

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, February 20, 2012

The Cold February of 1934: (Part of this story was told in the *Weekly News* of February 5, 2007). The coldest day of the 20th century in Yorklyn was February 9, 1934, when the big thermometer on the front porch at Auburn Heights registered 18 degrees below zero. In fact, it was one of the coldest winters in memory. That was the winter one of my maternal cousins, Mary Comly Shallcross, then a student at Beacom College at 10th and Jefferson Streets in Wilmington, lived with us, going home to her family's farm near Odessa only on weekends. "Comie," as she liked to be called, celebrated her 19th birthday with us on February 4. It was also the winter that the back of Auburn Heights was torn up in the building of our new kitchen and a recreation room below. The stone wall had been cut away to make the opening where the pantry gives way to the present kitchen, and in the evening we could walk carefully through this opening to inspect construction progress. Since the old kitchen door had been closed off, we had to use the "side door" to enter and exit the old kitchen, still in use.

Unlike early Christmases, I remember very few of my birthdays. I was told by my mother that my father had taken her in a snowstorm (obviously in one of his Packards) to Mrs. Turk's Hospital on West 18th Street near Monroe in Wilmington where I was born on February 20, 1924. The only logical conclusion to this short paragraph is, "Who cares?" or "So what?"

Back to 1934, Comie and I, along with my paternal cousin Eleanor Marshall, were taken to school in Wilmington as usual on February 20. About 10 A.M., it started to snow steadily, and in early afternoon, Clifford ("Cliffey") Murray had put on "the chains" and was dispatched to gather us up and bring us home. Today, it's hard to realize how big storms or blizzards could cripple transportation for several days. For one thing, we had no idea these storms were coming. For another, there was no equipment on hand to clear the roads. Cliffey made it to the old Friends School at 4th and West Streets and then picked up Comie at 10th and Jefferson, and we headed out Kennett Pike. Moving along slowly but steadily, there was no way he could turn onto the present Route 82 or onto Old Kennett Road, so he continued on to "the head of the Pike" at Hamorton and on into Kennett Square. Carefully, he made it down Creek Road to Clifton Mill and on to the gateposts at Auburn Heights. Comie and I ran up the lane to the front porch in snow up to our knees. Somehow, Cliffey must have gotten Eleanor home or at least to the foot of "Gun Club Hill" at the railroad. He then began the long task of digging out our driveway by hand, but he was used to that.

The one birthday present I remember was a spring-loaded pistol set that shot harmless darts. Instead of sharp points on the darts, there were rubber vacuum cups, so the operator could shoot at a wall or a target and simply pull the dart away without harm to anything. My greatest enjoyment with this set was shooting at ping pong balls on the floor of a room with sparse furniture, somehow trying to beat an opponent who was doing the same thing. The little pistols were surprisingly accurate.