

Joe Gosinski – Mustang Aficionado, Mentor & Friend

By Jessica Mickelson

I was born and bred into the world of classic cars and performance and here's how it all started. It's 1987, I'm seven years old and my Mom, Jeanne, is a single mother selling real estate on Whidbey Island, working full time. Not far from her office was the office of the Whidbey Island Chronicle, where worked a gentleman by the name of David Marin, the publisher of the little local paper. My Mom drove a '58 Ford Fairlane and David, well, he drove a '68 Mercury Montego MX convertible. As I said, this was in 1987 and these cars weren't exactly a dime a dozen. So as you can imagine, it was the crux of David and Jeanne's first encounter.

Long story short, before you know it, I'm sitting on David's lap asking him to marry my Mom. About six weeks later they eloped and were married in a little chapel on Easter Sunday in Brookings, OR. And if one spontaneous life change wasn't enough, they immediately quit their jobs and started on their next journey... publishing a magazine called *CRUZIN'*.

Their passion for classic cars, David's journalism background and my Mom's financial sense, faith and free-spirit were all they needed. I spent the next 11 years of my life at car shows every weekend and from a young age I had a special affinity or Mustangs and hot rodding ran through my blood. In fact, my first car was a little straight six '67 coupe, which I adored.

I left home in 1998 when I graduated high school and enlisted in the US Coast Guard. In the coming years I had two other Mustangs, an '85 Fox Body and a late model '96 coupe, but I always dreamt of having something more... something with a lot of horsepower and a lot of muscle. Finally, in late 2008 when I graduated from Officer Candidate School and received my commission as an officer, I treated myself to my lifelong dream, a '68 Fastback with a 'rebuilt' 351 Windsor. So this is where my story takes a turn, for it is not about how my parents met, or my career in the Coast Guard. Rather, it is about a passion



THE BEGINNING – JOE, RENE AND ME (JESSICA) PULLING THE NOT-SO-REBUILT 351 WINDSOR BACK IN MAY, 2010

for cars, a passion that united my parents back in 1987 and that same passion which led me to cross paths with one of the greatest people I ever knew... his name was Joe Gosinski.

Shortly after I bought the Fastback I was reassigned to Long Beach, CA and had to move once again. In all of my previous assignments I was fortunate enough to move to places where I already had family and friends, but this time, I knew no one within 350 miles. After getting settled in, in April of 2009, I researched Mustang Clubs and found the Beach Cities Mustang Club and decided to go to a club meeting so that I could get back into the hobby. That's when I was introduced to Joe, owner of Chicane Sport Tuning. Some of you may recognize his name from his two appearances on *Overhauled*, mainly his rebuild of the '65 "Rustang". Anyhow, that night at the club meeting, Joe walked over to my car and did a once over on her and within seconds already had a vision of what

she 'would' be. He was a ball of intense energy and I could see how fanatical and knowledgeable he was about Mustangs. He rattled off mechanical, fabrication, fit and finish ideas and how he wanted to get rid of all the garbage and make her look 'clean'. I could immediately tell that Joe was meticulous, methodical, brilliant, a straight-shooter and even charming. Perfect. This was exactly who I wanted working on my car- someone who was vivacious and cared about the details as much as I did, someone who had the same passion and perfectionism I had and best of all, someone who specialized in Mustangs. Joe had been in the industry for 20+ years including working for Saleen for several years before opening up his own shop in 2000. He did everything; design and fabrication, mechanical troubleshooting, entire builds, aftermarket upgrades on late model Super Snakes, Bullitt's, Shelby's, GT 500's and Roush's. Not only did Joe
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(Joe Gosinski — Continued from Page 19)

know what he was doing, he was the best at what he did. Hands down.

A few weeks after the club meeting, I took the Fastback to Chicane to put her up on the lift and see what I had really gotten myself into. By the time I left I felt overwhelmed because there was so much to do, more than my budget could handle. The 'rebuilt' engine was 'not-so-rebuilt' and was barely lugging along and was hanging on by one motor mount. Joe could quickly see my disappointment and assured me that I would eventually have my dream car, we would just tackle one thing at a time. So, for the time being Joe fixed what had to be fixed for her to remain drivable and safe.

In the meantime, Joe knew I was new to town and gave me his number, insisting that I call if I ever needed anything. As I would later learn, Joe meant it, he was so selfless- the kind of guy that genuinely cared about people and would do anything to help someone out. For example, one of my best friends ended up moving nearby and was barely keeping her head above water through nursing school and a taxing divorce. When her car broke down, Joe fixed it, only charging her for the parts and taking the time to teach her how to fix it if it were to happen again. He was also building a silver Fox Body for his friend who was handicapped, retrofitting the car to be drivable solely by hand controls. Another time, the brakes were going out in my daily driver and between a rigorous duty schedule at work and hav-

ing to go out of town, I couldn't find time to bring it up to the shop. Joe told me to leave him a key to my garage and when I came home from my trip, there was my car, back in my garage, new brakes and a receipt on the seat. He was that kind of guy, so thoughtful. So many other people have similar stories about Joe.

Fast forward now, it's May of 2010 and I have spent the past year saving diligently. It's now time to manifest Joe's vision for the Fastback. Well, for the most part anyway. Joe and I both really wanted her to have 427, but remembering that I work for the government, we had to reassess my budget and so we settled on a crate 392 from Ford Racing. The 392 would give me 430 horsepower and we'd do everything new on the front of the car and save the rear-end, suspension and brakes for the next project to give me more time to save up. I told Joe that it was important to me to be a part of this project, I didn't want to just pay him to do it, I wanted to be a part of it, I wanted to learn from him and get my fingernails dirty. Joe was absolutely all for it, he told me



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FITTING THE NEW HEADERS ON THE 392 CI CRATE FORD 430-HORSE RACING ENGINE



JOE PLAYFULLY STICKING HIS TONGUE OUT AS HE PASSES ME THE TIE ROD

to get my coveralls on and get to work... and so it began.

Over the next several months, we installed a new Chicane custom radiator, Hooker headers, a Holley carb, new accessories from Billet Specialties, new clutch and new custom exhaust by Morse Muffler. Joe was an idea genius; he fabricated so many little parts here and there to make everything fit and match just perfectly. We spent many nights turning wrenches together, talking story about life, researching our next pipe dream for the car, whether it be bigger tires, a new driveshaft, brakes, a bigger rear-end, something by Ring Brothers or a new Flaming River power rack and pinion kit. We had so many plans. Over the course of the eight months we spent rebuilding the Fastback, we laughed, we bickered, we poked & prodded, we dreamt and I even shed a few tears when Joe was being ornery and giving me hell from time to time about not doing something right. All in all, we became true, genuine friends. Joe told me how he admired my drive and professionalism and how cool he thought it was to see a real 'chick' as passionate about her car as he was about his. We really held each other in high regard even if we did get irritated with each other every now and then. Joe and I knew we'd be friends forever and our encounters always started and ended with a hug. One time he had done something nice for me and I told him "Joe Gosinski, you've earned your ticket to heaven" and he said, "Jessica Mickelson, that's the nicest thing anyone has ever said to me". I bought him a Dire Straits CD and the next time I saw him I played the song "Ticket to Heaven" for him, he listened to it over and over and just loved it.

The Fastback was just about done, and on December 12th I went to the shop to help Joe with some finishing touches. By the end of the night, around 8pm, we finally took her for her first ride. Joe, being the kind of guy he was, wasn't ready to let me drive her yet, so I sat as a passenger in my car while he sped up and down Del Amo, being careful of course not to overdo it since it was a new engine. We could immediately feel the difference- she was resurrected and back with a vengeance! As the RPM's increased and Joe shifted through each gear we looked at each other



JOE'S TYPICAL GRIN OF SATISFACTION, HE WAS SO HAPPY WITH THE BILLET SPECIALTIES TRU TRAC SERPENTINE SYSTEM THAT WE CHOSE

with cheek to cheek grins of satisfaction. We had made it happen together and in that moment, nothing could have tasted sweeter. That night when I left, Joe gave me a big hug and shortly after I was gone, he sent me a text message asking me if I was happy. I told him I couldn't be happier and that I was so blessed to have found him. That's all that Joe wanted to hear, that he had helped make someone's dream come true.

On Christmas Eve this past year, someone murdered Joe. There is no way to say it lighter. There are no words that can lift the heaviness of my heart or the hearts of many others whose lives were touched by Joe. I go through turbulence each day, from fighting back tears, to counting my blessings and thanking God for having known Joe to extreme anger and a yearning for retribution. There will forever be a hole in my heart for the loss of such a great friend.

Yesterday I had to go to Chicane and bring the Fastback home. It was an absolute nightmare... fingerprint dusting, a dent from Joe's struggle and other unspeakable

reminders of what my dear friend went through in his last hours. I illustrate a story to all of you who are reading this in a hope that someone, somewhere out there, knows something about this senseless crime. If you do, please contact the Torrance, CA police department at 310-618-5719- there is a reward for information leading to the arrest and conviction of whoever took Joe's life.

Joe would want nothing more than to see me cruising down the street in my Fastback, or pulling up to a stoplight and revving my engine against a guy in a rice burner and leaving him in the dust. There were a few times we'd drive side-by-side along the Pacific Coast Highway, me in my Fastback, him in his GT 500 and just look over at each other and smile. He was just as fired up about my car as I was, if not more and she was the last car he built. Joe and I kept throwing around names for her, but never settled on anything, so I have decided that she will be his legacy and her name... Chikane, the 'chick' version of Chicane. Joe would like that.

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