

## REMEMBERING HOW THEY MET

José and Josy got married June 23, 1946, three months after he returned from the army. They recalled how they had first met on December 13, 1942, and how their relationship had deepened over time.

In the days when Josy's father Jacques, with his partner Daniel Berkowitz, owned an appliance store in Strawberry Mansion (the Keystone Appliance Company), a lady who had just moved into the neighborhood came in one day to buy a refrigerator. Her name was Rachel Rabinowitz, and she came with her two sons José (then nineteen) and Mario (six). In talking to them, Jacques learned that they had recently arrived from Mexico.

Back at home that night, when he mentioned this to Malvina and Josy, they suggested that he invite the family to get acquainted. Having spent time in Mexico themselves, they felt they might have many things in common.

It so happened that at the time Josy was planning a party to raise money for Chinese war relief, She was hoping to invite as many of her friends as possible, and even before meeting José, she thought it would be a good idea to ask him also.

Although Laib, Rachel Rabinowitz's husband, was working the following Sunday afternoon, Rachel and her sons, upon Jacques's invitation, came to the house themselves. They arrived at exactly at two o'clock, and Jacques, opening the door for them, invited them inside. Malvina came out from the kitchen and into the living room to greet them at the same moment that Josy was coming down from upstairs. Still on the steps, she glanced down shyly at José seated on the couch and 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 gray pull-over sweater and a pair of dangling red earrings to match.

When Jacques introduced everyone she shook hands first with Rachel, then bent down smiling to greet Mario officially as she might an adult, and finally turned to José, asking, "Do they call you José or Joe?"

When he answered, "Either one" she replied, "I'll call you José."

And that was how it all began.

Everybody sat down to get acquainted. After a while Josy, coaxed by her mother, played two or three pieces on the piano for them, and then she and José wandered off into the dining room where they sat down to chat. They talked about Bernie Kabacoff, her cousin Leah's husband who, it turned out, was a student and actually a classmate of José at PCP&S (Philadelphia College of Pharmacy and Science). Hesitatingly José asked her about her own political inclinations. Both felt relieved to hear that, although

somewhat progressive, neither shared the extreme views of Bernie and his wife. At that point Josy felt comfortable enough to mention the Chinese party she was planning two weeks later and asked José if he would like to come. He told her he would let her know.

Just as Malvina invited everyone into the dining room for tea and cake, José announced that he had to leave. He had made other arrangements previously, he explained. But spotting a copy of Ravel's "Bolero" on the piano, he asked Josy if he might borrow it to show his friend. (This would be his pretext for coming back again to return it.) He did come back the following day and, not finding Josy home, sat in the kitchen with Malvina instead chatting while she prepared dinner. This would be the first of several talks they would have together in the coming weeks whenever he chanced to drop by and find Josy out. Later Josy would laughingly claim that her mother turned out to be her chief rival for José's affections.

After he left that first Sunday afternoon, and after everyone else had finished tea and cake, Josy took six-year-old Mario into the living room by himself and, sitting on the couch together, she told him story after story to keep him entertained. Through the years Mario would always claim that he liked Josy from the very start. He said that he never forgot one of her stories in particular, about a man who had been kind to a beggar after everyone else had shunned him and was then rewarded by good fortune for his kindness.

A couple days later José went to a phone booth at a corner drug store near his home (they had no telephone in the house) and called Josy, inviting her out on their first date. He took her to the International House at University of Pennsylvania, where a talk on anthropology was being given. She remembered that evening well, recalling in particular that she had borrowed Malvina's tweed coat for the occasion, liking it better than her own.

They took two different trolley cars to get to the University, changing on South Street rather than Walnut to save the three cents extra it would cost to buy an "exchange" ticket rather than a "transfer" for each of them. On the first trolley he dug into his pocket and, pulling out two sticks of gum, offered one to her. As soon as she put it into her mouth she found herself unable to speak. The gum must have been in his pocket for some time, for it turned out to be hard as a rock, sticking to her teeth. But once she got to manage it, the rest of the evening turned out to be most enjoyable. Then, just as he was dropping her back at her front door José told her he would come to her Chinese party next week.

Meanwhile Rachel had invited the Feldmarks for tea the Sunday evening after the visit at their home. That was when they met her husband

Laib. It was the most bitterly cold day of the entire year. José was still out on a job delivering mail when they arrived. At that time mail came twice a day, and also on the two Sundays just before Christmas. In addition to working after school as a packager in the Baltimore Food Market in Germantown, José also got the chance to make extra money by delivering mail on those two Sundays.

He returned home a few minutes after they arrived, chilled to the bone. Pulling off a scarf, a knit wool cap, and two sweaters along with his coat and gloves, he recounted how in many houses they had invited him inside on his rounds offering him something to eat and a few minutes to get in out of the cold. He had to report back to the main depot as he finished his route, he told them, and tonight he learned that another employee had been fired after someone reported that they had seen him throw letters away into the sewer to lighten his load!

The hot tea that Rachel served was most welcome. Then José, Mario, and Josy went into the living room where she sat down on a chair while the others got down onto the floor to play with the new electric train set Mario had just received as a present. José seemed to have more fun playing with it than he did. (Josy wished she had worn a better pair of stockings; she hoped that the repaired run in her left leg stocking was not too visible to the two boys down on the floor at her feet.)

This evening would turn out to be the only time that Laib, Rachel, Jacques and Malvina would ever be together; for this reason it always remained especially memorable to both José and Josy.

The following Saturday (the night before the party) there was a knock on the Feldmarks' door, and Josy found José waiting outside, delivering part of the payment for the refrigerator Rachel had bought. She invited him inside and, after handing Jacques the envelope, José remained for a while to visit, keeping Josy company as she prepared a display of Chinese articles in the dining room for next evening's party.

He arrived early for the occasion the following night, having said nothing to Bernie Kabacoff about having met Josy (as she had suggested as a surprise), and when Bernie and Leah came in a few minutes later, they were indeed surprised.

Josy had planned a program for the evening, and in keeping with the theme, she played "Chinese Rhapsody" (written by her teacher Frank Potamkin) on the piano. As she finished, Bernie commented to José sitting beside him, "You really like that girl, don't you? Had I known, I would have introduced you sooner."

José and Josy saw each other several times after that. A few weeks later she asked him to help explain some of the calculus problems that had confounded her entire class and that would be given again in a re-exam scheduled for the following Tuesday. He was able to explain in fifteen minutes what her calculus professor Dr. Erdos had been unable to get across during an entire semester. Thanks to his help, which clarified the confusion of an entire semester, she came out with an A.

He invited her to his PCP&S dinner-dance that February, and they saw each other again several times before he left for the army on April 23 of 1943. In October of that same year he returned from New Orleans for his furlough. It was a few months before he was sent overseas. His parents and Mario had already moved away to Washington State, but he spent that week in Philadelphia catching up with as many relatives and friends as he could. It was during that short week that things grew serious between him and Josy, and they agreed to write to each other every day.