

The book cover features a close-up, painterly illustration of a young boy's face on the left, looking slightly to the right with a concerned expression. Below his chin is a brown dog's head, also looking right. The background is a dark blue field filled with several baseballs and a silver coin. The coin, located in the bottom right, depicts a figure holding a torch and a shield, with the words 'LIBERTY', 'JUSTICE', and '1776' visible. The title 'Joey Pigza Loses Control' is written in large, orange, stylized letters on the right side of the cover.

JACK GANTOS

**author of *Joey Pigza Swallowed the Key*,
National Book Award Finalist**

Joey pigza Loses Control

1

POTHoles

We were on our way to Dad's house and Mom was driving with both hands clamped tightly around the wheel as if she had me by the neck. I had been snapping my seat belt on and off and driving her nuts by asking a hundred *what if's* about Dad. She'd been hearing them for two weeks already and wasn't answering. But that didn't stop me. What if he's not nice? What if he hates me? What if he's as crazy as you always said he was? What if he drinks and gets nasty? What if I don't like him? What if Grandma tries to put me in the refrigerator again? What if they make Pablo sleep outside? What if they don't eat pizza? What if I want to come home quick, can I hire a helicopter?

"Yes," she said to my last question, not really listening. She was taking the long roller-coaster way to

Pittsburgh, which was up and down about a million mountain backroads, because she was afraid of driving too fast on the turnpike. As she said before we loaded up the borrowed car, "My license is slightly expired and I don't have insurance, so just bear with me."

"How can something be slightly expired?" I asked. "Is that the same as day-old bread? What if we get stopped by the police? What if we are arrested? What if the jails for boys and dogs look like giant bird-cages?" She didn't answer me then, and she wasn't answering my questions now, even though I kept asking. All she did was tighten her grip and lean forward so much her chin was touching the top of the steering wheel. After a while her silence beat my talking like paper covers rock, so I kept my mouth shut even though the list of questions kept sprouting in my brain.

But then Pablo, my Chihuahua, started yapping nonstop. Maybe it was his neck she was thinking of squeezing because he was driving her nuts too. The roads were beat up and I asked her not to hit the holes because Pablo has a weak stomach and gets carsick easily, but she didn't even try to steer around the bumps and holes. Her elbows were shaking and her jaw was so tight her front teeth were denting her lower lip. I knew she was stressed-out with the

thought of seeing Dad, but right now I was more concerned about Pablo.

"Go around the holes!" I kept shouting as I rubbed Pablo's swollen belly with the very tippity tips of my fingertips. He was lying on his back with his four feet up in the air like he was already dead, except his eyes were twitching.

"When you're driving you can't exactly zigzag down the road!" she hollered back. "We could lose control and flip over."

"Well, Pablo's stomach is about to flip," I said, warning her.

"Then hold your hand over his snout," she suggested, and squeezed the steering wheel a little tighter as the car stumbled along.

"Then he'll get carsick through his ears," I replied. "Or worse, it will back up and shoot out his you-know-where."

She glanced over at me and glared. "You better keep his you-know-where aimed out the window," she ordered. "I don't want any nasty accidents."

Just then we hit a deep hole and I lifted up off my seat. I saw another one coming and I took my hand from Pablo's fizzing snout and reached for the steering wheel and Mom slapped my hand away just as the tire hit the hole hard and I bounced sideways and cracked my head on the half-open window and Pablo

**"He was wired. No doubt about it....
Now I know what Mom meant when
she said he was like me, only bigger."**

Joeey Pigza really wants his six-week visit with his dad to count, to show him he's not as wired as he used to be, to show his dad how much he loves him. But Carter Pigza's not an easy guy to love. He's eager to make it up to Joey for past wrongs and to show him how to be a winner, to take control of his life. With his coaching, Joey's even learned how to pitch a baseball, and he's good at it. The trouble is, Joey's dad thinks taking control means giving up the things that keep Joey safe. And if he wants to please his dad, he's going to have to play by his rules, even when the rules don't make sense.

"Hilarious, harrowing, and ultimately heartening."

—*School Library Journal* (starred review)

"A truly memorable read."

—*ALA Booklist* (starred review)

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**A Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books
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