

11-15-95

Home Art

Back in my full-time Mom/PTA-volunteer days, I fretted about Betty Friedan's dictum that modern woman could not be fulfilled merely by volunteer work, no matter how meaningful. I found a number of home-based activities that had meaning for me and that kept me plenty busy. Unfortunately, they seldom were in the keep-my-house-immaculate category, but we managed to stay reasonably healthy and happy in the casual home that resulted.

One cool, rainy, March day, I was talking on the phone, arranging a program for the next fall for the SMU Woman's Club, and found myself idly doodling. Gradually I realized that the doodle could take the form of a monogram. It developed into a fairly elaborate design as I added to my initials the initials of the rest of the family, Paul, George, and Roland. The design needed considerable refining and, after my phone call ended, I took a fresh sheet of manila paper from the boys' school supply shelf and started afresh on my monogram - actually a cipher by now - using some of the better elements of my doodle and enlarging the letters into varying and broader forms. Before long I decided the design had some potential. I transferred the lines to a piece of poster board the size of an empty oak frame I had left over from another project. I foraged in the food pantry for beans, grits, mustard and celery seed, and dill weed which I placed on my design to get a feel for contrasting colors and textures. When I was satisfied with the contrasts, I began "painting." First, I saw the M as a unifying element and decided to use the red beans there. They were fairly easy to place with Elmer's glue. The celery seed, mustard seed, and dill weed served to fill in the rest of the letters, most of which were partially obscured by wrapping around, under, and over the M. Finally, I filled in the background with a coating of grits. I then completed my masterpiece by sprinkling cracked black pepper to cover the oak frame.

Our family room on Wild Valley Drive in Dallas was a moderately large, open room with the informal dining area separated from the living area by the projection of a red antique brick fireplace which was elevated about thirty inches off the floor and had three open sides. Above the fire opening was a plain brick wall ascending to the ceiling. The center wall on that fireplace was, I thought, the perfect place to hang my masterpiece. It added just the right touch to the contemporary feel of the room. I was proud of it, family and occasional guests seemed to agree, and we lived happily with my masterpiece until the following fall.

The October meeting of the Dan Rogers PTA Board, of which there were several new members, met in our home. The business of the Board was conducted in the living room, after which we adjourned to the family room for refreshments. Some of the board members, all women and several of whom I barely knew, wandered about the room. Several looked at my cipher picture, making me feel very proud. I joined one small group to explain the letter combinations in the picture - a satisfying occasion until I detected movement in one of the letters. My dill weed was alive! And so were some of the beans! I am sure these were the weevils that are in most all seeds, flour, seasonings, etc., that are

stored for any length of time. If I had thought about them at all, I wouldn't have expected them to stay alive after being glued down for several months! I hurriedly banished the offending picture to the outside and was glad when the Board meeting adjourned soon afterward.

I treated the entire picture with bug spray and tried to replace the missing seeds with new material, but the pleasure of my masterpiece was gone, and I reluctantly consigned it to the garbage can. Remembering that incident has almost inspired me to design another cipher, crafted entirely of inert material.