

## LIVING AT MR. GOLDBERG'S

After living with Jacques for several months, José and Josy began to look for their own apartment. Housing was extremely difficult to come by. People resorted to all sorts of ingenious maneuvers to get hold of the morning paper as soon as it came off the presses and, in this way, be the first to learn which apartments were available that day. Some people even went to the extreme of standing outside the newspaper building, with a paid waiting taxi-cab, its motor running, nearby so that, as soon as they got a fresh newspaper in their hands, they could jump in, yell directions to the driver, and speed off to a selected location that looked most desirable! At this time in 1946, obtaining a car or an apartment proved to be occasions of achievement and triumph. With World War II just over, the country suddenly found itself ill-prepared to cope with the massive numbers of veterans returning home and preparing to settle back into civilian life.

After several failures to find suitable accommodations in the price range that they could afford, José and Josy heard of an opening, an apartment at 1715 North Eighth Street (near Columbia Avenue in North Philadelphia). Here a retired Talmudist (an expert in the Aramaic language) lived. His name was Mr. Goldberg. His son and two of his three daughters had grown up, married, and left. Therefore he decided to turn the entire second floor of his three-story house into an apartment to rent out. This apartment contained, at the top of the first flight of stairs (and at the back of the building) a large living room with a tiny hallway that adjoined a miniature kitchen.

"The kitchen's too small for a table, but that can go into the hallway," Mr. Goldberg explained repeatedly while showing José and Josy the apartment. A set of four more steps at the second-floor level led to the front part of the house, where one entered a pair of large rooms which could serve as a bedroom and a study. For this Mr. Goldberg demanded \$55 a month, payable in advance to a real estate agent three blocks away. José and Josy never found out why they had to pay through a real estate agent and in advance, but Mr. Goldberg seemed pleasant enough and, when they realized that the living room would be able to accommodate Josy's Kranich and Bach baby grand piano, they decided to take the place.

Fortunately, a trolley car was available a block away. The transportation system was called PRT at that time, later to be renamed PTC and still later SEPTA. The fare then was seven and a half cents (two tokens for fifteen). "Transfers" to some connecting lines were free, but "exchanges" to other more centrally-located connections cost an additional three cents. The trip from the apartment to the University of Pennsylvania, where José was now enrolled, took approximately half an hour, even though, after the first trolley ride, it involved changes to two other vehicles (the Broad Street Subway and then the Market Street "El").

Mogilefsky's Pharmacy stood on the corner of Franklin Street and Columbia Avenue, a block and a half away from where they lived. Here, public phones were available. José and Josy made frequent use of these, so as not to have to pay for having their own additional phone service in the apartment, and also not to inconvenience Mr. Goldberg, the Talmudist. On Friday evenings, since he liked to have hot food, Mr. Goldberg allowed the lights and gas stove to remain lit for the full duration of the Sabbath. When Mr. Goldberg returned home from his prayer meeting, he would refuse to ring the doorbell. Instead, vigorously he would kick the front door with his foot, sometimes ten or twelve times until José would run down the stairs to let him in. The telephone, when it did ring on the Sabbath, went unanswered, unless José chanced to pick it up. It was located in Mr. Goldberg's first-floor living quarters under the steps, and José and Josy never made outgoing calls from there.

During this time, José and Josy occasionally invited people to visit and partake of supper. A Dr. A. was one of several to be invited. One morning as José was standing on the corner of Franklin and Columbia Avenue, waiting for the 47 trolley car to take him to the University, he noticed a short, dapper gentleman leaning with both hands on a cane, also waiting for the street-car. This fellow appeared to be in his late fifties. He was nattily dressed in a three-piece suit (despite the heat of that August morning) and, in the gray spats that peeked out from the tops of his polished black shoes, and his matching gray hat, he was the picture of elegance. They struck up a conversation.

"So where are you going, so early in the morning?" asked the stranger.

"To the University of Pennsylvania. I'm starting my graduate work there," replied José.

"In what field?"

"Chemistry."

"Chemistry? That's what I studied at Penn. Who is your adviser?"

"Dr. Wagner."

"Ernest Carl Wagner? He was my adviser, too!"

They shook hands and, when the trolley finally arrived, they entered and sat down together. The gentleman introduced himself as Dr. A., a chemistry teacher at Central High School. José explained that he and his wife had just found an apartment nearby.

"And is your wife also from Mexico?" asked Dr. A.

"No, she grew up in Philadelphia."

"What high school did she go to?"

"Gratz."

"Gratz! I used to teach at Gratz!" came the reply. "What was your wife's maiden name?"

"Josephine Feldmark," José answered.

Whereupon the gentleman threw his arms around José and hugged him. "She was my student!" he practically shouted. "She was in my last class at Gratz, before I left for Central! And she wrote the farewell poem for me at the going-away party that the class gave!"

José immediately invited Dr. A. to come visit. Later that day, when he told her about the chance encounter, Josy was overjoyed.

"He was such a wonderful teacher! We all loved him!" she cried. "I can't wait to see him again! And to think that he lives only a couple of blocks from here! What a coincidence running into him this way!"

They had a splendid reunion and, after that, they continued to see Dr. A. regularly. Several weeks later, they invited him to come for lunch. Twelve o'clock was agreed upon. Josy prepared a tuna salad platter, with iced tea, fruit and cake, something fitting for the hot weather. She opened all the windows of the apartment wide to cool off the place (nobody had air-conditioning in those days). Then, when she heard the doorbell ring downstairs, she set out their three filled platters on the table in the small hallway outside the kitchen. Dr. A., as usual, was punctilious and on time. He climbed the stairs, greeted them with the copy of an article he had been reading, and then José invited him to come into the study at the front of the apartment to see some of his books. One of these he offered to lend him. Then, after chatting for about five minutes, Josy suggested that it was time to eat.

They descended the four steps to the little hallway that served as their dining room. To their dismay, as they approached, they saw three plates on the table entirely devoid of food. A huge gray cat, belonging to the neighbor from the house next-door, had apparently leaped across and in through the open window, sprung onto the table, and helped herself to all the lunch. As Josy rushed in, the animal quickly licked off the last of the tuna fish and, knocking over the glasses filled with iced tea, as well as the fruit, it sprang into the kitchen and, with a tremendous bound, leaped out the window.

Speechless, Josy was about to offer to cook something else, when Dr. A. announced curtly, "I just remembered. I have another appointment!" And before either she or José could say another word, their guest flew down the stairs and out the front door.

A few evenings after this incident, Drs. Carmack and Horning, teachers of José from the University, visited and ate a Mexican meal, after which Josy played the piano for them, and they stayed on to converse. It was quite late by the time they left and, since it was a week-night (and both José and Josy had to get up very early the next morning), it was agreed that the dirty dishes, pots, and pans would be left to soak in the tub of the kitchen sink, to be washed the following day after returning from work.

In the middle of the night, the clamps holding the tub to the wooden frame of the sink gave way. Suddenly, and with a tremendous boom, the tub came crashing loose and fell to the floor, smashing many of the dishes and breaking the ceiling of the room below. The whole house shook from the vibration. A few moments later, Mr. Goldberg, in his pajamas, came rushing up the steps, shaking with fright, and yelling that the ceiling of his living room had partially fallen. He was apoplectic and close to speechless. José rapidly secured a tall glass, filled it with strong whiskey, and handed it to the landlord.

“Here, have a drink, Mr. Goldberg!” he urged.

After two more such glasses, Mr. Goldberg finally calmed down enough to speak.

“Never in my life!” he muttered. “Never in my life!” The next day, he called a plumber, who promised to come make repairs within the next three days.

Meanwhile, Josy wondered, “Where does one wash the dishes in circumstances like these?” Accordingly, after each meal she would take a tray, pile it up with dirty dishes, and carry it to the bathroom just off the hallway. There, she would place the tray on top of the closed commode, wash the dishes and then, kneeling on the floor, dry them one by one, replacing them on the tray.

Two evenings later, as she was in the midst of this carefully-planned procedure, the doorbell rang. Downstairs, Mr. Goldberg opened it and, up the steps came bounding Dr. A., returning the book he had borrowed from José. What should he see when he reached the landing but Josy, on her knees in the bathroom, drying dishes.

“Hello!” she called out to him

“I just remembered,” he shouted, flinging the book over to her, “I have another appointment!” And, as in the week before, off he fled.

Mortified, Josy commiserated with José. “Somehow,” she pleaded, “we have to try to make amends to Dr. A. for all these catastrophes! We have to invite him again!” she insisted. They bought a box of chocolates for him and, the following day, they walked over to his house. Opening the door, he glanced at the chocolates and snapped, “I only eat kosher!”

Apologizing for all the mishaps, they announced that they were planning a dinner party in his honor, and would he please come as their guest the following Sunday. Somewhat mollified, he grudgingly invited them to come in, and they explained in detail the background of the odd circumstances he had recently encountered at their apartment. Suddenly, he came to attention.

“Will there be any single women at the party?” he demanded.

Thinking, Josy replied, “Well, José’s Cousin Rose is expecting a friend from out of town, and if she comes, of course she’ll be welcome.”

“Aha!” he shouted. “You’re trying to fix me up! I knew it!”

Nothing they could say would convince him otherwise. “Don’t expect me! I’m not coming!” he stormed. And he saw them out of the house with cool disapproval.

They didn’t hear from Dr. A. for twenty-five years. Then one day, in 1972, the telephone in José’s laboratory at the V.A. Hospital rang.

“Radioisotope Research,” Jose answered.

“I need heavy metals,” a voice commanded. “Send me water-soluble chemicals: strontium, germanium, gallium, lanthanum, silver, and yes, also copper!”

“ Who is this?” José demanded.

“Dr. A., of course. My garden needs some heavy metals, preferably the chloride or sulfate salts, so I can get different colors in my flowers. Make sure they are water-soluble!”

“Where did you get my number?” José asked, amazed.

“Never mind that!” came the reply. “Just send me heavy metals!”

José and Josy never heard from him again. They read in the newspaper, years later, that he had died in the 1980’s at the age of ninety-three.