

MY FIRST BROTHER-IN-LAW

Marriage is more than the joining of two people. It is the joining of two families. When I married Sylvia Feig in December 1951, I became a part of her family, as Sylvia became a part of mine. I don't know who got the better part of the deal. I did not have any siblings; Sylvia did. Her older sister Hilda was married to Louis Pastor, and they had two small children. What follows is a short memoir about two events involving my brother-in-law, Lou.

Lou was a nice enough guy, but he never had much luck. His outstanding feature was that he looked like John Garfield, the actor. He was bright, but he did not have the opportunity to go to college. He was a hard worker, but he always felt that whatever he was told to, he had a better way of doing it. Lou was convinced he was born to be an entrepreneur. He did not want to work for someone else. He wanted to work for himself.

When I first met Lou, he was working as a used car salesman, but felt he could do better on his own. In the spring of 1952, Sylvia and I, and our friends Sid and Barbara Stern came up with the idea of driving across the country. We would learn how to drive, buy a car, and we would have a fantastic time. We took driving lessons, and practiced driving with the help of friends. With that under our belt, the time had come for us to buy our own car. The obvious person for us to turn to was Lou. He had just gone into business as a used car dealer. He was working for himself.

We called him, and he said he would get right on it. Within a few days, he told us he had just the car: a dark green 1948 Ford. It was a "cream puff," he said. The price was \$750, which sounded OK for the time (1952). He took care of everything, registration, plates, and drove it over, and parked it in front of our house. Sid and Barbara checked it out. We were now the proud owners of a car.

That weekend, I had asked a driver friend to accompany us as we practiced driving on our very own car. Mel Schwartz came over and took one look at the car and frowned. What's the matter? It looked like a repainted cab. He pulled back some of the rubber and there was yellow. Mel explained that his brother used to buy cabs in New Jersey, have them repainted, and sell them at an impressive markup. He suggested we call the New Jersey Motor Vehicle Bureau. We did, and learned that it had been a taxi. Oh, Louis, Louis, Louis.

He was mortified when we informed him. He had gotten it from someone he considered a friend, and had told him that it was for his sister-in-law. In retrospect, our dream of the four of us driving across the country that summer was crazy. We were new drivers, and knew nothing about cars. Maybe it was better this way. Sylvia and I ended up hitchhiking. Lou gave us a Brownie camera as a gift for our trip.

Several years later, Lou had abandoned the used car business, and decided to become a portrait photographer. He bought a wonderful Rolleiflex TLR (twin lens reflex) camera. However, it was difficult making a living as a photographer. He moved on to something

else. When I was in the army, and after Carol was born in 1955, I bought an Argus C-3 35 mm camera, and started taking lots of pictures. First, of Carol, then of Lewis, and then of friends, and of landscapes and of buildings and of almost anything else photographers photographed.

In 1962, soon after Martha was born, Hilda and Lou paid us a visit. After admiring the baby, and the usual chit-chat, Lou called me aside and said he would like to give us a present. He then gave me his Rollei. Wow! It is a great camera, and it is expensive. Initially, I refused to take it, but he insisted. I didn't know how to thank him. He gestured as if to say it was nothing. He wasn't using it any more, and he knew that I had been taking lots of pictures. I was overwhelmed. Then he said to me, "Don't insure it." I thought it was a strange remark. It would never have occurred to me to insure it. He then told me, in a whisper, that he had had it insured, and reported it stolen. At the time, he needed the money. Oh, Louis, Louis, Louis.

I loved that camera. I felt like a pro taking pictures with it. It was certainly the perfect camera for portraits. The following summer, after Lou had given me the camera, we were vacationing on Bantam Lake. I decided not to take the Rollei with me. I had my 35 mm camera, which made more sense on vacation. I took lots of pictures. We were staying through the Labor Day weekend, coming home late Monday afternoon.

When we came to our door of our apartment at 960 Sterling Place, it was clear that something was wrong. Our apartment had been broken into. We had been robbed. The burglars had taken our good silver, and every piece of jewelry that we had, including the watch that my mother had given me. And of course, when I went to the closet in which I kept the Rollei, it was gone. I was heartbroken. But Lou didn't have to worry. I never insured it.

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