about frantically to stop the mayhem.

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At that time the Feldmarks lived at 867 North Sacramento Boulevard, an apartment near Albany Avenue by Douglas Park. Josy’s earliest memory, at two and a half, was of crawling down a circular flight of steps at the back of the building, while two men carrying boxes to a moving van skirted around her. Her family was moving to a different apartment also on Sacramento Boulevard, at 4900 just a few blocks away. The 1929 City Directory would list Jacques at this address as “dept mgr Republic Flow Meters Co” and Malvina’s mother Dina, same address, as “Feldmark Dinah (wid Margules)”.

Josy learned to speak both English and Yiddish from the start. Since her grandmother never learned English, she had to converse with her in Yiddish. Josy would pronounce cucumbers as “cutecumbers” and tomatoes as “tomonatoes” but, before long, she was able to recite her home address correctly, invariably following the number and street name with the words “Chicago, Illinois, America”.

Dina hovered over her constantly, frightening her by calling out shrilly, “Forvard-

zih! Forvard-Zih!" ("Be careful! Watch out!") every time Josy took a step learning to walk. She would startle Josy at many new activities, especially when Josy made false starts trying to climb into an armchair or reach up into a cabinet. It was apparent, though, that Dina was proud of Josy. Once, watching Josy build a tower of blocks on the floor, Dina gloated to Malvina that the child would grow up to be a builder or even an architect "just like her grandfather Joseph."

Jacques and Malvina also fussed over her endlessly. They had been married thirteen years before she was born. As an only child, she remained the focus of their attention, and in growing up, she would acquire many characteristics and some of the innate loneliness often associated with only children.

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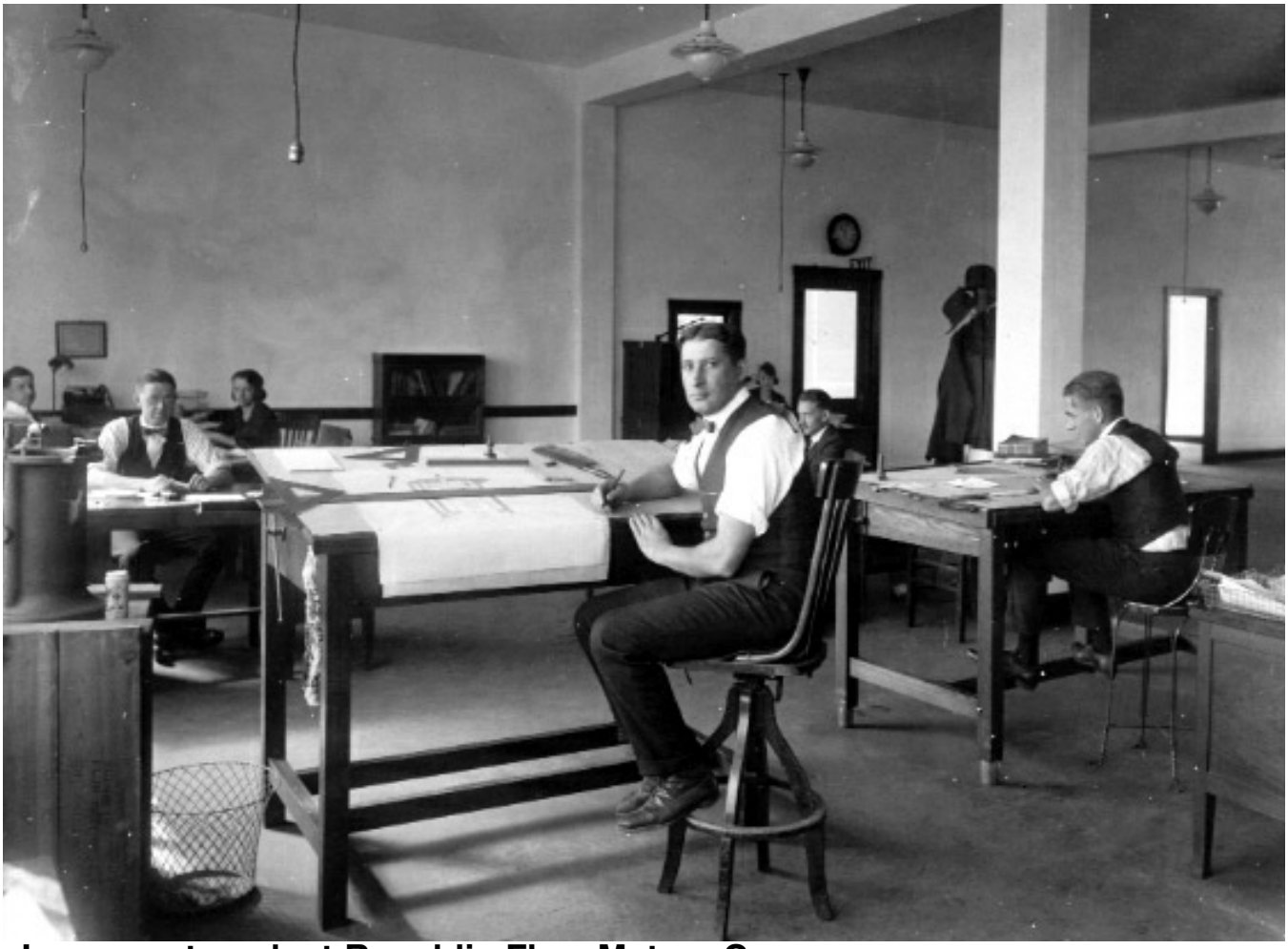
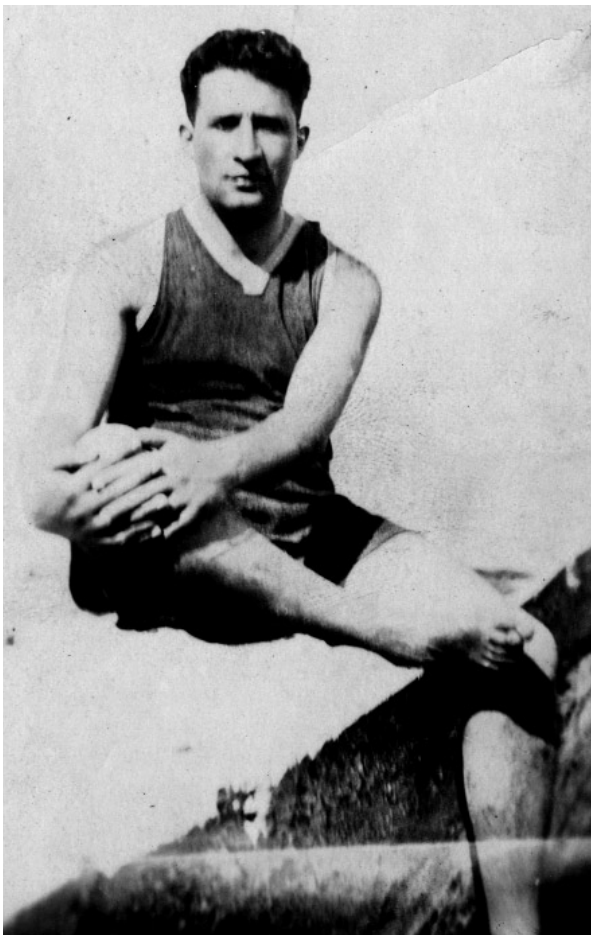
They usually spent summers in Indiana at the nearby resorts of Lakeside and Union



Jacques at work at Republic Flow Meters Company.



Jacques in 1925.

Pier on Lake Michigan. One afternoon when she was not yet three, Josy wandered away from her mother on the beach and got lost. As she trudged along the water's edge, bewildered, an elderly lady noticed her and called her over.

"Whose little girl are you?" she inquired kindly.

Innocently, Josy gazed up at her and replied, "My Mommy's!"

Just then Malvina came running over. It turned out that she knew the lady, who explained how the little redheaded girl wandering alone on the beach had caught her eye, and she recounted with some amusement the conversation they had just had. It was an extremely hot, brightly sunny day, and Josy must have remained lost for quite a while because, by the time her mother found her, Josy's face was now covered with freckles.

II

She had her tonsils and adenoids out when she was three (an experience that terrorized her) and she was taken to the doctor constantly for checkups. Enemas were what the pediatrician recommended for many fevers and stomach upsets. During pre-school years, Josy got them regularly. She came to regard the procedure with unspeakable terror. It would take two adults to corner her while preparations were under way. Then one parent (usually her father) would hold the enema bag high in the air, while her mother fought to apply the insert. So paralyzed with fear was Josy that she soon developed an intuitive recognition of any activity that might signal the approach an oncoming enema.

When she was not quite three, she went downtown with her mother one Saturday afternoon to the Loop, Chicago's shopping district. Among the purchases Malvina made was a brightly colored sheet of oilcloth that she planned to use as a tablecloth in the kitchen. On the way home, they stopped at Celia's and Frieda's to say hello.

"So what did you buy?" asked Celia, curious, as usual.

Malvina opened the packages, one by one, to show them. Before long, she came to the oilcloth.

"That's beautiful," exclaimed Frieda. "Let's see how it looks on the table."

Josy watched them unfold the cloth in the kitchen, then she shrieked. Puzzled, everyone turned to her in question, but she kept shouting louder and louder. Then she began to weep hysterically. The more they tried to comfort her, the louder she screamed. She ran out of the kitchen and rushed to hide behind the living room sofa.

The very act of spreading an oilcloth out in the kitchen meant just one thing to her: an enema was coming. Whenever she got one at home, the first step was to spread an oilcloth over the kitchen table to prepare for later spills. Seeing the cloth in place now, she assumed the worst. Shouting frantically and racing from corner to corner, she flailed her arms wildly, refusing all attempts to comfort. Bewildered, Malvina finally cut the visit short and took her home. It took several days before she learned the reason behind that outburst.

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Each generation seems to focus on one particular phase of child rearing. In the 1950's ,when Josy would be bringing up her own children, that phase would be sleep: having children take naps, putting them to bed at a reasonable hour, seeing that they got enough rest, getting them to sleep through the night.

The only sleep-related problem that Josy was able to recall from her own childhood took place one hot summer night when she was about three and a half. The air was heavy and extremely humid, typical of mid-August Chicago. They had put her to bed about eight o'clock, and it was still light outside. Her parents and grandmother were sitting in the living room listening to a concert on the radio when suddenly they heard her crying.

Malvina came into the room demanding, "What's the matter?"

"I want to dance!" sobbed Josy.

"Dance?" asked Malvina, puzzled.

From the living room the strains of Bizet's "L'Arlesienne Suite" drifted in from the radio.

"I want to dance," repeated Josy, tears streaming down her cheeks.

"So dance!" Malvina replied. Picking her up, she carried her into the living room

and deposited her on the floor.

Overjoyed, Josy got up and pranced about the room, kicking her legs, swinging her arms, jumping wildly up and down, pirouetting in delight.

Finally the music ended. Dina and Jacques applauded dutifully, then Malvina picked her up, returned her to her bed, and promptly left the room. Without a word of protest, Josy turned over, sighed contentedly, and went right to sleep.

In looking back on the many struggles and disputes over sleep that she later had with her own children when they were small, she sometimes wondered if her mother's composed, off-handed approach might not have been something to emulate.

Unlike her calm handling of the sleep situation, though, Malvina was far less successful in dealing with eating. From the beginning, she remained fiercely determined that Josy eat well. This, according to the thinking of the 1920s, would build up resistance against disease. Parents at that time had an especially intense fear of polio. There was still no vaccine, and the Grodsky's daughter Masha, about four years older than Josy, had recently caught it, her face ever afterwards remaining slightly contorted whenever she smiled. The Grodskys considered themselves fortunate that this was the only effect. Given these circumstances, it was understandable why Malvina became so relentlessly over-protective.

The chief concern then was getting enough proper food into the child at any cost. From Josy’s infancy on, Malvina plied her with enormous meals. In between, she produced huge snacks. Her portions were so overly large that, before long, Josy started to balk. Then her mother’s demands increased even further. The portions kept expanding in size, and often she tried to disguise them in overly large glasses, cups, and dishes. One glass, originally a pint-sized container for sour cream, she regularly used for individual servings of milk. When Josy protested, Malvina would exclaim innocently, eyes wide open in surprise, “But it's only a single glass of milk!”

As Josy continued to rebel, snacks got introduced ever more frequently. Then food began to be presented as a treat and a reward, and eating became a game. Before long, a vicious circle developed and the problem was firmly entrenched. It was now a contest between parent and child. Perhaps as a result, ever afterwards, even into adulthood, Josy remained an extremely slow eater.

As a distraction so that she could shovel more into Josy's mouth, Malvina got into the habit of reading stories aloud with each meal. Every spoonful was presented with a sentence, not to be completed until the food was swallowed. This continued for so long

and with such regularity that soon Josy had memorized each story Malvina ever read to her. There were dozens of books, and she not only grew to know every story in every book word for word, but could also unerringly associate which words went with which picture in each story. Hours, days and, eventually, months passed this way. Her resistance to eating got ever stronger, but she became letter-perfect in reciting from memory every book her mother ever read aloud.

Dina and Josy, 1925.

Around the time of her third birthday, Celia Kirson stopped by one evening with her good friend Dr. Abraham Low, a noted child psychiatrist. In a playful mood Malvina announced that Josy was a fluent reader.

"That's impossible," he scoffed. "No child of three can read."

"Mine can," she insisted, "and I'll prove it to you."

Selecting from an enormous heap of books lying on the dining-room table, she opened one and presented it to Josy, who immediately began to recite, word for word, everything on the page. As she went along, she pointed to each word, just as she had seen her mother do. Dr. Low looked on, astonished.

"Here, let me," he interrupted, with a knowing smile. Picking up a different book, he opened to a page in the middle and handed it to Josy. Cued by the accompanying picture, she immediately began to recite correctly, again pointing to each word as she went along from line to line.

Dr. Low pulled the book away from her and snapped, "We'll try another one!"

As before, her "reading" was letter-perfect. He switched back and forth, from story to story, section to section, from one book to another, but with unfailing accuracy Josy continued to deliver all the words correctly and full of expression.

He went through every book in the pile. Not once did she falter or make a mistake. He grew ever more confused. Finally scratching his head, he got up from the table and muttered, "I'm going to have to do some more research on this."

Then after a long pause, he turned to Malvina and, with a steady gaze of profound respect, declared, "Mrs. Feldmark, your child is a genius!"

Jacques and Josy, 1927.

Giggling to herself Celia, eyes twinkling and always ready to enjoy a prank, whispered to Malvina, “He’ll never find out from me!”

Josy's food problems involved more than reading. On countless occasions she would be made to sit at the table by herself, long after everyone else had left, ordered to stay there until her plate was clean. Often she would remain alone in the empty dining room, mouth stuffed, cheeks bulging with unswallowed food, for as long as an hour or more.

One evening the following summer Malvina decided to serve supper on the back porch outside the kitchen, since it was unbearably hot and it would take hours till the apartment got cool enough to sit inside.

At that time they were lived on the second floor of the building. Malvina set up a card table on the shaded back porch, and the family sat down out there to eat. At the end of the meal she brought stewed prunes from the kitchen for dessert. Josy balked.

“You must finish your prunes,” Malvina admonished.

Josy sat there toying with her food. When her father and grandmother were finished, they got up and headed for the front porch on the other side of the apartment, away from the setting sun. Josy was left at the table alone.

“I'm going inside to wash the dishes,” Malvina announced. “You just sit there till you finish everything.”

Several times she came back outside to check on Josy. The prunes remained untouched. Time dragged on. The shadows got longer and the sun began to sink in a torrid sky. Finally Josy had an inspiration. Tiptoeing to the edge of the porch, she leaned over the railing and threw her prunes down over the side of the building. Then returning to her seat, she leaned back and sat waiting for her mother to return.

Eventually Malvina came out. Spotting the empty plate, she smiled in approval.

"What a good girl you are!" she exclaimed heartily. "See, I knew you could finish if you wanted to!"

Just then who should come storming up the outside steps but the neighbor from the apartment below.

"How dare you!" she screamed at Malvina. "How dare you allow your child to use this porch as a toilet!"

"What?" gasped Malvina.

"Yes, a toilet, and don't tell me she didn't do it," shouted the woman, pointing an accusing finger at Josy. "I saw all that brown stuff come flying down right here from this very porch!"

Josy in 1927.

Catching her breath, Malvina realized what must have happened. She had all she could do to convince the neighbor that what had come flying down had been only prunes.

III

On New Year's Eve of 1928, when she was almost four years old, her parents got ready to go to a party at the Grodskys. She was to remain home with Dina, who wanted to go to bed early.

Around ten o'clock, just before leaving, Malvina and Jacques came tiptoeing into her room, scarcely able to restrain their laughter as they leaned over to kiss her goodnight. Josy lay bewildered by what she saw. Malvina was wearing a long, fringed dress, the type popular during the Roaring Twenties. On her head was a tightly fitting cloche, the hat pulled down to her eyebrows. Her face was caked with dark rouge, heavy powder, and a large penciled beauty mark rested on her cheek. But Jacques startled Josy even more. In

his hair he wore a rose, his mouth was painted in dark red lipstick, and even more strange, he was dressed in the pink tutu of a ballerina!

The "bunch", as they called their circle of friends, had selected from their crowd the five tallest men to perform in a chorus line as ballerinas. The five dancers were Julius Schaeffner, Sol Krasnick, Sam Glassenberg, Max Rosner, and Jacques who, at six feet tall, was the shortest of the group. For several weeks prior to the party, they had been rehearsing in secret. All five, arms interlocked, knees kicking high in simultaneous motion, would come swinging out from behind a curtain, trilling in high soprano voices the then-popular song "Take Me Out For A Buggy-Ride".

To maintain an element of surprise, rehearsals were held behind closed doors in the empty apartment across the hall from the Grodskys' flat. Malvina heard that at these rehearsals the pianist Bella Rosner (wife of one of the dancers) who accompanied them at the piano, often had to stop playing, convulsed with laughter, unable to contain herself at the sight of these husky, awkward fellows strutting around arm in arm, kicking their gawky legs high into the air in step as they sang.

Now on New Year's Eve, for the first time they were all in costume. The effect on the crowd that evening was uproarious. Their number proved the highlight of the entire celebration. Josy's parents, as well as their friends, would talk about the party for years to come, remembering fondly the merriment, jokes, and especially the exuberance of Rita Grodsky's mother Mrs. Bloom who, in her late eighties, kept everyone in hilarious good spirits throughout the evening.

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Ben Weintroub came to the house regularly. Aside from his friendship with Jacques and Malvina, he also struck up a warm personal relationship with Dina. Because he was involved in the publishing business through his quarterly *The Chicago Jewish Chronicle*, he occasionally received tickets and free merchandise in place of cash for ads that his publication ran. He often distributed these items among his friends. When the circus came to town, he sent tickets for Dina and Josy. But just a couple days before the performance, Josy came down with measles. It looked as if plans for the circus would have to be scrapped.

Nevertheless, on the morning of the performance Ben came calling. He carried a huge toy for the patient (who, intensely miserable and running a high fever, remained

completely indifferent to both gift and giver). Then he announced that he would use Josy's ticket and accompany her grandmother to the circus. Dina later told the family that he had escorted her as if she were royalty. Offering his arm wherever they walked, he bought her a program and several favors, even treated her to popcorn, soda, and cotton candy. Afterwards he brought her home in a taxi. She talked about the outing for weeks, recounting every detail of the excursion to any visitors who happened to come by.

IV

Josy and June Liph, the younger daughter of Samson and Rose, became good friends. Lenora, June's older sister, had become inseparable from Masha Grodsky (her own age), and when all their parents got together, the four children paired off happily. Josy and June played together not only during weekends in the city, but also in the country where their families rented bungalows during the summer. They spent a great deal of time together, and became deeply attached in the whole-hearted, unquestioning way that young children sometimes do. One time, seated across from one another on a two-seater swing that could accommodate as many as four people, they talked, giggled, and even ate a page of a newspaper together as if it were picnic food. The memory of this childhood friendship would remain with Josy long after her family moved away from Chicago. Even well into her adolescence (the next time she would see June again after moving away) she would recall the fun they had had earlier and continued to refer to June as “my very best friend”.

One summer at Lake Michigan her parents took her to Benton Harbor, the retreat of a sect called The House of David. The monks with waist-long hair and flowing beards made an unusual sight, especially when they played baseball. Rides on the miniature railroad cars running over the broad lawns surrounding the main building attracted children and parents alike.

Not far from the tracks stood a tall lighthouse, rising directly from the very edges of the lake. A small rowboat brought passengers over to the lighthouse, where they would get out and, clinging to the rounded walls of the building, slowly work their way around its circumference to reach the grassy slopes behind it. With the waters of the lake lapping only about a yard below their feet, they would inch their way forward across the narrow ledge around the lighthouse. Josy clung to the bricks as her father kept a firm grip on her

Beach at Union Pier, 1928. (A) June Liph, (B) Lenora Liph, (C) Josy, (D) Morris Grodsky, (E) Samson Liph, (F) Rita Grodsky, (G) Rose Liph, and (H) Jacques.

shoulder while they moved along in the line of people, finally reaching the small path taking them to the other attractions. She never forgot the feeling of adventure it left her with.

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The only spanking her father ever gave her (for reasons she never could remember) came that summer, but the scowl and look of agony on his face in a photo snapped just

afterwards reflected that it must have cost him too much emotionally to repeat. From time to time she would receive a spanking from her mother, but Jacques chose other ways to discipline her, more subtle and less draining on them both.

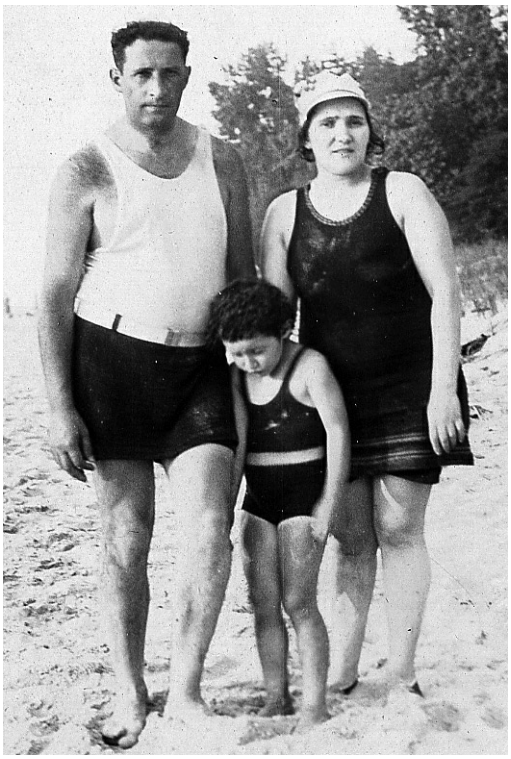
Her third birthday party was one event that ended with a spanking. She was enjoying herself so much amid the visiting children, games, presents, ice cream, and cake, that when it came time for her cousin Melvin (the only guest remaining) to leave, she had a tantrum. The two had been having a wonderful time racing from room to room shouting to each other. Josy began to cry bitterly when his parents dressed him to go home, and she hung on to his coat, refusing to let him get past the landing at the front door. Her mother had to pull her away and, when Josy resisted, Malvina administered a sound spanking while Melvin, also ready to burst into tears, was led by his parents down the stairs and out the front door.

Another episode that should have ended in a spanking (but failed to) was on a ride home from the Loop on the IRT, Chicago's elevated train. Malvina had taken her shopping, and the long excursion proved too much for a three-year-old. Standing idly in the stores while Malvina examined one piece of merchandise after another and then compared them all was something she could never get used to. On that particular day Josy took to annoying passengers on the train home. Malvina scolded her severely, but her behavior only grew worse. Not wanting to punish her in public, Malvina announced, with a stern look, “Behave, or you'll get a good spanking when we get home!”

The admonition had no effect. When they arrived back at the apartment her mother took off her coat, then turned to come after her, but Josy ran immediately to hide behind her grandmother's skirts.

“Vuss tist de t'sum kint?” (“What are you doing to the child!”) Dina cried in outrage, placing herself firmly between the two. She continued to upbraid Malvina so severely that at last Malvina gave in, and Josy never did receive the spanking she so roundly deserved.

Dina would sometimes bake soft pretzels in the kitchen, twisting the dough into odd shapes, and giv-



Josy after spanking in 1927.

Union Pier, 1928 (from left): Back Row: Rose Liph, Dina, Lenora Liph, Samson Liph (standing), Malvina, friend. Front Row: Josy, June Liph.

ing Josy occasional small pieces as they came out of the oven. She also taught her how to sew a bit, and Josy watched in awe as her grandmother stitched away. Dina never tied a knot at the end of her thread, yet it never pulled all the way out of the fabric where the knot should have been. Malvina sewed beautifully, too, probably having learned from watching when Dina had been forced to sew in order to support her family in Poland after her first husband Mordecai died.

As a little girl Josy enjoyed doing small bits of embroidery. They bought her a small round hoop, and she sat importantly with the grown-ups, stitching away. When Dina's elderly lady friends came to visit, she would sit at the edge of their circle, listening to their Yiddish stories and trying to understand choice bits of gossip.

V

When Josy turned three, Malvina decided to buy a season ticket to the Chicago Philharmonic Children's Concerts. They went only once, however. Arriving early, they took their seats, centrally located and just ten rows from the stage, and waited for the performance to begin. Bored and restless, Josy took to examining the opera glasses Malvina had brought along, an elegant ivory-covered set in a red velvet sack.

She soon discovered a fascinating diversion: examining the faces of people nearby. She became especially preoccupied staring into the face of the bald-headed gentleman seated directly behind her. Soon he began to squirm helplessly. Even after the music started, Josy kept turning to gaze at him through the glasses. Malvina repeatedly pulled her around in her seat, but she continued to fidget and squirm, paying no attention at all to the music. Malvina sold the rest of the season's subscription, deciding that it was too soon for this type of entertainment.

The following year, however, was a different story. Josy was so enthralled by the performance of the Russian Ballet that she was sure it was her own enthusiastic applause that had led to three encores from the troupe. When it finally became clear that no more would be forthcoming, she wept loudly and bitterly. After all the rest of the audience had finally left, Malvina had to drag her out of the empty concert hall, while Josy, unable to accept that the performance was really over, tearfully screamed that she wanted more.

She also became fascinated with the music coming out of the radio. In those days, radios were large pieces of furniture, and the one in their living room stood almost four feet high and three feet both deep and wide.

“Where are the musicians?” she wondered.

One day she managed to crawl behind the radio and look inside the space in back. As she gazed in wonder into the interior, she saw a small light and several wires amid some wooden slats. She concluded that this must be a tiny stage where miniature players sat performing, but that they were too small for her to see.

VI

Passover Seders were held at the Tecotzkys. Anna (Melvin’s grandmother) prepared her own special gefilte fish, which she always made in the Polish style, heavily laced with sugar. The children as well as the adults were served wine, and the mood was always festive and jovial.

When Josy was about four, the wife of Malvina's distant cousin Sam Goodman (Ann Kochman Goodman) gave birth to twin boys. After years of trying to conceive, the new parents heralded the event as a miracle. Each morning, almost as a ritual, Ann telephoned Malvina and settled in for a lengthy conversation. Usually this lasted for close to an hour. She spared no detail, relating tedious descriptions of every movement of each baby, how this one coughed, how that one spat up his food, how they both smiled, how one of them hiccuped. It got to the point where Malvina dreaded the ringing of the phone.

“Next time she calls,” Malvina groaned, “tell her I'm not home.”

About an hour later the phone rang again. This time Josy ran to answer. When she heard Ann Goodman ask, “Is your mother there?” she proudly announced, “My mother says to tell you that she's not home!”

It took weeks of apologizing before Ann would speak to Malvina again.

Another family Jacques and Malvina knew and never tired of talking about had a pair of boys who grew into hellions before turning six. The father, it seems, dabbled in music, while the mother was an artist who painted in a room of the apartment that she called her studio. Both boys ran wild and out of control. On one occasion they got hold of a tub of butter and, pretending they were artists, smeared huge quantities of it over every dress in their mother's closet.

The parents aspired to move only in social circles they considered highly elegant and cultural. One evening the father came home excited, jubilantly announcing that he had accomplished a great social coup. He had personally met Feodor Stashenko, a prominent Russian baritone currently on tour at the Chicago Opera Company, and had gotten Stashenko to accept a dinner invitation to their home a few weeks hence.

They would give a great party in his honor, he informed his wife. Only the cream of Chicago's musical elite were to be invited. Preparations must begin immediately so that every detail would be letter-perfect. Deciding on an impressive menu, they sent out elaborate invitations to specially chosen guests. A team of workers came in to clean the apartment, new draperies were purchased, and new slipcovers ordered for the furniture. Everything proceeded like a battle-plan. Day by day, step by step, they followed a clock-like schedule.

After weeks of hard work and anticipation, the long-awaited evening arrived. Guests were due at six o'clock. The table was set with the finest china and silver, and flowers adorned huge vases in all the rooms. The children were dressed especially for the occasion in long pants, white shirts, and bow ties, their hair neatly combed back with pomade. At the last moment, their mother went into the kitchen to check the canapés and hors d'oeuvres.

At precisely six o'clock, the doorbell rang. Wiping her hands on her apron and taking a deep breath, she stepped back into the living room. There she stopped short. Speechless and horrified, she stared in disbelief at the rug. She had vacuumed it only moments before, but now it was a littered sea of torn-up newspapers spread from wall to wall, interspersed with scattered pages of sheet music and ripped magazines. The room looked as if a cyclone had hit. Aghast and in utter dismay, she stared at her two boys, who were grinning in delight. To help, they announced, they had just built a little bridge for her so she could welcome the honored guests in style! The ensuing frenzy of both parents served to make the party a fiasco before it even started.

VII

Outside the Sacramento Boulevard apartment building where Josy lived, many peddlers came by, usually in the late afternoon or early evening. The horseradish grinder, the knife-and-scissors sharpener, the fruit and vegetable vendor, each with small wagons and sets of tools, called out their trade in singsong voices. Once, a photographer with a mobile studio came around. Without asking anyone's permission, he took pictures of every child playing in the back yard. A few days later he returned, going from apartment to apartment to show parents samples of their children's photographs. Few were able to resist buying copies and he did a healthy business.

One peddler came by regularly with his horse and wagon, selling fabrics and odd scraps of cloth. Malvina, quite adept at sewing by this time, frequently bought from him. From some of these remnants she made a one-piece dress with a tiny jacket for Josy. The skirt of the dress and the jacket were black velvet, the small blouse (with a huge bow at the throat) bright Kelly green silk. It was a striking outfit, especially on a four -year-old with bright auburn hair. Josy wore it to birthday parties and on many festive occasions for the next couple years until she finally outgrew it. Then Malvina gave the outfit to the peddler who had sold her the cloth. The man's eyes welled up with tears.

“This will look so beautiful on my own little girl,” he sighed. “I could never afford to buy her anything as elegant as this!” He took her hands into his own and kissed them gratefully.

Several other children lived in the apartment building, and they played in the enormous enclosed back yard that all the tenants shared. Once, when she was four, Josy and another little girl were playing outside together when Malvina noticed her vanity table drawer in the bedroom open, face powder spilled all over the floor.

Going out to the second-floor back porch, she called downstairs, “Josephine!”

Two children's faces turned to look up at her, both covered with heavy white powder. Two pairs of lips, blotched with bright red lipstick, grinned up at Malvina in delight.

Sometimes instead of the yard, Josy played on the front porch of the apartment. On the second floor, it had no access to the street, and on occasion Malvina would isolate her there as punishment.

One such day, bored and resentful, Josy climbed up onto the balustrade. It was about four feet high. Standing on top of it for several minutes, surveying the scene on Sacramento Boulevard, she watched the children playing down on the sidewalk below.

"Why don't you jump down and come play with us?" demanded one little girl on the pavement.

Josy considered the suggestion seriously. Then, without quite knowing why, she climbed down off the balustrade and back onto the floor of the porch.

"Because my mother wouldn't like it," she called back.

Afterwards she recalled not the slightest fear, just the realization that some unconscious feeling of self-preservation must have been at work, saving her from serious consequences.

Often she joined in the games in the huge back yard, but if some children from adjoining apartments were too rough, she came back inside and played alone indoors. Sometimes Malvina would wind up the record player and Josy wheeled her doll carriage from room to room, marching in step to the strains of "Parade of the Wooden Soldiers".

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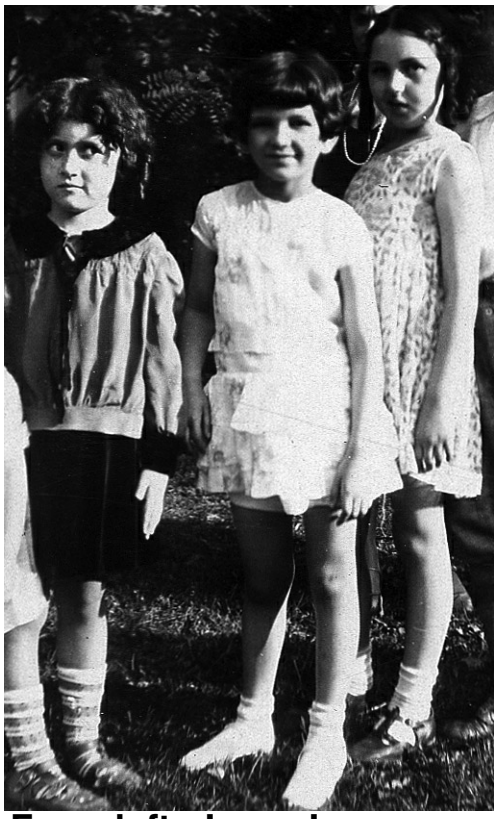

From left: Josy, June Liph, Masha Grodsky.

Her parents belonged to a discussion group. Every three or four weeks they met to review a newly published book. One copy was purchased for everybody to share, and they would pass it from member to member until everyone had read it. Then they met for interesting and lively discussions.

One novel they selected was *Winterset* by Sherwood Anderson. Considered daring and controversial for its time, it sold out quickly in most bookstores. With difficulty they finally located a copy, and Josy's parents were among the first in the group to read it.

When they finished and were ready to pass it along to the next reader, the book was nowhere to be found. Malvina turned the apartment upside down, cleaning out closets, emptying drawers, searching through wastebaskets, and going through all probable nooks and corners, but to no avail. Puzzled and enormously embarrassed, she finally went back to the bookstore where, after a great deal of coaxing she got them to

order another copy (a delay of still one more week).

Meanwhile, the phone calls from other members of the club left her extremely uncomfortable. Several implied that she might deliberately be trying to keep the book for herself. For the next several weeks, even after she had already provided the new copy, she found some of the women eyeing her suspiciously every time they met.

About six months later, when cleaning out Josy's doll carriage, what should she spott but the original copy of *Winterset*, snuggled between the doll blanket and mattress. Josy must have come upon it in her parents' bedroom and, fascinated by its bright red cover, saved it for her dolls.

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One hot summer night the Grodskys and their daughter Masha came to visit. At the end of the evening Jacques took Josy and accompanied the visitors back to their trolley stop where they bought ice cream cones before saying good-bye. They all went inside the corner drug store, got ice cream, and then crossed the street to the trolley stop. As they stepped off the curb, a car came speeding towards them. The grown-ups, grabbing both children's hands, shouted “Run, children! Run!”

As everybody scooted across the busy street, Josy's ice cream fell off her cone. Ready to cry, she awaited the spanking she was sure was coming. Instead, Jacques patted her on the head, saying, “Come on, we're going back to get you another one!”

Rita Grodsky took the empty cone from Josy’s hand and, giving her a kiss, said “Here! We'll give this to the doggie over there!” She held out the empty waffle cone to a passing dog who snapped it up eagerly and ran off.

Josy never forgot her surprise at not being punished, or the delight and attention she got as she proudly chose her own new flavor of ice cream.

VIII

Early one morning Jacques came into her room, patted her gently on the cheek, and told her to get up for something special. After breakfast he walked her to a tall gloomy building, where he left her with a stern looking woman and some other children in a kindergarten classroom for her first day of school. She stayed in that class for only two

weeks. When those in charge saw that she had learned how to tie knots and bows, and knew which of her shoes went on which foot, they decided she was ready for first grade. She was only five and a half.

They moved her then and there in the middle of the term, and the results proved disastrous for her. Many mornings she would cry, not wanting to even leave the house. Occasionally, in order to encourage her, Jacques would arrange to arrive a bit late at the office so he could walk to school with her. She found this the only pleasant part of the day.

She hated the school. Children got herded into long lines in the yard, then pushed along in groups by sniveling adults who scolded them all the way to their classrooms. (She wasn't sure whether these were other teachers or merely parents assisting them.) The building itself, a tall, gray structure, resembled a huge fortress. It was not particularly inviting, inside or out.

It soon became apparent that she was having difficulty learning to read. She had trouble especially identifying letters in combination. To address this problem, her teacher placed her in a remedial reading group. Daily at ten o'clock, she was moved for half an hour into a circle at the front of the class with a dozen other children, most of them older and bigger. They were all struggling to master sounds and letters, and several turned out to be behavior problems. A visiting teacher towered over them, trying to explain the relationship between sounds and printed letters, all of which eluded Josy completely for the entire time she spent in that school.

In particular she had trouble with the word “fish”. The teacher would bend over her stern-faced, pointing an insistent finger at her, impatiently repeating in a shrill voice, “Fish! f – i – s - h! Fish! Can't you see it? There are four letters? Four! f–i–s-h !” Josy could see only three: an f, an i , and an odd shape that she took to be one single letter, but that was actually a combined s and h.

At home, a young woman who came weekly to help Malvina clean noticed her struggling over this one afternoon. Glancing up from the ironing board, quietly she explained that the s-h in ‘fish’ were not one but two separate letters joined. Josy was amazed and extremely grateful. It opened up a new concept: that a pair of letters could represent one single sound. Reading readiness would elude her until she was six and already attending school in Philadelphia. But meanwhile the remedial reading group experience left her with a deep sense of shame. What a far cry this turned out to be from the earlier pronouncements of Dr. Low that Josy was a reading genius!

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During those first weeks in the Chicago school, the exterior of the building was being painted. One day during recess, a few other children and she remained standing in the schoolyard, watching with upturned faces as the workers moved around high above them on scaffolds. An hour later, Malvina received a frantic telephone call from the school secretary.

“Come get your child immediately,” the woman shouted into the phone. “She can't be seen in our school building this way!”

Alarmed, Malvina rushed to the school office. There she found Josy and several other children, all with faces covered in splotches of white paint.

The secretary somewhat breathlessly shooed Malvina and Josy out of the office as quickly as she could in an effort to keep the room presentable. Malvina rushed Josy home and, holding her firmly over the kitchen sink under a stream of hot running water, she scrubbed vigorously with a stiff-bristled brush at the hardened paint while Josy filled the air with piercing shrieks. Considering all these expereicnes, it was small wonder that Josy later recalled the beginning of her education with less than joy!

IX

In 1929 the Great Depression hit. Like many other people, Jacques suddenly lost his job. After weeks of frantic searching and numerous inquiries, he finally got a lead in Philadelphia. A position had opened at Honeywell Brown (The Brown Instrument Company). He went there by train, was interviewed and then quickly hired. At the Republic Flow Meters Company in Chicago he had been the only Jewish engineer. Now, at Honeywell Brown, he was one of two.

He remained in Philadelphia and started work immediately. Back in Chicago, Malvina started preparations for the move to join him. The weather in Philadelphia that year had been peculiar, and not realizing that what he saw was atypical, he wrote in one letter, “And we thought the weather in Chicago was bad! I don't know what kind of place this is, but today, on the third of May, we had a snowstorm!”

It sounded even stranger than Chicago, which Josy would always remember as having summers that were unbearably hot and humid, and winters of never-ending onslaughts

of snow. She would recall how, from December through February, spaces between sidewalks and buildings often became completely obliterated, piled so high with snow that they turned into firmly packed mountains whereshe and her friends would climb to play "stage". In her first six years, though, she also saw numerous wide and brilliant rainbows there that followed downpours in spring and early summer. She remembered more rainbows during those early years in Chicago than anywhere else ever afterwards. At that point, Philadelphia sounded like a very odd place indeed.

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Ben Margolius and his family had left Chicago back in 1922. The business tycoon John Wanamaker, while visiting Chicago, had hired him to come work in his Philadelphia department store. Because Ben spoke German, Wanamaker thought he could assist in translating the store's business dealings with German companies. The fact that Ben was Jewish had to be downplayed, though, so he worked hidden away in the china department packaging dishes and glassware. He would stay in this same job for the next fifty years.

One reason Jacques was quick to accept the offer at Honeywell Brown was that Ben and his family now lived in Philadelphia. This would allow Dina to be near both her son and daughter, and he thought she could alternate living in both homes. This never came about, though, for Ben harbored bitter feelings against his mother. After a few unsuccessful attempts, Dina settled permanently into Malvina's home for the rest of her life.

By June 1930, after weeks of preparation, everything was ready for the move. Malvina, Dina and Josy were ready to board the train for Philadelphia. A number of friends and relatives came to the station to see them off. It was a tearful scene, for the distance was great, the journey would take close to forty-eight hours, and most of the well-wishers never expected to see the travelers again.