

## THE EVENTS THAT SURROUNDED JOSY'S LEARNING TO DRIVE

Josy had gone to college with Wilma Korn (later to marry and become Wilma Barron). She knew Wilma casually from a couple of English courses that they both had taken at the same time. Later, during the first half of their fifth year at Penn, both of them also did their Practice Teaching together at Upper Darby Junior High. (Wilma worked under the direction of Master-teacher Portia Mollard in History, Josy under Ruth Wiker there in English). Wilma chose to accelerate and graduated from Penn with her B.S. in Education in 1945, Josy in 1946.

One day in 1949, when Josy was teaching in West Philadelphia at the Holmes Junior High School, she bumped into Wilma at the corner of Market and Fifty-sixth Street at the El train stop. They chatted for a few minutes, and Wilma mentioned that she had just gotten married and was now living in Overbrook Park. This was the first that Josy had ever heard of Overbrook Park. But a year later, when she and José were ready to move from their apartment at Eighth and Columbia and look for a house of their own, she recalled her conversation with Wilma. It was in Overbrook Park, therefore, that she and José began to search. They soon found the house that they would buy and live in until 1957. Although they put a down payment on the house (located at 1334 North Seventy-sixth Street) in September of 1950, they did not get to move in until April of the following year. (The owners – the Pavoni Family – were also, in turn, waiting for the building of their own new house to be completed, and a shortage of the construction material rock lath was holding them up as well.) José and Josy sat amid boxes and crates all packed in their apartment and ready to move, for nine months until they were finally able to move. With the help of an attorney (Harry Kozart) they made settlement at the McClatchy Company in Upper Darby. Mr. Kozart, for an attorney's fee of twenty-five dollars, helped them skirt the efforts of real estate people to charge for finding the mortgage which they already had, to ask double payment for the same item in the lease, etc. In April of 1951 José and Josy finally moved into their house in Overbrook Park.

Shortly afterwards, in mid-May, Josy was riding home from school on the bus from Sixty-ninth Street one afternoon when she met Wilma again. Two days earlier, Josy had purchased a pair of blue traverse drapes for the front bedroom, and neither she nor José had been able to get them to open or close properly. When she happened to mention this on the bus, Wilma immediately understood. She herself, she told Josy, had run into exactly the same problem when she moved into her own house.

"If you give me your address," Wilma offered, "I'll come over in about an hour and get your drapery rods working." Josy was delighted. True to her word, Wilma appeared at the house that same day, and by supper time the curtain-rods

were in perfect working order. Josy was exceedingly grateful.

A week later, José announced that he wanted to invite a colleague from his laboratory (Minor Judd Coon) and his wife to come for dinner. Josy immediately phoned Wilma and invited the Barrons to also join them. The dinner turned out to be a jolly occasion, everybody got along well and, after that, they continued to see the Barrons regularly for the next couple of years.

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When José had graduated from Penn in May of 1950, his Advisor (Dr. Earnest Carl Wagner) recommended that he go to work for Professor Sam Gurin at the University of Pennsylvania Medical School. Sam interviewed José and, after talking to him and reviewing his credentials, pressed him for more information.

"Tell me," he asked, "Are you lucky?"

"Am I lucky?" José echoed, astonished.

"Yes, are you lucky?" Sam wanted to know.

After considering the question for a moment, José replied, "Yes, I think I **am** rather fortunate. I came out of the war safely. I just got my Ph.D. I'm married, and I think I have a good future ahead of me. Yes, I think I've been pretty lucky all along, in spite of several problems and difficult situations."

"I want somebody who is lucky," Sam declared. "Experience and intelligence are one thing. But being lucky, now, that's something else.

"Being able to choose intuitively, to make the winning decision," he continued, "That's what's important! I want somebody who can do that, somebody who is lucky. Are you lucky?" he asked again.

"Yes, I think so," José repeated, still a bit perplexed. "Yes, I think I am."

"Then you have the job!" Sam replied decisively. "Just make sure you keep on being lucky!"

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José had a technician named Irma Zack. At that time, television was a new diversion, and a program entitled "My Friend Irma" (about a lovable but zany, utterly scatterbrained secretary) was extremely popular. José's technician Irma fit the bill to perfection. Married to a dental student, Irma came to work each day destined to fall into the most preposterous situations, and every day proved to be almost an adventure in second-guessing and sidestepping the predicaments and entanglements that she became involved in.

One afternoon in late October, José, busy with preparing for a new experiment, asked Irma to set up a group of the chemicals for him while he

continued to make last-minute arrangement at his desk. Confidently filling a beaker with alcohol, Irma placed the open container on top of a Bunsen burner and lit the flame underneath. In seconds, the whole set-up exploded, setting Irma and her clothing on fire.

"Don't worry," she called out distractedly to José while attempting to brush the ever-increasing flames from her clothes, "Don't worry! I've got it all taken care of!"

José sprang up, grabbed Irma and at the same time pulled the chain for the overhead emergency shower. Although it took only a fraction of a second for the water to come pouring down on them and extinguish the flames, most of Irma's clothing was already destroyed (even the metal stays of her girdle had melted). José's arms were burned quite badly. They rushed him to the emergency room at the University of Pennsylvania Hospital, where it was determined that he had suffered second-degree burns over both arms. The crooks of his elbows, especially, were severely affected. The physicians wrapped both of his arms in dripping Vaseline bandages, to which they attached wires held at an angle away from his body to prevent the upper and lower parts of his arms from rubbing together.

Then, one of his colleagues, Walter Shaw, volunteered to drive José and his car home. Realizing that Josy was five months pregnant at the time (with their first child, Malva), and wanting not to shock her with a sudden appearance at home looking the way he did, José phoned her so that he could forewarn her of his prospective arrival.

"Hello! Everything's fine!" he announced as soon as she picked up the phone.

"What happened?" she responded, immediately understanding that something must be wrong.

José briefly explained the situation, warning her not to be shocked at the sight that would greet her when he arrived at the house shortly. Indeed, when she saw him, Josy was glad that she had been forewarned. Walking in came Walter Shaw, leading a disoriented José who staggered along with arms extended into the air, huge white bandages dripping fluid, walking along as if in a trance.

"You have to drive Walter back to Sixty-ninth Street!" was the first thing that José said. "Walter was so nice to drive me home. Now you have to drive him back to the Sixty-ninth Street Terminal so he can catch the El back."

"But I can't drive!" Josy protested. "How will I get back here after I drop him off? You know I've never driven by myself in a car before!"

"You have your driver's license," José insisted. "It's not right, letting Walter wait for a bus after he was nice enough to bring me and our car home. You have to drive him. I certainly can't drive in this condition!"

Embarrassed and confused, Josy got José settled on the couch. Reluctantly

she agreed. Several months earlier, she had finally gotten her driver's license, but had refused to be in a car by herself ever since. Originally, she had resisted even learning to drive. Her family had never owned a car, and she couldn't picture herself behind the wheel and in control of a moving vehicle. They had bought their own first car (always to be referred to as "Betsy the First") early in 1951, several months after José's graduation as a Ph.D., and when they were assured that he had a job and that they would move into a house in a neighborhood with little public transportation available. The car was a beautiful, shiny, new dark green Plymouth. They had purchased it for \$1800, the going price in those days.

José had quickly applied to take his driving test. In the army in Burma a few years earlier, although he had never driven before, he had been forced, in an emergency situation, into taking the wheel of a four-gear truck as part of a convoy. He had had the presence of mind to hit the reverse gear in order to stop when the brakes suddenly failed to operate. Now, armed with this experience and a couple of driving lessons from friends, he presented himself at Belmont Barracks in Fairmount Park to take the driver's test. He did well until the part where he was asked by the instructor to weave the car in and out of a series of strategically planted posts. There, at the end of the turn, the road suddenly swerved uphill, and the car stalled. The instructor failed him, and he had to return a couple days later to take the test again, at which time he passed and got his license.

Josy, however, had refused to have any part in these proceedings. "You'll be the driver in the family," she insisted. Finally, one day, José presented her with a newspaper clipping. It related how a man had been killed when his wife, seated inside their car, had not known how to step on the brake as the vehicle slid down their driveway because she knew nothing about driving.

"Is this what you want to have happen to us?" José demanded. Reluctantly, Josy agreed to learn to drive. José took her out in the car for a lesson or two, but it was an uncomfortable situation for them both. Then one day, after picking up her cousins Krysia and Adek, he drove the four of them out to Valley Forge Park. There, on a lonely country road, he got out of the car and insisted that Josy take the wheel.

"I don't want to right now!" she balked. "I don't feel ready."

José remained firm. "You have to start sometime," he insisted. "Now is as good a time as any." He walked around to the passenger's side, demanded that she move into the driver's seat and start the car. Reluctantly, she switched places with him and started the engine, while Krysia and Adek sat, motionless and wordless in the back seat. Slowly the car began to move. Going at about five miles an hour, they began to roll down the road.

"How am I doing?" Josy asked, glancing at Jose beside her.

"Keep your eyes on the road," he snapped.

Finding her courage, she began to pick up a bit of speed.

"Watch the road!" José commanded. "Now give it the gas!"

Suddenly noticing a sharp turn in the road, he cautioned, "Slow down! Step on the brake!"

Instead, Josy stepped on the clutch.

"Step on the brake!" José shouted again.

"I am! I am!" Josy exclaimed, not realizing that her foot was on the wrong pedal.

The car slammed into a white picket fence, where it abruptly shuddered to a stop. José, for the first time that Josy could remember, turned entirely speechless. Their brand-new car, no more than a few weeks old (and the first one that they had ever owned) now sported dented fenders and a bent front grill.

At that moment, a farmer's boy of about thirteen appeared, running out from behind the picket fence carrying a small suitcase.

"Anybody need help?" he called out brightly. "I have a first-aid kit here! Can I help anybody!"

Once the confusion had subsided a bit, and after Adek had tried to calm José down by reminding him that, after all, it had been he who had insisted that Josy take the wheel, and that she had not wanted to drive in the first place, and after José had eventually found his voice, he made an announcement. "Let's save our marriage," he stated. "Josy has to take driving lessons. But never again from me! She's got to go to a driving school and learn from a teacher there!"

So Josy enrolled the following week with a driving instructor from Forty-sixth and Walnut Street. She signed up for a battery of six lessons (costing \$25). Every day after teaching at Sayre Jr. High School nearby, she went for a lesson. When the course was over, she felt incompetent, and enrolled again for a second battery of six lessons. Then, twice more she went back, so that she finally took twenty-four lessons in all. The teacher, a no-nonsense elderly gentleman, proved to be very level-headed. He was extremely patient with her. At the end of the last course, he took her to the area of Fifty-first and Market Streets, underneath the elevated train-tracks overhead. Here he taught her to wind the car in and out between the poles that supported the tracks. This, he told her, resembled exactly one of the tasks that she would have to perform at the Belmont Avenue Driving Barracks. There even was a slight incline in the road at the end of the turns here, just as there would be at the Barracks, he explained to her, and he had her practice over and over again now so that she wouldn't stall at the end.

The day after the twenty-fourth lesson, he accompanied Josy to her driving test, where he waited while she went off with a tall, husky police officer who looked exactly like a German storm trooper. This man was huge in size, mean-looking and unsmiling, and exceedingly gruff in manner. After commanding Josy

to get into the driver's seat, he climbed in beside her, patted the police club at his hip, and began bombarding her with questions.

"How fast are you permitted to go in a school zone?" he demanded. "What does a blinking yellow light mean? What do you do when a police officer motions you to go through a red light?", etc., etc. Suddenly, after hearing her answers in silence, he barked at Josy, "Are you Yiddish?" Completely shaken, she quaveringly replied, "If you mean 'Am I Jewish', yes, I am."

"Now drive!" he commanded. At this point, in a state of near shock and in something bordering upon despair, Josy started the car. She went through all the motions mechanically, working entirely by reflexes. She even managed to avoid the unexpected stall at the upgrade after winding in and out between the series of poles. Everything she did, she accomplished mechanically, almost as a robot would have done.

"You pass!" the examiner grunted, getting out of the car without another word. Josy couldn't believe her ears. She had passed her driving test on her first try. Yet, despite all of this, she came home still lacking the confidence to drive in a car by herself. Until that day when José demanded that she drive Walter Shaw to Sixty-ninth Street, Josy had never driven in a car without another driver present in the seat beside her.

Now she and Walter climbed into the green Plymouth. Josy drove, and they headed toward Sixty-ninth Street, where she was to let Walter out so that he could get on the El train. Suddenly, she remembered something.

"Walter," she announced, "I just read an article in **Time Magazine**. It said that the worst traffic intersection in the entire United States is Times Square in New York, but the second worst is Sixty-ninth Street, right here in Philadelphia! I can't possibly let you out of the car here! You can't leave me alone in the car for the first time in my life in such a place! I know what! I'll drive you to Sixty-third Street, and you can catch the El there instead."

"O.K.," Walter agreed.

They continued on, turning onto Market Street. But, as they approached Sixty-third, Josy suddenly exclaimed, "Look, Walter! No left turn permitted here. I'd have to turn left all by myself after you get off! I'll drive you to the next El stop, the one on Sixtieth Street!"

"All right," answered Walter. "But I'm getting off there, no matter what!"

As they approached Sixtieth Street, Josy called out, "Oh look, Walter! Trolley tracks!"

"Good-bye!" shouted Walter, springing out of the car and sprinting for the El steps. For the first time in her life, Josy was suddenly alone as a driver. Gingerly she turned left onto Sixtieth Street. As she drove along the trolley tracks, the car began to stall. This happened over and over again. She struggled to restart the

engine, each time flooding the carburetor and having to wait longer and longer for the car to cool down. A trolley car eventually came up behind her, and the driver, impatient to keep moving, began clanging his horn, shouting repeatedly, "Get a move on, Lady! Why don't you learn to drive? Come on! Get moving!"

Eventually, Josy got herself and the car safely home. By this time, she had suddenly overcome her fear of driving. She marveled at how quickly she was able to cover the same distance in a car as it had taken so much longer on foot. From then on, Josy became enamored with driving. Now, José had all he could do to pry the car away from her and to get to drive it himself.

During the interval between José's accident in the laboratory and Josy's gaining confidence enough to take the wheel by herself, Wilma Barron called to invite José and Josy to the movies. Josy complained that José was incapacitated, and that she herself didn't know how to handle a car. Wilma then suggested that Morris could drive them all, which he graciously did. In the next couple of weeks, he continued to chauffeur them on several errands until José's arms healed and he was able to drive again. On that particular occasion, they all went to see a film called "Five." It was about a nuclear holocaust that would take place in the far-future, in the year 1965, when only five people would survive one earth. Somehow, that film will always remain embedded in Josy's memory as associated with her learning to drive!

Meanwhile, during the week or two after José's accident at the laboratory, Sam Gurin came by every morning in his own car, driving José in to work and then back home again at the end of each afternoon. Sam refused to permit José to miss a single day of work. He insisted that, if José were indeed going to prove himself to be lucky, the least he could possibly do would be to appear at the laboratory consistently, day after day, so that he could prove to Sam without the slightest doubt what a lucky person he really was.