Flash of Genius

I lie back on my bed while listening to Janis Joplin's album Pearl. It contains one of many versions of the song "Me and Bobby Magee" that I've heard over the years. Janis is my favorite. I love how her grating bluesy voice sounds on this song, more than any other song she has recorded. As she sings the lines, "Windshield wipers slapping time, I's holding Bobby's hand in mine and we sang every song that driver knew," I have a mental picture of the hitchhikers riding in the rain and singing. I hear the slap, slap, slap of the wipers. Only they don't do that anymore. It's more like slap, long pause, slap, long pause, slap. Windshield wipers no longer have only two speeds, fast and slow. You can make them stop for a second, may two, or longer, just to give the light mist that used to smear across the window, a chance to build up enough to be easily removed by the wiper blades.

Flash of Genius is not exactly about how our windshield wipers became endowed with the ability to go "slap, very long pause, slap," but it is about the man who in a "flash of genius" figured out how to make them do just that;, something the "Big Three" automakers had been working on for years and failed to do. This man, Bob Kern, installed his new "intermittent wiper control" into his Ford Galaxy 500. Being a Ford man, he took his invention to Ford Motor Company who were ecstatic with the unit and then apparently stole his plans and idea. Suddenly their engineers developed the "intermittent wiper control" in their next year's models. Flash of Genius is really about the fight of one man for recognition for his invention. It is a true David and Goliath story of one lone man against a corporation with vast resources at its disposal. The film chronicles his struggles to prove that he is the inventor of the intermittent wiper control. It becomes not so much about money, but about truth, justice, and honor. I never thought a film about windshield wipers would entertain and inspire, but it did.

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Posted by Keith C. on Aug 30, 2012

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