

Hidden Villa Memories

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Comments for September 29, 2019, History Program "Tales of Moody Road"

Although I was born and grew up in St. Paul, Minnesota, I often dreamed of coming to California where my cousins lived in Los Altos Hills. My chance came when my grandmother retired from the Minnesota Historical Society to Los Altos Hills to be the Hostel Manager at Hidden Villa in 1956. The Duvenecks had established the first Youth Hostel in the West in 1937. On a bicycling trip with their family to Europe, they became impressed with the international friendships which were formed among young people traveling between hostels. Because of the Hidden Villa hostel, young people from around the world have come to Los Altos Hills.

I was fortunate to spend four months at Hidden Villa with my grandmother Ruth Abernethy in 1957. A painting of hers was featured on the first Los Altos Hills Pathways Run tshirt in 2002.



During my sophomore year my high school allowed me to skip my final months of the school year and submit my work from California. During that time, we became acquainted with international travelers who were referred by the State Department to visit the Duvenecks. I observed also that people from throughout the area were enjoying Los Altos Hills as well.

On weekends there were often cars on Moody Road heading for company picnics at Adobe Creek Lodge. Pink Horse Ranch had also been a destination for Bay Area residents from 1951 to 1956 with their pool and picnic facilities. Just past Hidden Villa on Moody was another picnic destination, Martha Minnich's Canyon Road Inn, where you could picnic, and purchase gas, beer and other supplies.

I was fortunate to find two girls my age living on Hidden Villa when I arrived in 1957. Erica Duveneck, was the granddaughter of Frank and Josephine Duveneck, and lived with her parents and two brothers in a house near the white barn. Both girls loved horses and riding. The three of us would each grab a rope and head to the creek area where all the horses lived in the Spring. We would throw a rope around a horse and ride it back to the barn to saddle or to just grab a bridle for a ride around the ranch or up Central Drive. What a glorious spring I spent.

During the summer the Hostel was always used as the headquarters for the Hidden Villa Summer Camp, so my grandmother and I needed to move. . The camp, established in 1945, was the first multi-cultural summer camp in the nation.

The Duvenecks had purchased Hidden Villa in 1924. They gradually added to the acreage to protect the Adobe Creek watershed. They had recently purchased property which now is known as Rhus Ridge Road. The Rhus Ridge Road area was pristine with no construction on it. There was no electricity or other necessities.

The Duvenecks moved two trailers to the top of Rhus Ridge Road where my grandmother and I enjoyed the views of the Bay Area on this quiet and lovely spot. My grandmother lived in one trailer, I in a tent, and the other trailer was a guest room. Naturally I wanted to return to this beautiful area and got the chance two years later when I was accepted at Stanford University.

With my grandmother Ruth Abernethy continuing as Hostel Manager during the school year, I was fortunate to have Hidden Villa to visit on weekends. I loved fetching the milk set aside for us in the milk house.

I often would walk to “The Big House” to pick up the mail. During that era, sending a letter to Hidden Villa Ranch, Los Altos, meant it landed in a large box in the post office. Mr Duveneck went to the post office every day to gather the mail and bring it home in his white postal bag to divide into the cubby hole post box in his entrance hall. Ranch residents came in and out of “The Big House” every day. Opposite the post box was a large painting of Bellosguardo, the residence in Florence, Italy, where Frank Duveneck was born. Frank Duveneck’s father was an accomplished painter. Paintings of both Frank’s parents decorated the walls.

After graduating from Stanford in 1963, I began working for the County Welfare Department. By then my grandmother had left the Hostel Manager position, but retained a small trailer on the ranch up past the pig pens. I persuaded her and the Duvenecks that I should live there while working in San Jose. This was another idyllic situation, near Bunny Creek, and surrounded by the forest. During the rainy season, Mrs. Duveneck asked whether I would like to live in “The Big House” in a bedroom on the ground floor. I loved that as well, being part of the dinner parties and afternoon tea parties where new neighbors or visitors were invited to meet with old-timers.

During the 1960s and the ensuing years, I was aware of all the social justice issues the Duvenecks championed. Often Mrs. Duveneck would invite neighbors and friends for a program in her large living room. It was a chance to meet the speaker and become informed about issues such as poverty, racism, education, citizenship, civic rights, Native American issues, and the environment. The Duvenecks knew how to organize to bring change to areas in need.

Mrs Duveneck was a member of Friends Meeting in Palo Alto. When I attended meeting with her on Sunday we arrived early so that she could play hymns on the piano. She provided that hymn singing experience for those who wished to sing along. Another member of the Friends

Meeting was Rosemary Goodenough who founded Friends Outside, an organization helping the families of those in the county jail. The Duvenecks welcomed her to live in the little cottage near the gate, known as the Kremlin. Years later when the organization was financially stable, she moved back to her home. The cottage was called "The Kremlin" because the first resident was a refugee from Russia, Theodore Ofereiff.

During the period that I lived in "The Kremlin" I continued to work for the County Welfare Department and had clients who were farmworkers. One evening after I arrived home from work, I received a phone call from Mrs. Duveneck. Cesar Chavez and a group of farmworkers were coming to dinner. Did I want to join them? I was impressed to be among these workers. After dinner, we set up the chairs in the living room in a circle and they began to plan for the first farmworker strike. Not having a good command of Spanish, I could not follow the discussion. But I was in awe of the community working together to plan an action that they would all be supportive of. I assume some of this talent came from working with the Duvenecks' consensus building style.

In Josephine's autobiography she describes becoming aware of justice issues for local farmworkers. She urged the Community Services Organization in Chicago to send an organizer to help California farmworkers. They did send a talented veteran organizer Fred Ross, who lived in "The Big House" while working with local farmworkers. He was instrumental in training Cesar Chavez to be an effective leader.

When John and I got married in 1969, Dan Dana, the Duvenecks' son-in-law, enlarged the bedroom of "The Kremlin" so we could bring in a double bed. John and I loved living on the ranch with all the young people playing volleyball on weekends, cleaning the old pool each spring, and participating in larger Hidden Villa activities. Our first child was born in 1971 while we lived here and we were fortunate to find our current home just 1/4 mile up Moody from Hidden Villa.

We were happy that we were living close enough to continue to participate in many Hidden Villa activities. Each year the Friends Meeting in Palo Alto organized a huge Harvest Festival. There was a rummage sale, taco sales, sales of Hidden Villa hot corn and more. My husband always enjoyed participating in a walk led by Frank Duveneck around the lawn to see the many unusual trees he had planted. On Bastille Day the neighbors gathered each year for a big neighborhood party. John and I attended several weddings and other celebrations on the Duveneck lawn.

Mr. Duveneck was a member of the Pacific Horticulture Society and each month Mr. Duveneck, two others who lived on the ranch, and my husband would drive to Redwood City for their meetings.

The third Friday of the month we met in the Duveneck living room for folk dancing led by Edith Thompson and Liz Dana. It was at one of these delightful gatherings in 1978 that we met Miles Horton, founder of the Highlander Folk School where Rosa Parks of the Montgomery Bus Boycott had participated. The next morning we were devastated to hear that Josephine

Duveneck had died that evening. A cloud hung over Hidden Villa for me. I couldn't bear to even look toward the gate. But eventually our love for Hidden Villa and Frank Duveneck led to many more years of beautiful memories.

In 1960 Mary Davey had helped the Duvenecks incorporate The Trust for Hidden Villa and create a board of directors to manage the many activities, summer camp, environmental education program, youth hostel, and facility rentals. At that time an organization called Friends of Hidden Villa was established. It comprised volunteers who assisted in the many activities and annual events. I was asked to chair the organization in 1981-'83. During that period I was a member of the board of trustees and was impressed with the community members willing to donate their legal, financial, and organizational skills to ensuring that Hidden Villa continue to be a treasure and resource for the Bay Area.

Today my husband and I continue to enjoy walking the trails and enjoying the farm and remembering the many inspiring and pleasant days we have spent at Hidden Villa. I have a special old red chair perched on a hillside of our property where I can see the mountains of Hidden Villa. It is my sanctuary. "I lift up my eyes onto the hills" and am grateful for the inspiring lives of Frank and Josephine Duveneck.

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