Rose Parade 1949

By Jerilyn Stone Lupu

The aroma of coffee permeated the showroom at Uptown Chevrolet on Colorado Boulevard in Pasadena, Calif. It was another New Year's Day and Papa had cleared the shiny new automobiles out of his showroom and had erected bleachers to give the members of his "Uptown family," as he called his employees and their children, choice seats for the Rose Parade.

A truck loaded with packages of powdered-sugar doughnuts and steaming urns of coffee was backed into the area. Outside, people seated at curbside on striped canvas chairs or wooden slat-back chairs shivered under blankets. Inside, it was warm and cozy, as the crowd waited impatiently for the first rose-covered car of dignitaries and the grand marshal to appear. Usually my family was there, but in 1949, when I was 8, we rode on Uptown's float in the parade.

Papa participated in the Rose Parade every year from the mid-1930s through the 1950s. Papa always rode on horseback with the Los Angeles Sheriff's Posse, on his champion Tennessee walking horse, Silver Joy. Silver Joy was Uptown's mascot and "wrote" a column entitled "Horse Sense" for the *Pasadena Independent* newspaper. His picture ran above the column, which began: "Being a horse, I see life a little bit differently from my stall than most people do." Then he went on to report the news from Uptown—the births, marriages, deaths and special events.

Silver Joy's white colts, Thunder and Lightning, carried the buglers heralding the parade.

Toby, Papa's trained Dalmatian, clad in a miniature gold saddle blanket that matched those of the prancing horses, was the posse's mascot. He was

Above: "Going to Sunday School" was Uptown Chevrolet's float in the 1949 Rose Parade. Right: This is Uptown Chevrolet as it appeared during the World War II years. John E. Wilks, owner, is on the right.

Good Old Days on Wheels

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also one of Uptown's 24-hour tow truck service crew. Whenever he heard the night bell ring, he would run and jump into the truck. But on parade day, he marched in rhythm with the silver and black saddled horses, performing tricks at hand signals from Papa.

The 1949 Rose Parade was special because my family and I rode on Papa's Uptown float. We had gone to Hollywood to rent costumes of 1899 vintage from a movie costume supplier. Mother had her hair swept up and wore a large, broad-brimmed hat bedecked with flowers. Her long, flared coat was nipped in at the waist, and the puffy sleeves flowed full to her wrists. My heavily embroidered gray wool coat had a collar as big as a saucer. My sisters and I fastened our high-topped shoes with a buttonhook. Daddy sported a tweed suit, bowler hat and mustache.

The back lot at Uptown was used for body work on damaged cars. Carport garages, where repairmen in striped overalls labored, surrounded a large open area where finished cars were parked, awaiting their owners. This was where the Uptown family, including my parents, two sisters and I, gathered on New Year's Day, among the glue pots and baskets of flowers, to paste the blossoms through the chicken-wire frame covering the wooden skeleton and the automobile underneath.

Though I longed to fasten the bright orange bird-of-paradise plants, we children were allowed to glue only the gold and white chrysanthemums. I carefully brushed the underside of each mum with glue and pressed it through a diamond-shaped opening in the wire.

Papa furnished box lunches for all. When our tummies were full and our bodies warm from the sunshine, we could barely contain our excitement, anticipating our hour of fame along with the beautiful Rose Queen and her princesses.

On parade day we were up before dawn, ready to be outfitted and seated in the fringed surrey of gold and white chrysanthemums, with wheels and a fringed top of ferns and red roses trimmed with blue cornflowers. The beautiful horse of white pompoms was harnessed with brown magnolia leaves. Under his feet extended the roadway of bronze chrysanthemums. The rocks were dusty miller leaves; the sides and apron of the float were purple heather.

My sisters and I, along with a cousin and one of Papa's daughters, occupied the backseat of the carriage. Mother and Daddy sat in the front with two of Papa's toddlers and my sister Janice on their laps.

The parade passed slowly. Bands stopped at intervals and entertained the crowd with drum majors and baton twirlers performing. Monty Montana twirled a lariat. An ice skater performed on a pool of ice surrounded by flowers.

After three hours, Mother and Daddy's laps were soaked, the toddlers were wailing, and we were thirsty and needed a bathroom. At the end, however, we had to remain in our places until the judges had viewed our float.

Many years have passed. Uptown, Papa, Silver Joy and Toby are gone. But I'll never forget watching them entertain audiences in the shadow of Mount Baldy in the warm, fragrant California sunshine. ❖

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