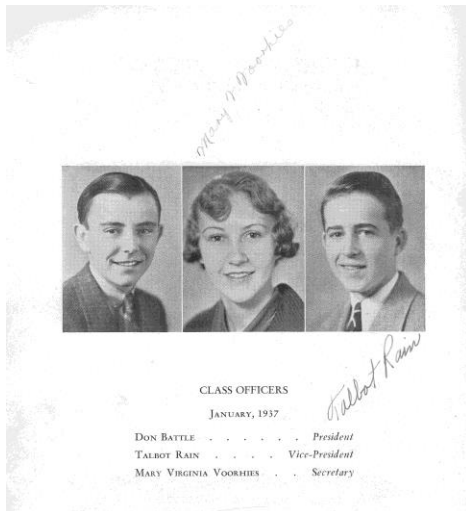


1-20-93

Mary Vee

When anything brings to my mind the grade school/high school times of my life, I find myself thinking of an entire group of friends at that time, a diverse group all of whom had double names and used them - Mary Alice, Mary Catherine, Mary Elizabeth, Mary Virginia, Mary Beth, Mary Ann, Mary Frances, Mary Cecilia, Alice Faye, Jane Clair.... Over a period of six or eight years, an occasional name disappeared and several new names appeared, but they all had in common one thing: double names, although not all were Mary-dominated. The group was only roughly cohesive; no one personality was transcendent. We survived adolescence without any outstanding traumas in spite of, or perhaps because of, the Great Depression, which had begun back in grade school and continued, for some of us, through high school and on into college. We scattered to various colleges or jobs after high school, never again gathering as a group although individual friendships did continue sufficiently for pairs of us who kept up with each other to bring ourselves roughly up-to-date on some of the others. As adults we all were semi-nomadic during the war years, and I do not know of any of the relationships that survive today.

Mary Virginia was the only one of us ever to use a single name. She wanted to be called Virgie, although most of us generally called her Mary Vee. She stands out in my memories not only because our friendship lasted the longest, until well after World War II, but also largely because of where she lived.



Mary Vee had the greatest amount of style in the group. Her pale brown hair was always done a bit differently, swooping across her generous forehead in a diagonal line; her clothes were always distinctive and well suited to her angular body. To tell the truth, the rest of us were quite prosaic in our everyday appearances, indeed even in our most dressed-up times. But Mary Vee always appeared a bit different, a bit more stylish. She made good grades, like most of the group, but she seemed to achieve them with just a bit more panache than any of the rest of us. *And* she lived at the T & P Club, whereas the rest of us lived in ordinary houses in ordinary neighborhoods.

The Texas & Pacific Club was a large, low wooden structure perched on a little hill overlooking the east end of White Rock Lake, then a recreational lake surrounded by suburban development. The lake had once been the water supply of a much smaller Dallas. Mary Vee's father, Mr. Voorhees, was manager/caretaker of the building, a recreational facility for employees of the Texas & Pacific Railroad. He, his wife, and one child, Mary Vee, occupied a comfortable apartment in the building. Except for their apartment, a large kitchen, and some storage rooms, the rest of the building consisted of a huge, plain, multi-windowed, multi-purpose room, surrounded on three sides by a deep, long wrap-around screened porch looking out over the lake. It was well used for large and small gatherings of the Texas and Pacific family of employees. If the building was not scheduled for any official activity, Mary Vee could invite our crowd over for what we called "spending the night." That meant each of us brought quilts for pallets for sleeping and pot-luck food for the three or four meals we would share. We considered ourselves very lucky to have Mary Virginia as a friend who could share her unusual home with us. We could count on several special events two or three times in the winter and almost weekly in the summer, when the Texas weather in those un-air-conditioned times proved too hot for the adults privileged to use the club. As youngsters, we were apparently immune to the summer dog days. Sometimes we would have a long weekend, starting Friday afternoon and continuing through Sunday.



During our long evenings together, we spread out over the porch, giggled some, talked school, teachers, and boys, and had deep "philosophical" discussions, all great innocent fun. During the day, we had several boats we could row about the periphery of the lake, especially on cool mornings, investigating inlets of dense lily pads or catching minnows for the fishing we never seemed to get around to. We could play vigorous games on the generous grounds, sometimes volleyball, croquet, or tennis. More often we simply watched the progression of weather, fun in winter and frequently spectacular in the summer. Out there on that porch on that hill overlooking the lake, the weather was closer, more intimate, than it was at our homes in any of our suburban neighborhoods. I especially remember our sharing the awe of a small summer squall marching across the lake. First, we saw the smooth water across the lake begin to ripple, pocked by a gentle shower, quickly followed by waves growing into miniature whitecaps. Then heavy rain

obscured most of the landscape and the wind became strong enough to send us scurrying from the screened porch into the shelter of the building, where we watched the briefly fierce thunderstorm evolve abruptly into bright sunlight which steamed the quiet water as well as the land. No one said a word, but I, at least, hoped in vain for a return engagement.

I've not been back to that location since I left home many years ago, but I am sure the frame T & P Club building has been replaced by one or more upscale homes overlooking our cherished end of the lake. I've seen a few of the double-named friends to catch up on what they did after high school. In fact, Jane Claire is a friend of my younger sister, along with several other of my high school acquaintances, a luxury those who still live in Dallas enjoy. Mary Vee and I both continued to be semi-nomadic but were able to correspond and visit briefly in Dallas and Washington, D.C., for a number of years, until we finally lost contact. Yet, I still enjoy nostalgic memories of Mary Vee, the other double names, and the good times we all had at the T & P Club.



T.P. Hill (TeePee Hill on a sign), 2014