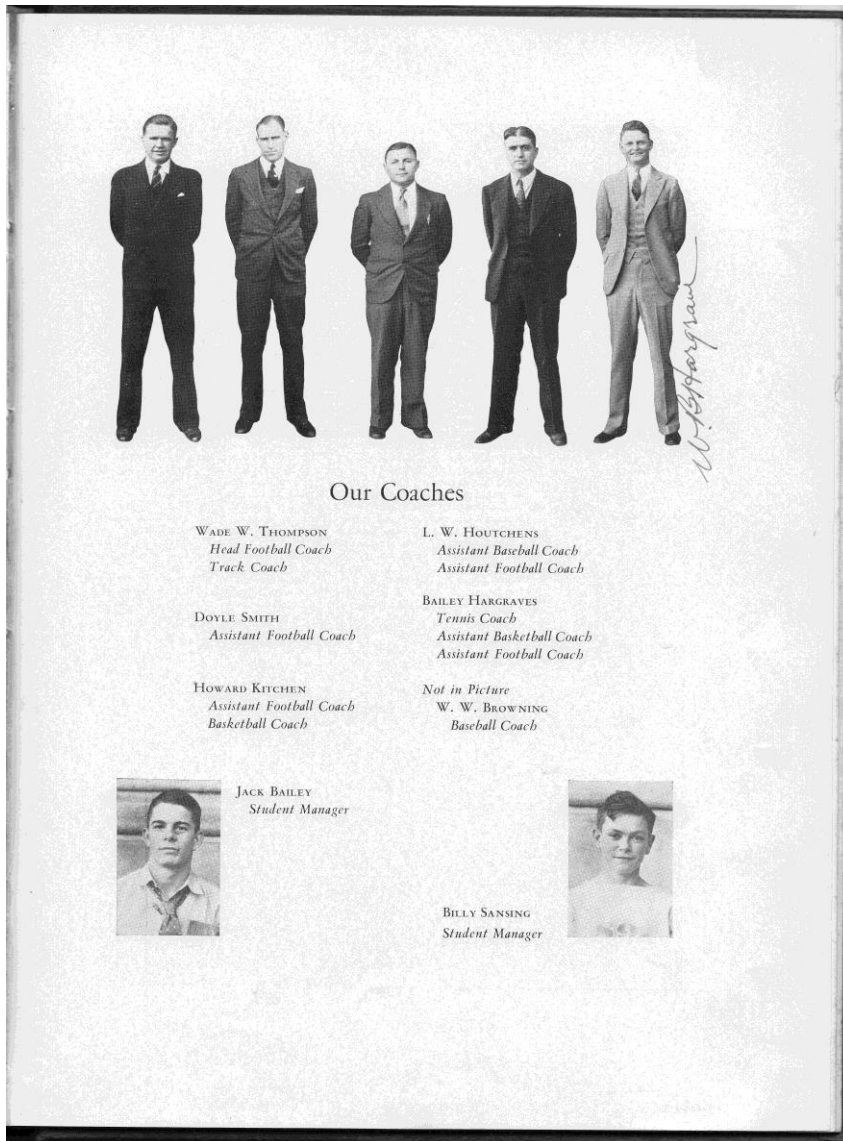


2-10-93

First Love

Mister Hargraves. If he had a first name, and I'm sure he did, I was too awed by his presence to wonder about it. I was twelve, a freshman at Woodrow Wilson High School in Dallas. Not knowing any teachers at the school, I had ended up in Mr. Hargraves' General Science 1 and his Algebra I classes. He was young, tall, blond, and handsome!

His science class was fun and informative. We learned an assortment of facts from biology, chemistry, and physics. Mr. Hargraves dissected a pig's eye for his ecstatic or repelled students, depending on each person's feelings about dissection. I was one of the ecstatic ones. Join his skillful dissection of the fascinating parts of an eye with his physical stature and his youthful enthusiasm for his subject and you have the perfect formula for a twelve-year-old's infatuation.



Then, algebra turned out to be a class I would have gloried in even without Mr. Hargraves' tutelage. With him, it was the absolute highlight of the day. On most days there were three or four minutes at the end of the class which he used for what he called "Mental Arithmetic." He rapidly called out various numbers and functions, working in algebraic functions when possible. Suddenly he would point to a member of the class, who was supposed to give the answer. Sometimes he would get mixed up, or perhaps he saw that most of the class was bewildered, and he would call for multiplying by zero in order to get everyone back on course. But mostly, the Mental Arithmetic was excellent training in quick thinking and in reinforcing newly acquired algebraic knowledge. I doted on the stimulus of the exercise and on the teacher, gradually becoming starry eyed at the very thought of Mr. Hargraves. He had an easy, relaxed manner as he stood at the blackboard, wandered about the class, or called on individuals to work at the board or to answer questions.

I had started high school in January. When the spring semester ended, I had the entire summer to idealize Mr. Hargraves and to look forward to more classes with him. I cherished each remembered incident of the two classes I'd had with him. But it was a gloating that I never then or later shared with anyone. Mr. Hargraves was my dream. To have shared him would have been to diminish some of his charm.

On registration day the coming fall, we cleared our desired subjects with our homeroom teachers and checked the printed schedule of classes with names of teachers and room numbers. Then, at the signal of a bell, we "ran" for the classes we most wanted. I say "ran" in quotation marks because we were not allowed to actually run in the corridors. The corridors were spacious, but there were many students. Running could have produced more pandemonium than the faculty could deal with. So, we walked *very* fast, clutching the papers for registration with outthrust elbows to insure the maximum space for our progress toward the desired class. I got my first class – English - with Miss Baker, who was a character deserving a complete sketch, but this sketch belongs to Mr. Hargraves. Each period on registration day was ten minutes long, with a three-minute passing allowance from one period to the next.

Second period was the one I had reserved for Algebra 2, in room 234, with Mr. Hargraves. 234 was a long way from Miss Baker's 315, but I arrived at the door of 234 to find myself fifth in line. I was safe for entrance into that highly coveted class. In ten minutes, there wasn't time for reunion or social comments, an amenity I was far too shy to attempt, but I was thrilled that he remembered my name and welcomed me into his algebra class. I was equally successful in entering his General Science 2 class at the fifth period.

The rest of the day went well in that I was successful in getting into my desired Spanish and World History classes, all with unknown teachers. It was a great day because I was going to have Mr. Hargraves for a whole semester in my two favorite classes. Actually, I enjoyed all my classes and liked all of my teachers, continuing with all of them as long as I could.

The next semester I was able to have Mr. Hargraves for Algebra 3 but had to have someone else for Biology. His class was every bit as fascinating as the previous ones had been. I fantasized post-high school activities that would involve the two of us socially. I calculated that he couldn't be much more than ten years older than I although I was probably overly optimistic. But ten years was a difference I knew wasn't significant. It was the difference in my parents' ages. The fantasy grew to include a romance and even a possible marriage. Unfortunately, in late May my bubble burst when the underground declared that Mr. Hargraves was being married that summer. I conquered my grief sufficiently to be able to continue enjoying algebra, but a great deal of the magic had faded. Two years later, when it was time for me to take Algebra 4, I couldn't imagine having anyone else for the subject, and I concluded my high school mathematics career with Mr. Hargraves and his delightful teaching, nursing my diminished grief at losing him to some unknown and probably unappreciative woman.

Years later, long after I was married to someone else, I saw Mr. Hargraves at a distance at a symphony concert. He was tall and blond if no longer particularly young. But handsome? No. His head was too small for his body, and his chin was decidedly weak. But I could still cherish the memories of magic science and algebra classes.