

CHAPTER 1 - REMEMBERING HOW THEY MET

José returned from India in March of 1946. He and Josy were married on June 23rd, three months later.

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They had first met back on December 13, 1942. Four years before that Josy's father Jacques, an engineer at the Brown Instrument Company (Honeywell Brown) had suddenly lost his job. In 1938 shortly before World War II broke out, a minor depression struck the United States. One of the many companies affected was Honeywell-Brown. In one day alone they fired eight hundred people. Jacques was among them.

Discouraged, adrift, inexperienced doing any type of work but engineering, he decided to go into business with his friend Daniel Berkowitz. Together they opened a store at Broad and Loudon Streets, naming the place Keystone Appliance Company. Here they sold electrical appliances and furniture. A couple years later they would move the store from Logan to Strawberry Mansion, an active Jewish community where they would continue to remain business partners a couple years more

One day in late 1942 Rachel Rabinowitz, new to the neighborhood, came in to buy a refrigerator. She brought her two sons, José nineteen and Mario, age six along. It took Jacques by surprise to hear her mention that they had arrived recently from Mexico. In those days it was exceptionally rare to find anyone from Mexico living in Strawberry Mansion. Jacques had been to Mexico City himself a few years earlier to look into the possibility of establishing an import-export venture with his brother-in-law Stashek Margules who lived there, a venture that never worked out. Josy and her mother also had both been to Mexico, so now meeting people newly arrived from that country piqued Jacques's interest. In the evening when he spoke about it at home, both Malvina and Josy suggested that he invite the family to the house to get acquainted.

It so happened that at the time Josy was planning a party to support Chinese war relief. She was trying to include as many people as possible, and even before meeting José, she thought she might ask him "if he turned out to be nice".

The next time Rachel came into the store, Jacques extended an invitation to come to the house and meet his family. He suggested the coming Sunday afternoon. Explaining that her husband Laib would still be at work, she accepted anyhow, saying she would come with her boys.

They arrived at exactly two o'clock. Jacques opened the front door, led them into the living room, and Malvina came out of the kitchen to greet them. A moment later Josy came down from upstairs. When she saw José, already seated on the living room couch, she drew in her breath, impressed at how handsome he was. Later he told her that he would never forget how she looked coming down those stairs, wearing a red Mexican folk necklace over her short-sleeved gray sweater and a pair of long dangling red earrings to match.

Jacques introduced everybody. Josy shook hands first with Rachel, then bent down smiling to greet Mario. Her first words to José were, "Do they call you José or Joe?"

"Either one," he answered.

"I think I'll call you José," she replied.

And that was how it all began.

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Everyone sat down to get acquainted. A bit later, coaxed by her parents, Josy went to the piano to play a couple numbers. Then while Rachel and Josy's parents began to chat in Russian, she and José wandered off into the dining room to sit down and talk there.

"Do you know Bernie Kabacoff?" she asked him, referring to her cousin Leah's husband, who was also a student at Philadelphia College of Pharmacy and Science.

José indeed knew him well. Bernie, along with his wife Leah, was extremely radical in his political beliefs, with a reputation for aggressively trying to convert everyone at the College, constantly trying to draw people into discussion, handing out leaflets whenever he could.

Hesitatingly José asked Josy what her own political inclinations were. Not knowing his, and reluctant to put him off in any way, she paused, drew a deep breath, and then answered truthfully that she in no way shared these views, though she was sympathetic to many progressive causes.

Immediately they both relaxed. Now feeling more at ease, they chatted about other things. and before long Josy felt comfortable enough to mention the Chinese party and ask José if he would like to come. He told her that he would let her know.

Malvina then invited everyone into the dining room for tea and cake. At this point José announced that he had to leave; previously he had made some other plans. But on the way out he spotted a copy of Ravel's "Bolero" on the piano, and asked Josy if he might borrow it. He wanted to "show it to

a friend”, he told her. (Later she would find out this had been a pretext so he could come back to return it.)

After he left, Josy took six-year-old Mario into the living room and, seated beside him on the sofa, told him a few stories to keep him occupied. Through the years that followed, Mario would often remark that he had liked Josy from the very start. He would never forget one story in particular she told him, about a man who, after going out of his way to be kind to a beggar, later reaped enormous good fortune as a reward for his generosity. This Mario would always remember, and he would keep referring to it for years to come.

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José returned the very next day to bring back the sheet music. Josy was away at school, but he stayed for a while just the same, sitting down in the kitchen with Malvina to chat while she prepared supper. This would be one of several long conversations he would have with her whenever he chanced to drop by and Josy was out. Later Josy would reminisce and laughingly imply that her mother had been her chief rival for José’s affection. But in her heart, she would always be deeply grateful that the two had shared so many talks together.

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The next day José went to a corner store phone booth (there was no telephone in his house) and called Josy, asking her to go out with him a couple days later. He took her to the International House at the University of Pennsylvania where a talk and film on anthropology were being given. She borrowed Malvina’s tweed coat for the occasion, for what reason she would later be unable to remember, though it was the only time she ever asked to borrow any of her mother’s clothes.

José came for her around seven o’clock. They walked the three blocks from her house to Twenty-ninth Street where they took the Number 7 trolley. Once on board he dug deep into his pocket, pulling out two sticks of gum that he had had for some time and offered her one. As she put it into her mouth and began to chew, she suddenly felt her teeth stick together. The gum was rock-hard, and it took several minutes before she could get her jaws apart. It wasn’t until they found seats that she was able to speak again.

They kept riding past Walnut Street, which made her wonder, since this was where she usually got off to switch trolleys for Penn. Instead,

continuing on some seven blocks further, they got off at South Street, where they changed to the Number 40. At Walnut Street, he would have had to pay an extra three cents each for *exchanges* instead of free *transfers*. She realized that a saving of twelve cents was a serious consideration for a student working several jobs while going to school, especially when his Philadelphia College of Pharmacy and Science wage was only fifty cents an hour.

They had a most pleasant time at the International House, and at the end of the evening as he was dropping her off at her front door he told her yes, he *would* come to her Chinese party two weeks later.

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Meanwhile Rachel had invited the Feldmarks for the following Sunday. She asked them to come late in the afternoon so Laib would be home from work.

It turned out to be the most bitterly cold day of the year. José was still out when they arrived. In those early years of World War II around the December holiday season, mail came twice daily, twice on Saturdays, and once every Sunday. In addition to making slides and drawings for his professors at the College, and also travelling to Germantown in the late afternoon to work in a Baltimore Market, José had also found a temporary extra job delivering mail on Sundays.

He reached home just as it was getting dark. (Josy and her parents had arrived only moments before.) Chilled to the bone, he pulled off his bulky coat, heavy gloves, a wool cap, and two sweaters while glowingly telling about his experiences of the afternoon. In several houses people had invited him inside for a few minutes to warm up, some even offering hot drinks or snacks. At the end of his route someone had told him that one of the mail carriers had been discovered throwing letters away into the sewer. He had just been fired.

Rachel served hot tea, welcomed by everybody. Then José, Mario, and Josy went into the living room, where she sat down on an armchair to watch José and Mario settle onto the floor to play with Mario's holiday present, a new electric train set. José seemed even more enthralled with it than his brother. While she looked on as they all talked, Josy wished she had worn a better pair of stockings, hoping the repaired run in one leg would not be too apparent to the boys at her feet.

That evening would turn out to be the one occasion when all four of their parents, Laib and Rachel, Jacques and Malvina, would be together at the same time. Several months later the Rabinowitzs would move to

Washington State, and other things as well would preclude this from happening. The joys of whole families sharing simple pleasures like dinners, get-togethers, and family occasions would never be theirs to cherish. For that reason, this particular December evening would always remain especially poignant to both José and Josy in the years to come.

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The following Saturday around seven o'clock, the evening before her Chinese party, Josy opened the door to a knock and found José standing there. He had come to deliver the balance of payment for the refrigerator his family had bought at Jacques's store. He handed the envelope to Jacques, then remained to visit for awhile, keeping Josy company as she set up a small display in the dining room for the party. She asked if he wanted to help but he declined, just remaining there to talk and keep her company as she arranged and rearranged the items.

They had agreed to say nothing to Bernie Kabacoff until the night of the party about having met each other. Indeed it came as a complete surprise to Bernie and Leah when they walked into the house and found José there.

Josy had arranged for several guests to participate with talks, stories, and songs in keeping with the Chinese theme. She concluded the program by playing "Chinese Rhapsody", a number composed by her teacher Frank Potamkin on the piano. As she finished and was putting the sheet music away into the piano bench, Bernie turned to José seated beside him on the rows of chairs set up in the dining room, and commented, "You really like that girl, don't you? Had I known, I would have introduced you sooner."

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Over the weeks that passed José and Josy saw each other several times. Then late one Monday night in January she came to his house in a panic. She asked if he could possibly help her with some of the problems that had confounded her (and most of her classmates) in Professor Erdos's College Algebra final exam the week before. The Dean had rescheduled the final, citing as a reason "the inappropriate way in which the test was originally administered." Professor Erdos had allowed the assigned two-hour exam to extend to over four and a half hours, at which point the Dean had come storming into the room demanding to know where the papers were. Finding Professor Erdos conferring privately with one student after another, writing out formulas on the board while the rest of the class was still

struggling to work amid the bedlam, hastily she collected the papers. The exam was invalid, she declared. There would be a re-exam the following Tuesday morning.

It was now late Monday night, and Josy felt more bewildered and panic-stricken than ever. She begged for any help and advice José might to give her. It took fifteen minutes for him to clear up the confusion of an entire semester. Professor Erdos had allowed students to take home copies of the original test. Now looking these over, José reviewed a few examples and rules, and clarified them in direct, concise terms.

The following day Josy came out of the exam with an A, which translated into an A for the entire course! Shortly afterwards the Dean phoned her father, announcing, “Mr. Feldmark, I think I’ve severely misjudged your daughter. She has real mathematical ability, and when it comes time for her to choose a major in her junior year, I do hope she’ll consider mathematics. We have far too few women in the field!” (Later it would come as a shock to nobody but the Dean when Josy, tackling Solid Analytical Geometry and Calculus in the coming two years, would barely skim by, with José away in the army and unable to help her.)

Meanwhile he was scheduled to retake the English exam that had been required for his admission to the College of Pharmacy and Science. They had administered the test to him the very day after he arrived in the United States. In it he was asked to correct one hundred misspellings and grammar errors that appeared in a three-paragraph story. He had come out with a 69, one point short of passing. The college had admitted him on condition that he retake the exam and get at least a 70 before graduation. Now with just weeks to go, he told Josy about this. She tried to give him some pointers to help. This time he got through with a 71. They never quite figured out if this was because of her help, the improvement of his language skills over time, or just sheer luck!

Later, at the end of February, he invited her to his college dinner-dance. Then a few weeks after that he left for the army.

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On April 23, 1943 he departed for Fort Meade in Maryland. Just a few days into his basic training he developed a case of measles. This put him into an army hospital for close to two weeks.

Meanwhile three days after he left Philadelphia Josy also grew sick. That Monday as she was sitting in Psychology class feeling weak and

strangely exhausted, her friend Anna Benjamin commented, “You look yellow! Even the whites of your eyes are yellow.”

“You look just like my uncle looked when he came home from the South Pacific,” Mary Denman, on her other side told her. “He had malaria!”

With Josy it was a case of yellow jaundice. It would keep her out of school for the rest of the freshman year. The University agreed to let her begin her sophomore year the coming September on condition that she take and pass her freshman finals when she returned in the fall. This she would do. Neither she nor José found out until later that each had been sick at the same time.

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From Fort Meade José got sent to Camp Pickett in Maryland, then on to Atlanta where, for the next three months, he would receive training and instruction in tropical diseases at Lawson General Hospital, affiliated with the Malaria Control in War Areas Center. (This would later become the nation’s Center for Disease Control.) From Atlanta he got transferred in early summer to New Orleans.

A few weeks after he had first left for the army, Kayser Permanente, the company his father worked for, transferred its Philadelphia operations to the town of Vancouver in Washington State. Laib left for the West Coast that May, and a few weeks later Rachel and their son Mario moved there to join him. Josy thought that she would never see José again.

Then in October 1943 he got a furlough. Taking the train to Philadelphia, he came there for the one week he had off. He stayed at the home of his Aunt Jennie and Uncle Nathan Garber on Warnock Street in Logan. Just a few months later he would be sent overseas to China-Burma-India. There he would be stationed for the rest of the war.

It was during that short week of his furlough that things grew serious between him and Josy. They became aware of their attachment for one other, and agreed to write to each other every day after he went back.

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The war finally ended August 14th, 1945. After that it took several months before all the troops came home. There were too few ships available in the China-Burma-India Theater to bring them all back at once. A point system was devised to determine the order in which everyone got sent back. Age, length of military service, time spent overseas, marital status, number

of children, all figured into the equation. It took José, single and among the youngest, till the following January before he left India. The voyage back across the Pacific lasted over six weeks. It was March 1946 before he arrived in New Jersey, where he got his final discharge from the Army.

From there he came to Philadelphia, staying as he had during his furlough, at the home of his Uncle Nathan Garber. Aunt Jennie had died a few months earlier, and he found that Josy's mother Malvina had also passed away just weeks before his return.

He and Josy were finally reunited after more than two and a half years apart. They were married on June 23rd, three months later.