Dr. Oglesby: Okay, it is December the thirty first; that's New Years Eve, 2011. And I'm in the home of Virginia Lancaster – did I say that correctly, Lancaster?

Virginia Shields: Uh huh.

O: Lancaster/Shields. In Athens, Georgia, and we're going to get started talking about Virginia's life. So let me let Virginia say her name, because she's from Virginia, and they are very – they want their names properly pronounced and enunciated. So I'm going to ask Virginia to say her name. If you would.

VS: I'm Virginia Lancaster-Shields.

O: Okay, and I've asked Virginia as I do everybody, what is her first conscious memory.

VS: I have two first memories. The one, I think I was lying on the bed for an afternoon nap, I think. And I woke up and the screen door became something else. And I was seeing pictures in that screen door. And I don't know what they were of, so I must've been very small. And the other one I remember being down on what we called the rocky lane, and I was crossing the creek, I saw a log. And somehow I knew about alligators, and I was sure that log was an alligator. And those were the two first memories that I have.

O: Okay. So you don't recall how old you were, but they were both very young.

VS: I must've been about three for the alligator. And I think I was less than – I think I must've been maybe less than two when I remember waking up and not knowing what the screen door was and seeing shadows and pictures in it.

O: Yeah, okay. Those are early memories – from the early –

VS: Yes. The earliest I can remember.

O: Okay. Could you describe yourself as a child? Either what you remember of yourself or – you can describe yourself the way you recall and then you can describe what you think – how you were sort of characterized as a child.

VS: I was the quiet child. One of my aunts told me that she never heard me speak until I was eleven. I am sure that's not true, but I was outnumbered. I was one of ten children. And I was very quiet, but I listened to everything. Sometimes they called me 'Watchgoose'. But –

O: They called you 'Watchgoose'?

VS: 'Watchgoose'.

O: 'Watchgoose', okay.

VS: But anyway, I remember loving the out-of-doors. And I still do, I stay out-of-doors as much as I

can. And I remember the creek and the spring. I loved the spring. And it was about – oh it was down a long hill, underneath a huge cucumber tree. And that's where we got our water when I was a child. But a big tree had fallen over, and there were wildflowers growing up on the root of that big tree that had been there for a long, long time. So it was a beautiful place to be, and watercrust grew in the stream, and eventually the spring which we used for water, would run into a beautiful creek that rippled over rocks. It was a beautiful place to be, and I spent a lot of time there.

O: Now is this – was your home in Floyd, Virginia?

VS: This was the home in Floyd, Virginia. It's been in the family for eight generations.

O: Oh my. Wow.

VS: And we have the old log cabins that were built about 1798, that my ancestors lived in. And I had them roofed last year to be sure to protect them.

O: Wow. And are they still used today?

VS: Oh yes. Nobody – we don't rent the place, we just open it up in the Summer. So nobody lives in those old log cabins, we call them. They were little houses, log houses, that had been – had side (?) where they had never been painted. So they were dark gray color. And there was a huge cellar dug underneath one, and that's where we kept all the apples and canned food, Mama's canned food, below frost level. So it had a big door with hinges, I remember. It was hard to open and close. And there were bins built for all the turnips and apples and everything to be stored there.

O: So how much acreage was on that farm? Lets say the farm your father inherited, how big was it?

VS: We had two farms; Papa had two farms. One was about eighty four acres--in the mountains; that's fairly big. Forty is on top of the mountains, so it's hill country, but it's up about 3300 feet above sea level.

O: So can you tell us where in the state of Virginia Floyd is? Can you tell us in proximity say –

VS: Yes, Floyd is in the southwest part. Virginia comes to a little corner, and we're in the southwest Virginia. It's about forty miles from Roanoke, it's about thirty miles from VPI Blacksburg. And it was built long before any of those existed; people settled there very early.

O: Okay, so you were quiet but inquisitive child and you absorbed things?

VS: Yes, Yes I absorbed the out-of-doors mostly, I think. I knew everything about the out-of-doors.

O: You always, it sounds like have been a nature lover? You've always loved nature and the natural environment?

VS: Oh, just yes.

O: Now can you describe your parents, your father and your mother?

VS: Yes. I can barely remember Papa. Papa was a very tall man, and very thin with almost black hair

that had turned gray by the time I knew him. And he was a musician; we said that he played the fiddle and my sister [who] studied music in New York played the violin. With the same instrument. But he was a great musician, had a great voice. And I used to ask him when I was a child to play me a tungent(?). And he would play for me. And the whole family – we were all musical, and I could remember as a child waking up and down stairs, in what we called the parlor, there would be at least five or six adults, some cousins. All singing and playing instruments. So I grew up just listening to music passionately from the time I was a child.

O: How about your mother, was she also –

VS: My mother was not musical. She couldn't carry a tune, but she loved music. But we would hear her early in the morning singing while she got breakfast. The song she sang was “Neath ???? of the barrel came a whisper soft and low.” And we would say 'oh it’s time to get up, Mama's rattling in the kitchen' (laughs).

O: So, you've described your father as a musician, but he made his livelihood as a farmer right?

VS: Yes. Yes.

O: Alright, just to have for the recording. Okay, and so can you say a little more about your mother? She wasn't musically talented.

VS: She wasn't musically talented, but she had the greatest talent for people in the world. Everybody adored my mother. She – on Sunday, we had cousins, because we were early settlers there. And one of my ancestors had given his daughters each a farm. So it’s a wonder we didn't commit incest (laughs). Because everybody was a cousin, we were loaned all the land around – the farms around. And uh –

O: Was there a lot of – We might think of it today as a stigma, but for many many years marrying cousins was not only not a stigma it was a common practice.

VS: Oh it was. We did not marry any cousins, but my mother's sister married her first cousin. And I grew up with those children; she had mostly boys.

O: Okay. And you've already told me your father farmed –

VS: And Mama was a tall woman, big boned woman with long, auburn hair that I loved to brush at night. And in the daytime she just wrapped it around and put it in a big thing on top of her head. But she was very energetic and when my father died, I remember she came upstairs into our bedroom and she said, “Children, don't cry, I'm going to take care of you.” And she did; she was the strongest woman.

O: So how did she manage the farm?

VS: We had helpers. We always rented the land out, and they tilled the land and Mama got what was

called a widow's third. In the state of Virginia, if you rented land like that you got a widow's third. And I've seen her up in the grainery, watching the men toll out all the wheat, the corn, whatever they were doing that season to get her widows third and put it in the grainery. We had a wonderful grainery, up on stilts.

O: So she got her dowers –

VS: Yes.

O: Right, so the land stayed in her name, and then she just passed it on to all each of you?

VS: Yes. Well Papa made the will before he died, and he left the land to his ten children; to Mama as long as she lived and then to his ten children. And Mama never changed that will, that's just the way it went. And so each of us owned one share, but when we got old enough to be educated – the older children Papa had educated – he was a strong believer in advanced education. And so all of them had been educated; my five older brothers and sisters – Robert, went to Hampton Sydney, the others – two of em went to teacher's colleges – Radford I remember. And Albert went to VPI, and when Papa died he had to come to take care of Mama. But then the other children were – Mama educated the other children, primarily with the money that Papa's brother left us. And I worked my way through college, I was cashier of the cafeteria.

O: Okay, and you're gonna tell me in a few minutes more about your own personal education.

VS: Oh, I will.

O: Okay.

VS: More about childhood, if you want to.

O: Yes, right. But now you said that your father wanted to go to William and Mary, and his mother talked him out of that.

VS: Yes, and gave him the farm if he would stay.

O: Yeah. Well did you ever know how he felt about that? Obviously he was willing to do it, but –

VS: Oh he never should have been a farmer. He was tall and very thin; he didn't have the temperament to be a farmer, but he did no matter what. We had cows that I can remember him – we had everything in place when Papa was alive. We had a milking gap where all the cows were driven to be milked. And shelves to put the milk on. The spring house; everything – he was very organized, but he never liked farming. He wasn't meant to be a farmer, he was meant to be a teacher. And he did teach, he taught a one room school in the late 1800s. That's how – my mother was his student. He was eight years older than she was. And it was a one room school and they sat on logs, I understand. And he was their teacher for many years. But he knew mathematics, he could help my older brothers and sisters with geometry, with anything. So they were educated in this little cabin in Floyd, and they

rode horseback – Mama and Papa both cause they were neighbors. And they lived during the week at the academy, and then someone would come gather them on horseback and take them back home on Friday.

O: Do you know what year your parents married? Do you remember?

VS: I'm not sure. They married about 1897, I think, because I know they had little Gertrude the first year.

O: Okay. So your mother was roughly about sixteen which was common.

VS: Yeah, she was sixteen when she married.

O: Alright. And did you ever get a sense that she had anything ever in mind other than being the wife and mother and homemaker that she was?

VS: No, I don't think she ever – she never went beyond the academy.

O: Where your father taught.

VS: Where my father – he didn't teach the academy, he taught the one room school. Then they both went into Floyd on horseback. From the farm, into to Floyd to go to the academy. But it must have been a rigorous, rigorous education because he knew an awful lot.

O: Yeah. Okay.

VS: But Mama was a beautiful woman, and very, very healthy. And she loved the out-of-doors too. I always remember her as being in the garden; she was almost always doing something in the garden. We had a garden – we had two gardens, and one of the gardens had a walkway though it and Mama had beautiful flowers on every side of the walkway – both sides. And then potatoes and tomatoes and everything else in the other part of the garden.

O: Did you all work the garden as children?

VS: No, Mama worked it primarily. But after Papa died, we always had a man who lived at the house – a boy, usually a high school student, maybe a junior or senior in high school. A neighbor boy, that we knew, who lived at the farm and did the milking and the heavy work. Then when they left, I became the outdoor person. And I did the milking.

O: So your brothers were away at school?

VS: They were away in school, yes.

O: How about the extended family? Your aunts, uncles, cousins, that kinda thing. Did they live close by?

VS: Oh sometimes we had eighteen or twenty every Sunday. And Mama would cook for them all, and, “oh, welcome, welcome.” They lived in cities; they lived in Roanoke – her sisters did, and they would come with maybe five children for Sunday dinner. And it was just, to me, I'd been a shy child.

Anna and I didn't like it at all; we'd take a book and run up into the woods and stay when all these relatives came. There was much laughter, much sitting on the porch, much peeling of apples (Laughs).

O: Did they sing?

VS: No, that side of the family that didn't sing. It was Papa's side of the family who sang.

O: But it was your mother's side that visited?

VS: My mother's side were the ones who came and visited with lots of children. And she had five sisters, so...

O: Your mother had five sisters and no brothers?

VS: Yes, she had two brothers. She had uncle Sam who had one of the first Packards I'd ever seen. And the other one lived in Roanoke; and I never met uncle Howard. Mama's two brothers. But she loved them all and they loved her.

O: And so she had seven siblings, what about your father? How many did he have?

VS: Papa had just 4. There was Aunt Elma and Aunt Attaway, who married a Dr. who lived next door. And she died in childbirth. And so my grandmother raised that child since they lived next door – Dr. Felman walked across with the baby and just gave it to my grandmother and said she's yours. And so she raised Lena, and Lena was a woman when I was a child – she was that much older than I was. But she was always there.

O: So she was sort of in the capacity of an aunt –

VS: No, she lived in Roanoke and was married. And had two daughters, but they visited often because that's where she'd grown up. And that was Papa's side of the family.

O: Okay. But the large extended family was close it sounds like?

VS: They were. Maybe two miles away Mama's sister lived, and she had children. The oldest child became the head of the Emory University in Atlanta. He was a Dr..

O: What about your father's family? How close by did most of them live?

VS: Aunt Elma, his oldest sister, lived about a mile and a half away in a wonderful, tiny little house with all sorts of interesting out buildings. And she was a marvelous cook. I remember we had spending days. People when they went to visit didn't just stay an hour, they spent the days. So we spent many days, and Mama's grandmother – my great grandmother lived across the road which was a Franklin turnpike. Across the road from my father's oldest sister. So sometimes we'd go and spend the day at her house, and we went in a buggy. We had a double buggy and a single roadster buggy. And the whole family could get in the double buggy. And I can remember as a child riding in that buggy, Papa whipping up the horses, and once when it snowed we had a sleigh that you could hook

horses to. And he took us in the snow for a ride and I was so little that I could sit in the little seat in front of the slay. And the hoses would kick up snow in my face – it was terrible. That's one of my earliest memories too.

O: Now the first four siblings were plenty older than you – like your –

VS: One was 20 years older.

O: Now did you know her?

VS: Oh mercy yes! We all lived – she lived to be 98. And every summer the house was filled, even though they were out in the world. And some of them were free and the house was filled with older siblings.

O: Oh, okay. They come from either school or –

VS: Oh yes, most of them were teachers. But even when they were in college – my two – Marvin and Grace went to Stonewall Jackson college in Abington, Virginia.

O: And Attaway, did she marry?

VS: She never married. She became a nurse. My father's – I told you that uncle Albert educated his older sisters children, and one became a Dr. and one became a lawyer. And Bob – he was Dr. Bob – they always came to the farm too in the summers. And I remember my father – I didn't remember it, because I wasn't born probably. But my father nursed him through diphtheria. Diphtheria was a terrible scourge in that day.

O: His brother? He nursed his brother?

VS: No he nursed his nephew. His older sister's son through diphtheria by putting him in grandmother's old house upstairs so he was isolated from the rest of us. And he had a battle with Scarlet fever.

O: Do you remember the diphtheria your cousin who stayed in –

VS: I may have been told it, I may not remember it. I may have been told it, but I do remember; I know where he was and everything.

O: So he survived it?

VS: He survived it, but in Fredricksburg; I went to Fredricksburg, and just every grave: “Dead of Diphtheria. Dead of Diphtheria.” All the children – under two, up to 10 “died of diphtheria, died of diphtheria.” So it was a great scourge. Do we have a vaccine for diphtheria? I don't know.

O: Well, somehow or another it’s been wiped out. I don't think – you don't hear of it these days. So either there was one developed like polio.

VS: It must've been but I don't remember.

O: Well actually I do recall it being part of an immunization shot. I don't hear about it now, but

obviously back then it was –

VS: Oh it just wiped out families.

O: Can you describe your mother's relationship with her mother? Was it close?

VS: Her mother died very early, and I don't think they were terribly close. We never talked about her mother. We talked about Papa's mother because she lived with Mama and Papa; her name was Octavia. And she was the little one that had the Indian ancestor. And she lived with Mama and Papa but I don't know, she died before I was born.

O: Now do you mind saying again just for the record, about the story of your great great grandmother Missania Kanady (?) was that the name? Could you just say sort of briefly that your family's English except for that native American Cherokee blood? Could you just tell that again?

VS: Yes. When we did – on my father's side, his mother was an Underwood. And we've traced the Underwoods clear back to about 1668. And she was in that line. And she was married to Joeseph Kanady. And I never knew; we just had this myth that there was an Indian in our background. But then when they traced some woman in Florida as a distant distant cousin. And she'd traced the Underwoods all the way back and sent me the family tree and Missania is in there. Indian is in there. And she's my great great great I think, three greats back. But I never heard them talk much about it, they just said 'you know you're part Indian.' And it was not proper at all to be part Indian.

O: Well not until the 1960's and then it became very popular.

VS: Oh it's very popular now (Laughs).

O: Exactly, isn't that interesting?

VS: And I don't know why. We didn't talk much about this Indian ancestor I remember. I was always proud, cause I looked just like 'em.

O: Yes you do, it must be a dominant strain in your background.

VS: It is. Except I was blonde; we were mostly blonde and redheads. But I looked just like that Indian grandmother.

O: So do you have a picture of her?

VS: Yes. There's a picture that some man who came from Ireland looked at that picture and he said, "You are identical. You look just like that Indian Grandmother." (laughs)

O: Yeah, well. Okay so your mother didn't really know her mother.

VS: No, she never really talked much about her. I think she was a fretful woman.

O: Fretful.

VS: Fretful.

O: Was your mother at all fretful?

VS: Oh, no. My mother was just absolutely the happiest woman I ever knew. Even after Papa died; she grieved, but then she became happy happy. And loved nature so much. I think that's why.
O: Okay, so the source of her happiness, which is obviously a strength, you think –
VS: Was her children and the farm itself. The out-of-doors, the garden. I think of her as in the garden in the summer, canning peaches; oh we'd get three gallons – three bushels of peaches. And neighbors would come in and women would all sit and peal peaches for canning. And our cellars were always full of canned food that my mother had canned. Even beef, she'd get a quarter of beef cause we did not have refrigeration in those days. We did not get electricity in Floyd until 19-- After the war.
O: Oh goodness, you mean the Second World War?
VS: Yes, second world war! 1940 something. Electricity came to the rural areas of Floyd county.
O: So you didn't get it from the TVA? You weren't that regional part of the country?
VS: No, we got it from some other source. REA maybe. Rural Electric or something like that.
O: Right. Well many of the mountainous regions were electrified by the Tennessee Valley Authority, but your area didn't get that.
VS: Yes, ours didn't get that.
O: Oh my goodness. Wow, so she stored beef in – did they store it in salt?
VS: Yes well she canned it!
O: Oh my goodness.
VS: You can, but we didn't have pressure cookers then. There was no such thing. So I can remember her canning beef by putting it in the oven all day long; you had to cook it interminable hours. And I could see these cans now, the little thing of water in the old wood oven.
O: Now a literal can or was it jars.
VS: Jars. No they were glass jars. She canned in glass jars.
O: But do you attribute her happiness and her sense of contentment in life with her love of the out-of-doors and just love of what she did in her life?
VS: Yes. And she loved people. I never heard her say a cross word about a relative or anybody. And we children would start saying, “we don't like so and so” and she'd say, “Hush!”. She has this good quality of that good quality. I never heard her gossip or say bad words about anything. We had a white woman who lived in grandmother's old house who did our cooking for us and our ironing. And she and Mama sometimes would sit by the fire and tell old tales. And I always listened, and sometimes they were terrible tales about people hanging themselves in the old days and –
O: So this woman, did she become a friend of your mothers?
VS: No, she was older than any of us. She was older than my Mama. She was an old maid; my great

aunt – Papa's aunt – had built a huge wonderful brick house that I loved with gingerbread triming. And she adopted this little girl from somewhere below the mountain, they always said, when she was 11 years old. And she raised her, to be a grown woman, and when she died she gave her a little house of her own. So Rhody for years who lived alone in a little house right across from the big brick house that had been my great aunts. And lived there until she died.

O: And never married?

VS: And never married – she hated men.

O: Oh, so she talked like that? You knew she hated men from the way she talked?

VS: Oh yes. Oh mercy yes.

O: Oh my. And did you wonder why? Did you ever wonder why or what the story was behind that?

VS: I never knew the story behind that. But she dressed even in modern age, I mean, she died after I was married and I was married in 1941. She died after 1941 as an old, old woman. But even then she dressed as they dressed in the 19th century with high collars clear up to her chin. And bodice, that was all (?) and a white one I think I have one of hers left I think. And a petticoat that Rhody wore, and sometimes she wore three petticoats and they would be down to her toes. And she dressed like that until she died, no matter what other people did. She was a real character, in fact I've written a story about her.

O: Oh I'd love to have a copy of it.

VS: Somewhere I've got it; I don't know where it is but she was worth writing a story because she would go out in the woods, and she had a fireplace. That little house was heated with a fireplace. And you'd see Rhody at night picking up sticks, getting her firewood from the down wood nearby on the farm.

O: Now, say her name again, Rhody?

VS: Rhody. R H O D Y. Light. L I G H T was her last name. But my great aunt adopted her.

O: Oh, okay. I'm trying to process this.

VS: And she became what they called then a body servant. My aunt was wealthy. One of Papa's aunts – I don't know if she married twice, maybe she married wealthy men I don't know (Laughs). But she was evidently a very fat woman, and she needed somebody to help her dress. So she adopted this little girl, and they called her a body servant.

O: Body servant. Okay so and was your aunt still living when Rhody came to help your mother?

VS: Oh no they'd been dead years and years ago. And that house passed to uncle Ike. And he married a young woman, and that property that was supposed to be Papas went to another family who were no kin whatsoever. We were always sort of bitter about that.

O: Okay. Now maybe I didn't write it down here. You married in 1941 did you say?
VS: Yes. And had a child that same year.
O: Okay. I don't know how I missed that. Okay, it sounds like this might be a difficult one for you so if you need to name more than one that's fine, but the question is whats the most significant or memorable event in your life up to the age of 12? What do you think either had the greatest impact or just what you recall as most significant as a child?
VS: Papa dying. They tell me that I cried for three weeks and I wouldn't come out. And I can remember sitting in a chair and grieving about it.
O: So you were –
VS: I was about seven when he died, I think. He died in 1952 – how old would I be...
O: Well I've got down here –
VS: He died in 1925. So I was born in 1918 I would be seven years old. And I knew what death was, because in those days they put the casket – an open casket-- in the parlor. And neighbors and friends came from all over to view the body I guess. And I remember that so well that I knew then what death was. And I was such a quiet internal child, that I think I just grieved and grieved and grieved, probably about death itself. Cause I can remember him in the casket –
O: Did your other siblings have similar problems with it? Sounds like he was close to his children...
VS: Oh he just loved the children! He just adored us. He was telling stories; I was seven and I can remember he would gather us all at night in front of a big fire. And he would tell us stories, wonderful made up stories.
O: Did he write?
VS: Never did, no. But he just was a wonderful – everybody knew him and loved him.
O: Okay. Do you remember, as a child, if you had a particular ambition to be or do something? Did you want to teach when you were a child?
VS: No. I didn't want to do anything except for what I did (laughs). Be out-of-doors and milk cows! I became the outdoor person when we no longer had – we got old enough and didn't have that older boy staying with my mother to do chores. I became the chore girl. I milked all the cows, fed the horse. I became the outdoor person who took care of the animals.
O: So you didn't resent that?
VS: Oh I loved it! I just adored it. I can still remember the cows. In fact, I remember it so well, that when I came to Athens, the reason I live out here is I have enough acreage that I can buy a cow. With my first money, I bought a calf from my husband who was the director of recreation at Memorial park. And I used my hundred dollars that he paid me to buy a Jersey cow!

O: Oh my goodness. And it was here on this property?

VS: Right here! I had as many as seven calves over the years.

O: A Jersey cow you said?

VS: A Jersey, yeah.

O: So that was a dairy cow?

VS: Yes, but a Holstein is the one that gives milk. A Jersey had very rich milk, so I churned and made butter and buttermilk right here on this place I live right now. I became a curiosity in Athens because I was a normal woman! I was educated, I taught, and yet I was out here milking the cows raising calves! (laughs)

O: And probably, were you sharing your butter with others?

VS: Oh yes! Everybody would come to get that butter and to get buttermilk.

O: Oh sure, my goodness. SO you didn't have that vision as a child to be or do anything in particular?

VS: No. I can remember knowing, because I spent a lot of time in the old barn – it was a log barn, and there was a hay mat where you could climb up. It faced west, and I didn't think there was a world beyond the horizon of the farm. And I could remember wondering if I could ever go beyond that horizon. I somehow knew there was a world out there. And I didn't much want to.

O: It was sort of idealic living on that farm.

VS: Yes.

O: Okay. Who were your heroes as a child?

VS: My next door neighbor; I just wrote his daughter. Mr. Shack inherited Dr. Thurmon's property who married my father's sister. And when I was a child I just worshiped him. He was a very talented artist; He'd been to the Philippines during World War I. And he had pictures of flamingos and all sorts of things; he was an artist and a farmer, a hard working farmer because that was a bigger farm than ours. And I just idealized him because he could sing, he made roaring fires, he liked children, and he bought one of the first new trucks and it must've been about a night in the 1930's. And he took us all – he took his children and we were the ages of his children. He took us all up to the Buffalo mountains and we spent the night camping out on top of Buffalo mountain, and I just worshiped him.

O: Yeah. So roughly how long did that go on? As much as your childhood?

VS: Oh yes. His daughter was my best friend and still is. I write to her all the time in Roanoke. And she comes anytime I go to Virginia. In fact, I just wrote her this Christmas letter asking her if she knew that I was really in love with her father. (Laugh).

O: So have you heard back from her?

VS: No (Laughs).

O: Will she be surprised to hear that?

VS: Yes! (Laughs).

O: Oh my. Well I hope you'll keep me informed on what her response is.

VS: I said as a child, but she'll understand.

O: Sure. Sure. Okay, this next question is going to seem out of place, but it sounds like you didn't have a lot of struggles as a child. But the question is what were your struggles as a child?

VS: I really – I just had the happiest childhood on earth. I loved to study, and a woman named Mrs. Gwyn. This is getting into education because I went there from the time I was in the third grade. Very wealthy woman, the Presbytery in Roanoke, Virginia, built mountain schools; they built three of them in that area. And we had a public school but Papa decided that, "Canady school", was the name of it, but it was a much better school. Presbyterian church in Dunham(?). And –

O: What was the name of it again?

VS: Canady. Harris Canady. It's named for Kellog Harris, who was an early educator in the academy in Floyd. And it was very religious. In fact, we had Chapel at nine o'clock every day and we went in and sang hymns and had Bible readings every day of my life. And we marched in to music. Every time we went to the playground, we didn't just run into the school, we had to march. They had this wide walk, and we had to march to music into our room. Into our school. But in the 3rd grade, I had French. I had French every year from the time I was in the 3rd grade. And I can still say the Marseillaise. And it was a religious school, but I always say I was educated by Christian martyrs. They were all old maid women who had given up their lives to educate people, and they were all well educated and most of em from wealthy families. And so our education was extremely different from that of most people.

O: Now seriously all the teachers were unmarried?

VS: Yes. Every single one of them. And they came usually from Roanoke. Miss Gibiny was my music teacher, cause we had sewing. Once a week, on Wednesday after school, we had to take sewing. And I made a dress by hand when I was nine years old. And it was pongee.

O: Now that would have been in mid to late twenties?

VS: Yeah. Uh huh.

O: Pongee.

VS: Pongee is a fabric that's very hard to sew, and I don't know why they make a child make a dress out of Pongee, but it's a rayon(?) material I think. But I can remember still, it had pleats. And I think the teacher would sew the big seams, and then we had to do everything else.

O: Now that must've been a fairly new fabric in the mid twenties.

VS: It was. And I don't remember pongee – I don't think you can get pongee anymore.
O: It's only vaguely familiar to me, but I know that Rayon – I'm pretty sure Rayon was a fairly new –
VS: Oh it was, I don't think we had Rayon when I grew up. But we had pongee.
O: Okay. So you – well the question was your struggles as a child, and you said you didn't really have any. But you started recalling this – something about the woman who taught you? You were recalling.
VS: Mrs. Gwyn. She became the principal of that school, and she absolutely changed the whole community. There were rough elements in that community. Settlers came in later – we settled in the late 1700's, but then if you went two or three miles away, they were not rough. They were just sort of uncultured. And she changed that whole community. We were taught music, we were taught French, we were taught sewing. So I marched in when I was about 9, and I said 'I will not take sewing unless you let me take music'. Because you weren't supposed to take piano lessons until you were in the 5th grade. And I don't know – cause I was so shy, but if I really wanted something I wasn't afraid to do it. And they let me take music when I was in the 3rd grade. So I was taught piano from the 3rd grade on.
O: Okay. What about today, psychology has become such a prominent discipline. We talk a lot about the transition from childhood to adolescence. Do you recall becoming a teenager? Do you recall any sort of transition in your life from childhood to adolescence?
VS: Oh yes. I remember not knowing what it was all about. I didn't know what was happening to me. And when I was 12, I became hard to handle. I understand that's normal, but I didn't want to be disciplined. And when my mother would tell me to do something, one time I told her – stood in her face and told her no. And I can never – she reached out and slapped my cheek when I looked at her face and did that. And oh I thought I'd done a terrible sin. To sass my mother. And I went away and cried, and cried, and cried. She'd always come and get me and just laugh about it. But I took things very seriously.
O: So you hadn't seen your sisters act this way?
VS: No. I was a loner.
O: Did you and your mother ever talk about this rebellion? Even if it wasn't major rebellion...
VS: No, she just laughed. She'd raised so many children, that she knew all about 12 year old rebellion (laughs). And it didn't bother her a bit.
O: But to you it was an unusual experience?
VS: Oh with me... We had such consciences. I think because somebody said the Presbyterian Church had ruined us – one of my cousins said. Because we thought everything was a sin, I think. And I in particular internalized everything. And oh, to sass my mother? I mean, that was just the most horrible thing and I can remember crying. And I took things very seriously and didn't talk much about

it. But I agonized about things.

O: Now how long did that – sounds like this was a transition period for you.

VS: It was.

O: Do you remember how long that went on?

VS: I think maybe – I was very frightened of Mama dying. So I guess all this was trauma, because I can remember waking up in the night and calling Mama's name. She could hear me in the room below – she slept downstairs. And I would say, “Mama” in the middle of the night. “Mama.” And she'd say, “Go to sleep, Virginia. Go to sleep.” So I remember death; had a great affect – Papa's death probably had the greatest affect on me. And I didn't realize why, but I was so afraid Mama would die too. And see, I was born right at the end of World War I, so as a baby, I heard people talking about the war. And I spent a lot of time alone, and I can remember running home up the little road that we lived on – the little Franklin Turnpike. And I'd go to visit a cousin maybe a mile away, and I can remember running and thinking, “The war's gonna get me.” I didn't know what war was, but the war was something terrible, I knew. And it was like a boogyman, or some phantom out there. And I was afraid war was gonna get me and I know that's because I'd heard them talk about World War I. So I did have some struggles when I was a kid (laughs). Internal struggle.

O: That's what I'm talking about, really. But your struggle was really transitioning from childhood to adolescence it sounds like.

VS: Probably.

O: Yeah. Cause you were a thinker.

VS: Yes.

O: And as you say, even now, you recall not knowing what was happening to you but knowing that something was happening to you.

VS: Right.

O: Okay.

VS: But then I went to summer camp – I didn't tell you about that. My oldest sister was a musician in New York. She went to the David Banner school of music in New York and became a violinist. Grace. And she brought the director of Hollenback Camp (?) home with her one summer to stay a week or two. And Mrs. Fink was a Welslyan graduate, from New England. And she ran Willoughby House– a settlement house in New York. And they called them settlement houses because indigent children came to them and got food and they kept them and they had a summer camp for them called Camp Hollenback. So Grace, when she couldn't get a job as a violinist in 1925, because men had the jobs as violinists in orchestras; women did not play in orchestras. So she went to work in a tea room run

by Miss Dowicker from New England. And became close friends with her, so she brought Miss Fink home to all these girls we were all adolescence then. Just this house full of girls. And Miss Fink – you see my life was influenced by two spinsters. And Miss Fink as we came of age would say, “I want that girl as a counselor.” So as we became 17 years old, we would leave in the summer, go to New York. Grace had an apartment in Greenwich village, and we'd stay in New York for about a week, and then we'd go across the Hudson River and go to camp Hollandback and became counselors for these children – these indigent children from New York who were wild. And I went three summers there. And that's where I met my husband.

O: So 17, 18 and 19?

VS: I went to New York at summer camp.

O: Okay, so that would've been in the late 30's.

VS: Yes, late 30's and early 40's cause I married my husband – my husband was a camp director in New York. And that's who I married.

O: Okay. Do you need to stand?

VS: But that was an interesting, interesting period, those three summers at that camp. Taking care of Brooklyn children, very poor Brooklyn children who had never seen a tree. It’s true that a tree grows in Brooklyn.

O: (laughs). Now did you learn something about poverty that you didn't know? Did you perceive their poverty as different from the poverty of the children around you in the area Floyd?

VS: Yes because we didn't know any really poor people (laughs). I guess we did down in Shootin Creek – there was a place that we could never go called Shootin Creek. And there were really poor, uneducated families that lived way down below the mountain.

O: Now you couldn't go because your parents were afraid that –

VS: To go to Shootin Creek you mean?

O: Yes.

VS: Oh no, we were never permitted to. I mean Shootin Creek was tough – they had shootings there, you heard about wild old boys and drinking and that kinda thing. And we were never permitted to go. That's when I got my first car. I went home to Virginia, and I said, “Ann, before our oldest brother comes and tells us what to do, we're going to Shootin Creek.” (Laughs). So we got in the car and went down there, and went to Shootin Creek.

O: And you were how old then?

VS: I was about 20 I guess. Well I was married, so I was about 25 I guess. We were grown up people.

O: Can you tell me what you thought? Can you give me some idea about how meeting these very impoverished children who were very different from you, can you tell me what that was like?
VS: Yes. Because their parents came too.
O: To the camp?
VS: To the camp. There was one place that not all parents, but grown ups from Brooklyn came. And they were housed in this complex, and they would sit there and they loved to ask us crazy questions to make us talk because we talked southern. And the children didn't care – I know one of mine had lice, and I had to get medicine and wash her head.
O: Okay, we took a little break but you were talking about the camp – the settlement camp.
VS: Yes, I was talking about the settlement camp and about the mothers. A few of the mothers were permitted to come. We all lived in tents. The counselors lived in tents scattered all over this rocky hillside near Fort Montgomery, New York. Right out in the woods. Each counselor had his own tent. But the mothers were strictly from Brooklyn – the mothers and some of the fathers came. And they would sit up there, and they were a pretty rough crowd – to me anyway. They weren't like southern people. And I remember taking a group up Torn Mountain. Torn Mountain was a mountain that rose up so high, the trees didn't grow at the very top of it – it was above the tree line. That was one of the things we had to do was hike those students up Torn Mountain. And one day, I had a little Italian girl who was in camp, and she had really never seen rocks and trees. So on the way up, all of a sudden she became utterly hysterical. She didn't know where she was or what was going on, and she just laid down and started screaming and crying. And we had to get some older campers to help me and we had to help her back down that mountain. And she never – she'd actually never seen rocks and trees before and she became terrified.
O: Cause she lived in the city –
VS: Oh they lived in the slums of Brooklyn. That's where they came from. So, about that time the tree grows in Brooklyn was popular. And I can remember thinking, “Well, a tree does not grow in Brooklyn.”
O: (Laughs)
VS: I was up there three years.
O: Now I was asking you before we quit, what did the adults do at camp?
VS: They just stayed up there, and mostly drank beer I think. I never did know; Miss Fink was the most proper lady you ever saw. And she lived on a house way down below the hill. But she put up with all these people that came up to get into – adults who had probably never seen a tree either. There must not have been more than eight of them. Maybe eight or 9.

O: Adults?

VS: Adults.

O: Okay. Alright. Well, somehow we got to that story talking about your transitioning into teenage years and –

VS: Yes. And I remember now that I did – I was fearful of death, I stayed awake at night listening to the crickets and thinking dark, scary thoughts, you know, about death.

O: Did that continue on through your teenage years, that fear of death?

VS: I think it kept on until I went to summer camp. That's why I happened to think about summer camp. And I had my first beer at summer camp. We didn't believe, we were tee-totalers. And I had my first beer at summer camp, and I understand that I jumped from rock to rock and wouldn't go to bed (Laughs).

O: You must have had more than one beer! (laughs).

VS: And I tripped walking! (laughs)

O: So did you tell your mother about that?

VS: No, she wouldn't have cared, she'd have just laughed. She didn't believe that any of her children ever drank. She didn't think her sons had ever had a drink. She'd say, “Oh, my sons have never had a drink.” Well the Presbyterian minister was at the house, and we all knew they were all grown up – they were in their 40's or 50's. We all knew that they were at the swing drinking Bourbon! (laughs)

O: And she was still claiming her sons –

VS: She said her sons never had a drink. And we were all giggling, of course. We were all married by that time.

O: Did the Presbyterian minister catch on or –

VS: No, no, he would never have caught on.

O: Well, now you alrealdy told me that you had an incident when you were about 12 where you didn't want to obey your mother and she smacked you, but she just laughed about it – she didn't get upset about it. Did that tension between you and her because of your growing into a woman, did that last very long?

VS: It lasted till that night. (Laughs)

O: Oh, okay. So you didn't have a sustained conflict with your mother?

VS: No, we never had any sustained fights. We had big feuds that would last maybe an hour, and then it would all be over. I don't understand people who sulk and don't speak. We always worked through it.

O: So you think that your mother's acceptance of all this transition was the reason why it didn't last?

The fact that she could –

VS: Yes. See you didn't have just Mama, I had Attaway who came every summer; the oldest sister. I had Maude (?). You had all these older sisters, before you that you watched.

O: Okay, they were models.

VS: They were models. They were my models, they had all been to college and they all played musical instruments. And we'd sit down and sing, and they would teach us words to songs. And I think music meant more to all the whole family than anything because we sang a lot.

O: And you think that that was sort of a bond, the music?

VS: Oh yes it was. Even though we all had little – I wouldn't call them fights, we had little tussles with each other. We never held anything – we loved each other the whole time.

O: And this was through the whole family? There weren't any –

VS: Through the whole family. There was never any lasting feudes that I remember at all. And my brothers just adored each other.

O: Virginia, do you know roughly when that was made? This picture?

VS: Yes. It was made after I came to Athens. I came to Athens when I was 27 years old. And I think a photographer took that picture, and I think that's when I first came to Athens and I came to Athens in 1941. That was probably taken about 1942, so how old would I be? 1918 to 1942...

O: 24

VS: Yeah.

O: May I write your name on the corner?

VS: Anything you want, oh sure. Write anything you want on it.

O: I just want to be sure... And you have other pictures before I go or even after I leave, that you would be willing to share I can scan them and get them back to you.

O: Okay. Now, this is a question that may not mean anything to you, but was there a difference in either the way they were treated or the expectation of your brothers than of you and your sisters? I mean was there any awareness in your household?

VS: Oh mercy yes. (Laughs).

O: Okay good. Explain that to me.

VS: Well Mama spoiled the boys to death! When the boys came – of course I was a child and they were grown up – but if the boys liked biscuits at night, she would bake biscuits. The girls liked cornbread, she adored her three boys. The baby was a boy who looked just like my father – the one that's still alive.

O: So Albert, Robert, and John.

VS: Uh huh. And Rob became Dean of the University of the South at Sewanee. And he's a redhead – a marvelous man. Oh I worshiped him. He was also my hero, and I was his favorite. He taught me so much when I was a child. He was 10 years older. Taught me not to be afraid. We were walking through the orchard, and he knew I was afraid of things internally. You know, and he would say to me, “Virginia, if you're ever afraid, walk toward it. Unless it’s a snake or something you know would get you. Walk toward what your fear is.” And I've done that all my life. And it’s the truth.

O: So that was a grand lesson?

VS: It was. And I remember that.

O: Where do you think that came from in him?

VS: He was very fearful, but you would never know it. When he was a teenager – I don't like to say it like this, but all of us are very bright, the whole family. It’s a wonder, because I said having 10 you could have had a little moron. (laughs). I think we're all almost exceptionally intelligent. And he was probably the most intelligent. And he finished Hampton Sydney in three years. And he taught at Gulfport Military Academy for his first year ever talking was 19. But he faced his fears, and I remember that we had horses. And the neighbors had horses, and one time one of the big farm horses got its legs through a rotten floor in the barn. And I watched him lift that horses' leg out of that. I can still see him in his red hair and I can still see his veins and his face. But he was like that – I mean he would – whatever there was to do, he did it. And he was a most beloved man. When he died, about – he died in '98 – didn't die many years ago. And they loved him so much at Sewanee; he'd been there since he was about 20. And he loved the, “Danny Boy,” and they had a Scottish band march singing, “Danny Boy” as they took his Hearse all the way through campus. He was a beloved man, and just full of fun and energy. And he could be serious – or he'd have to be to accomplish what he did.

O: Now Sewanee is a

Break----------

VS: Presbyterian. He became an Episcopalian after he'd been there for about 10 years.

O: So Robert, we're talking about Robert and he was Dean of Suwanee. And so they hired him knowing he was not Episcopalian.

VS: Oh yes, I mean that didn't matter. He was hired at 20 for the military school: SMA. Suwanee Military Academy. He and his wife, both. And he married a debutante from Biloxi, Mississippi. She made her debut in New Orleans. She was a wonderful – we adored her. She came to the farm and we couldn't imagine how she would take the farm. And we went out one day because at that time, because we didn't have electricity, we didn't have a bathroom. Everybody bathed in a – had his own

little pan and went upstairs to their own rooms and bathed. And we came in one day and she'd been out in the mud in the garden somewhere. She had her leg up in the dish pale. (Laughs).

O: This Biloxi debutante.

VS: (Laughs). And she adored my mother – lived with my mother every summer while Rob was at Michigan getting his Dr.ate.

O: Wow. At Michigan State or University of Michigan?

VS: University of Michigan I believe.

O: Okay, in Ann Arbor?

VS: Yes. It's Ann Arbor.

O: Okay. And what was his PhD in?

VS: Political Science.

O: That's right, you told me that.

VS: He had a law degree too.

O: Wow. But was he Dean at Suwanee for most of his working life?

VS: Yes. But he took time out – in the state of Virginia, you could read law and pass the BAR. And he read law, then at night he went to a law school somewhere.

O: Now why did he want the law degree? This was before the PhD.

VS: Well he practiced law in the town of Floyd. For two years after he got out of ???) after he went to the Military Academy. He decided to become a lawyer and practice law in Pulaski(?) Floyd. And he couldn't earn a living, so that's when he went to SMA.

O: Alright. Well, can we go back to that difference in your household between the way the boys were treated and the girls? Did you girls resent the boys being privileged by your mom?

VS: Yes.

O: Did you tell her that?

VS: Probably. We just told her she spoiled them rotten.

O: But because you got along with them, you didn't really resent them?

VS: Oh no, because they loved us and we – it didn't matter what age we were, we'd tease back and forth and were companions. So we really – there was no deep resentment at all. But girls could do in our family anything boys did.

O: That's a question I've got to ask, if your mother spoiled the boys but there wasn't any –

VS: No sexual separation to what we could do.

O: No discrimination?

VS: No discrimination.

O: There was no implicit ideas that girls weren't capable of doing anything?
VS: Oh no. We were capable of doing as much or even more. (Laughs)
O: Before we leave your teenage years, I asked you what was the most significant event in your childhood and you said your father's death. Can you think of an equivalent significant event in your teenage years? Before you became an adult. Something that happened that really altered things for you?
VS: No. It was –
O: The trips to New York?
VS: The trips to New York probably did, yes. I'm sure it did. Because I went when I was 17. And I'd never had a beer as I told you, and I'd never seen adults act the way those people acted. Or heard people curse, or that kind of thing. You know what I mean?
O: Sure, so that was a broadening experience for you?
VS: It was a very broadening experience, yes.
O: Can you tell me if you had not seen or experience real poverty – so the renters on your family farm, were they not a poor people?
VS: No. They all had farms of their own, but they rented – you know, they wanted more land.
O: So they weren't really tenant farmers?
VS: They weren't tenant farmers back in the south, they were just neighbors who wanted more land.
O: I see. So how do you think seeing those really poor people – what do you think that did for your understanding of different classes in this country – different classes of people?
VS: It made me very class conscious. We were always class conscious as a family. And that's weird.
O: Can you just talk about that? Can you explain how that was so?
VS: Yes. It's because we always felt aristocratic. I think because we were the early land owners and had for generations and generations been the – you know, had been there. And we were all educated, and the people around us were not educated.
O: So you not only had an awareness that you had more materially than many others –
VS: Well we didn't have more materially. No, Mama had no money. I'll tell you what happened to the money that Uncle Albert left. It was during the Depression, you know, there was a bank failure. Well, my oldest brother who I guess was in his late teens or maybe his early 20's, had to leave VPI and come home to take care of Mama. And he had left because he didn't want to do that for about a year, and went to work for my Uncle Sam who had a Piggly Wiggly – he had Piggly Wiggly stores. Mama's brother, in Bristol, Virginia. And I remember the banks closing and the Depression very, very well. He came home and Uncle Sam needed money for his grocery. He was gonna lose his Grocery Business.

Mama wrote a check for every – and I don't know how many thousands it was in the bank, in those days a thousand meant a lot. And she wrote a check for all that money, and sent it to Uncle Sam, who was gonna pay it back. And he put it in the banks, and the banks failed the next day. And all that money that he had left for our education was gone. Everything was gone, so there was no money to educate the little children. So Miss Gwyn, this Presbyterian woman who started that Canady School, near the Presbyterian school named Pikeville College in Kentucky. And it wasn't like Berea, but there were a few jobs available if you had pull. And she knew the president. So Mama saw to it that we got on – Albert drove us to Kentucky; took all day. And Ann went first, then a year later I went to this little Presbyterian college and worked my way through college as the cashier of the cafeteria. And I was frightened to death; you talk about trauma. I had never had – we just didn't have money. We had everything we needed, but we never had no money.

O: Yeah. But you had land.

VS: We had land.

O: And that was the source of your (?)

VS: Yes. And we had everything we needed, but the children just never had money per say. Well here I was made cashier of the cafeteria at Pikeville College (?). I had never had no money; I didn't know how to make change. And you talk about trauma – I'd be underneath this bright light shining on my head, and I was shy anyways still. And here would come this horde of people down this cafeteria line, and most of them had meal tickets and all you had to do was punch. They bought a weekly meal ticket; you just punched numbers on it until the thing ran out. That was easy. But the president of the college, I can still see him with his family coming through. And I think his whole family could eat all of $20 bill and have money left. And I was trying to count in my head "$2.98, $2.46..." I was desperately trying to count in my head because I didn't know how to make change. And finally somebody saw my dillema, and they said, "You don't know how to make change." And I said, "No, I don't." And they took me out and gave me a lesson. But they trusted me as a student. I sometimes would have $600 in a strong box and kept it in my room at night. In a dormitory. I mean, I was in complete charge of all the money. And when I think about that, it was just so stupid! And I never thought much about it. I was very careful; I locked the strongbox and kept it under my bed. But that was a great responsibility, and it almost killed me. In fact, I was so shy that I blushed the whole time until I broke little viens in my face.

O: Now Virginia, was this school like a boarding high school?

VS: Oh no, it was a college. An excellent college. In fact, now it's Pikeville University.

O: So this would have been in the mid '30's, that you were in Pikeville.

VS: Yes. 1936 or something like that; 1937. And I played the piano for dance classes and earned money. This woman – one of the professors taught dancing and she found out I could play so I played for the dance class. Played the piano, got money for that.

O: So the next question has to do with your family's beliefs and values. That your family was Presbyterian, right?

VS: Right.

O: Okay. So the primitive Baptist goes back before your time.

VS: That's great grandfathers and grandmothers.

O: Okay. So do you recall in your either childhood or teenager – do you recall ever questioning or disagreeing with any of your family's beliefs or values?

VS: We all had – Maude believed in reincarnation. And when they came home in the summer – all these were very sophisticated really cause all were educated in different areas and everything else had been in New York. And I remember our oldest sister was most straitlaced, unimaginative human you ever saw. (Laughs).

O: Attaway was straitlaced and unimaginative?

VS: Yes! Very practical and ran the family. Mama would say, “Oh, just let her run it. When she leaves, I'll take over.” And (Laughs), anyways. They were in the kitchen talking about reincarnation, and Maude already believed in reincarnation. And Attaway just came in the kitchen and laughed and said, “we will not have this kind of talk in this kitchen.” (Laughs).

O: Now how old were you when that conversation –

VS: Oh I was 19 or 20, maybe 22. I wasn't married I don't think.

O: But Maude (?) was then probably in her late 20's.

VS: Oh, more than that probably.

O: 30's.

VS: Yes, 30's would be right. Oh we talked about religion; we talked about reincarnation, we talked about anything. And for –

O: Did she really believe that? Did she continue believing that throughout her life?

VS: We never knew how serious Maude was about anything. She's very bright and very –

O: Sounds like she was very cosmopolitan –

VS: Very cosmopolitan. Very cosmopolitan. But anyways, I never knew how serious she was about anything. She was full of laughter. I used to be jealous of her, because I was quiet and serious and she was always – the men just loved her. And wherever she was, a group of men was always around her. Because she was full of fun and laughter and was beautiful.

O: Now where did she go to school? Pikeville?

VS: Stonewall Jackson. Oh no, she and Grace had been educated by my father, and Stonewall Jackson, at that time, was an excellent – almost like a private college, but it was a wonderful woman's college.

O: Now did Maude read Eastern Philosophy and Religion? She had to to believe in reincarnation but did she –

VS: She just sort of meddled with things. She didn't believe deeply, I think. She just kind of liked to shock people, I think partly (Laughs). So it was never very serious. I probably was the most serious of all, as far as religion was concerned. I can remember at Easter time, I would go into the parlor by myself and I composed a really serious song for the piano. It was cause I was singing about the crucifixion. And I worried a lot about things like that. I prayed a lot – Mama called me her praying child. Mama – (Phone rings)

VS: – That's a wonderful account of growing up.

O: Your brother?

VS: Uh huh, from a man's point of view.

O: Well I would love to see that. I'll have to check that out.

VS: I've got it here somewhere.

O: When did he publish it?

VS: I think the University Press published it. I'm not sure.

O: Okay. We got interrupted. You were talking about your – really reflecting deeply one Easter on the resurrection. Would you have been a teenager then?

VS: Yes.

O: Okay. Now what provoked that recollection was I asked if you ever questioned or disagreed with or challenged your family's beliefs.

VS: No. Because Mama was not very religious. She thought we were all far too religious. She said, and many of our cousins said, "Mrs. Gwyn has ruined all of you, you're too religious." (Laughs). But anyway,

O: Did you all go to church?

VS: No. We didn't have church. We had Dr. Cee (?) camp and preached every third Sunday. And we went once a month to hear Dr. Cee preach. But we had Chapel every day at the school from the time we were six years old. So we were just constantly hammered with religion. But then I did question everything. And I think I went though a period when I was in my early married years – I think I went through a period of just disbelief and – not disbelieving, but just abandoning all of that. And didn't go

to church at all.

O: So would you say that you kind of shelved your beliefs?

VS: No, I shelved them. I'm sure that was it. I questioned.

O: That seems to be a common experience for deep thinking people, you know. You read biographies of people who were deeply philosophical or just simply intellectuals and that seems to be a common experience.

VS: Is that right?

O: Oh yeah, yeah.

VS: I didn't know that.

O: In fact there's a quote, that has never left me... Anyways he was a prominent sociologist in the early 20th century who said that he put his beliefs in a drawer while he went off to college, and when he went back to get them they were gone. So he actually did continue to be an unbeliever. But so many other people –

VS: I didn't know that. But I went though a period of years, when I –

O: But that wasn't really in your –

VS: Well it wasn't questioning my family's beliefs. Mama just thought we were all too religious. She said, “Mrs. Gwyn has ruined you all.” She believed that her belief was not connected with any – and before she died, she lived with me every summer. Every winter, she came here and lived. And one day she called me in and she said, “I'm an old woman.” And she said, “I still don't believe those things.” And she questioned more than I did.

O: Wow. What did you say to her?

VS: I just said that there are times when none of us do. I'm sure. And Papa never joined the church.

O: Did that disturb you? Later when you reflected on it, did it disturb you that your father had never?

VS: No, I just wondered – I thought to myself that it’s strange that a man would go clear through, never joining a church. And Dr. See didn't want to preach his funeral because he was not a church man. He thought he was a non-believer.

O: Did he finally –

VS: He did, yes he did. But he questioned.

O: Now, did you become an ordained minister which is – well, did your mother know that; did you do that before she died?

VS: Oh, no. It’s just been the last two years! (laughs)

O: Oh, so that's very recent.

VS:I'll tell you about it after a while.

O: Sure. So we have a whole section on religion and beliefs and stuff so we can shelve that conversation for later. The next question is about your consciousness and your family's consciousness of the world outside your home place. Like your father clearly wanted to be formally educated, and didn't. But was the family aware of the world beyond the farm?
VS: Oh, constantly. I never remember a time when they weren't coming in from all over the world.
O: Now who? Who was coming in from all over the world?
VS: Well, my older brother and sisters were all educated and had been out in the world. And Grace lived in Brazil after she married. Lived in Rio for most of her life. I went to Rio and bought her a home when she was 80 years old. And so we knew the world. You know, we just –
O: Well, it does something to a person's being to be conscious of the world. Because there are so many people who the home place is about the extent of their consciousness.
O: I know. We were never like that. And it always amazed me! I do not know why, but we were the only family in that area that was like that. Most of them were just home people, you know, who didn't go beyond. Usually World War II brought them out, and they went into the world to go to war. And that changed their perceptions. But we always had that perception. Because my uncle in the – I guess 1903 or something like that – went to the University of Chicago. And we always knew – my sister lived in California on the coast, she lived in Mexico City and got her degree in Mexico City. Grace lived in Rio. And so you were conscious of the world.
O: Which sister lived in Mexico City?
VS: Maude. Maude was a teacher and she moved to California. She was married three times – the last time she married a man 20 years younger, and went to California – the two of them went to California. And then she went down and got a Masters Degree at Mexico city and lived in Mexico.
O: Master's of what?
V: Art
O: Well, it is just very interesting how your family became so truly cosmopolitan.
Break----------

VS: Pikeville is a beautiful college, up on top of a hill – Presbyterian. Clinch River runs down through the valley and there are 260 steps that take you down into the city itself. The College is way up here. And opposite that College is a huge mountain – you don't see anything but trees and a mountain.
O: What part of Kentucky is it in?
VS: It's in Western Kentucky, right across the Virginia line. Near Southwest Virginia.
O: So that would be Eastern Kentucky?

VS: No, it would be west wouldn't it?

O: (Explains geography)

VS: I guess it would be, yes. It would be east of Kentucky.

O: And so my question was what was it like when you first left home when you were –

VS: I was dreadfully homesick.

O: Were any of your sisters with you?

VS: No. I was completely alone, and I went back and forth usually by train. I got a train in Roanoke. And I'd never ridden on a train or anything; it's all new experiences to me. And then I was dumped immediately into the cashier of the cafeteria and couldn't make change. But I was a good student, so I excelled in my studies. And I took music. I had never seen a pipe organ before, and I fell in love. We had Chapel every day, with a beautiful pipe organ. And I just fell in love with that pipe organ. I loved that part of being in school. And one of the men loved to hike, so he took us – one of the professors. We hiked a lot into those mountains.

O: What did you do when you got homesick? Did you go hiking? How did you handle being homesick?

VS: I think I cried in my pillow sometimes. Not often, cause I got over things fast. And I was too busy. But I still was a loner, and I remember that I had to stay sometimes during holidays, and because I wouldn't just hobnob and get in a clutch with the ones that had to stay, they thought I was peculiar and they shunned me sometimes. And it didn't matter to me, cause I was always a loner. And I didn't want all that laughter and telling jokes and carying on that they all did.

O: So did you have a major there?

VS: No, we didn't – it was junior College. Yeah.

O: Well as a girl, did you feel free that you could be anything that you wanted to be? We kind of said this a few minutes ago.

VS: Yes. I felt I could do anything in the world I wanted to do.

O: Did you ever feel led to do anything other than teach English?

VS: Well I taught kindergarten; the first thing I ever taught was kindergarten. No – I taught after junior college, you could teach with a teaching certificate. And I taught a one room school! That was the most exciting thing I ever did. When I was 19, well – 20 maybe. I taught a one room school. It was the last one room school in the whole county, and they made the beginning teachers do it because they thought they learned so much. And it was a place called Slate Mountain, Virginia. And you talk about isolated. Those children – I mean, I walked into this one little room that had holes in the walls. It was cold, with a big pot belly stove. I had to go at seven and build a fire in the pot belly stove every

morning to heat the room before they came. I walked into the classroom and I said, “I'm Virginia Lancaster. Miss Lancaster.” (Whispers something). And I said, “whats wrong with you all? Can't you talk?” And they said, “The last teacher wouldn't let us talk above a whisper.” And she had all the class of 17 was all. Every grade, but 17 students. She had made whisper, and they were still whispering when I came the next year. And they knew nothing! They had – every Friday, I took them exploring. They had never – they had a mill, that’s now Mayberry's Mill. And that was just an old, old mill then. And they didn't know where the bread came from, they'd never been hiking, they lived at the top of Rock Castle Creek. Which was beautiful; they'd never seen Rock Castle Creek! They were – talk about ingrown. And religious – oh my soul. The minister, when I would go, there was a big stone Presbyterian church beside that little school house, and he would rail against painting your nails. So every Sunday, I'd paint my nails just as red as I could to go to church and flip him off. (Laughs). But they were so enclosed – they were generous; such good people, most of them. But they just didn't know the world at all! It was a strange experience. I lived in the house right near the school, and she was the store keeper – they had a store. And every Wednesday night, they met in the homes to have religious services. And they had singing and praying; old fashion singing and praying.

O: And did you say they were Presbyterian?

VS: Hmm?

O: Did you say they were Presbyterian?

VS: They were. The Presbyterian church was in their yard, but they were something else. It was a weird experience. But Lilly was the daughter of the family, and she and I walked in the snow; we walked one time, we walked three miles through the snow. And they thought I was peculiar because I was homesick then. I couldn't go home because we didn't have a car – we sold Papa's Dodge. And I didn't have anywhere to go except in that little village. And I'd take a book and go sit in an orchard in the weed and they'd say, “Miss Lancaster's up there in that weed doing something. She's a peculiar woman.”

O: Now was this – you couldn't go home, it was a holiday?

VS: No, I couldn't go home for the holidays or for weekends even though it was 30 miles away. Mama didn't have a car. But that was an excellent experience.

O: As a one room school teacher. Now was this when you were a senior at Pikeville?

VS: Oh no, I graduated. I'd graduated and had a teaching certificate and that was assigned by the school board.

O: So that was a job.

VS: It was my job, yes. Paid $84 a month. They called me from the University; I'd written a history of

my teaching, and they called me from the University and said, “There's something terribly wrong. You have down here that your first teaching job, you made $84 a month.” And I said, “That's what I made.” And I paid $12 a month room and board. And she packed my lunch.

O: You knew your husband then, but you all weren't married, is that right?

VS: I didn't know him then.

O: I thought you met him when you were –

VS: No, I was engaged to the one before (laughs).

O: Oh, so the person you met at the camp –

VS: The person I was engaged to; the other camp director. And he came while I was teaching this little one room school. And he was very cosmopolitan; he lived in New York all his life. A great, big, Pennsylvania Dutch man. And I think that he was in shock when he came to pick me up at that school, because he was going to Illinois and I was going to Merriam – he was coming back to go to Illinois. And he stopped writing to me after that; I think it was culture shock. I really do. And I didn't care – I wanted him to know. He had dated two of my older sisters while they were at camp too.

O: So you were relieved when he quit writing.

VS: I what?

O: Were you relieved when he quit writing?

VS: Oh yes. I mean I didn't care one way or the other. He married right after that. He'd been a bachelor – he was in his 40's then. He's about 20 years older, but he married after he went to Illinois and had a child, I found out.

O: Did you lose track of him after that?

VS: Yes. I heard he died while he was out there. Then the next summer I started dating the other camp director, cause they were the only ones who had cars. (Laughs).

O: So now, this was before the appointment to the one room school house, right?

VS: During that time. He came while I was teaching at the one room school. The one I didn't marry, yeah.

O: Okay, and you went back to the camp that next summer.

VS: And met the other camp director.

O: Who became your husband?

VS: He became my husband.

O: Before we leave this childhood period, you said something about you're still friends with one of your childhood friends.

VS: Oh yes, I am. She lived next door. And we became friends when we were 12 years old; we were

inseparable. And we walked to school together, we told each other everything through the years, she's been to my house to visit me here. And she comes every time I go home to Virginia. Her name was Manilla Shack, and her father was my hero. The father who now that I'm 90 years old, I wrote her and told her that he was my hero, and that I was childishly in love with him. (laughs). I said I'd been in love with somebody all of my life. (Laughs).

O: And so you all are the same age?

VS: Yes. She's a year older.

O: Is she in good health?

VS: Yes. She walks better than I do; she just walks. She's in really good health.

O: How recently was she here?

VS: She was here two years ago.

O: And you said her name is Manilla?

VS: Manilla. Her father served in the Philippines; he's the artist that I told you that painted so beautifully and sang and lifted heavy logs. He became a farmer but he shouldn't have been a farmer either, but anyway. They bought the farm next door.

O: Now why was he in the Philippines?

VS: He was in World War I. He could stand and put his hands on a horses rump, and lift himself up into the saddle.

O: So it sounds like he was a strong man; it sounds like he was big.

VS: No, he was medium size. But extremely agile and well preserved when I knew him. He had a lovely wife; Manilla's mother. And I always felt so guilty because I was in love with him.

O: And that's a good segway into the next section (laughs), cause it’s about marriage and children and motherhood. And the first question is about – you sound like a very romantic person, but how was that valued in your family? How was romance? Was your mother a romantic? She doesn't sound very –

VS: No. She was very practical. Attaway was very practical. My father, I think – I think we inherited it from our father who was a musician and very magical. Made up tales and told tales of faraway places.

O: So the value of romance in your family, like for instance when you were a child, you fell in love with your friend's father. Did you imagine what falling in love would be like?

VS: No. I was in love with practically every one of the ones who came to live with us.

O: The young boys?

VS: Yes. Older than I – I was about 10 maybe. And they would be 17 or so, and my sister and I – I

remember Frank wore boots – one of the ones who stayed. And I was just terribly in love with him; I was so jealous of Irene, who was his real girlfriend.

O: Well, it sounds like you must have had romantic notions about love and courtship.

VS: Oh, I did! Even as a child. But I didn't know really what it was like, I just knew I was in love with somebody.

O: Well, when did you start dating?

VS: I never had a date, I never kissed a man until I was 19.

O: Okay, and that's when you had the much older man as a first date?

VS: Yes. Well now, in school, I would remember that we'd go on trips to climb mountains or something. And we'd all ride together in a big bus or something. And I remember I was about 13, and Stanford would (?) the man that Manilla married, held my hand; we sat on boxes I remember along the wall. And he held my hand the whole trip. And I went home and told my mother., “Oh, you mustn't start that.” I was 12 years old. And she said, “Don't ever let a boy kiss you.” And we were all cousins; there was nobody to marry! (Laughs).

O: But that young man obviously wasn't a cousin.

VS: Oh, no. There were others, but he was already dating somebody older.

O: Was it just a friendly gesture, him holding your hand?

VS: Oh, no, it was romantic. Oh no. That was about 12; I knew holding hands meant something.

O: Okay, so you didn't kiss a guy until you were 19 and it was the man that was engaged –

VS: No, I was engaged to a man before that. I think the first man I kissed was Moll. That older man.

O: What was his name?

VS: Earl Moll, he was German; Pennsylvania Dutch. He was engaged once to my sister, Grace. But he'd come to visit the family and he'd just – he was engaged to Maude too. Maude had bought her (?). And she decided she couldn't marry him.

O: Was he handsome?

VS: Yes, but very dull. (Laughs). Even I realized that.

O: Ok so he dated Grace, he dated Maude, he was engaged to both of them?

VS: Yes.

O: And Maude didn't have better sense then to get engaged to a man who was dull?

VS: No, she didn't. He was sophisticated, cause he lived in New York all his life. So he knew how to do-everything, you know what I mean. Sophisticated, but, he didn't have much imagination.

O: So what was the first kiss like?

VS: Like nothing. I don't even remember it, but I think I did kiss him.

O: Okay.

VS: Holding hands with Stan at 12 was far more exciting than kissing Moll! (Laughs)

O: Well, okay. You weren't in love with him. And you knew that.

VS: No. I knew that, but I was going to marry him. Mary, my sister, came to me and she said, "Virginia, you are very plain." And she said, "If you can marry, you better marry." My oldest sister; that redhead. I still remember it. I was always considered plain. Until I got to be 15, and then I wasn't plain anymore.

O: Well, you weren't plain when you knew him!

VS: I wasn't, but I thought I was. I thought my mouth was too big, my eyes were too big. I had a very bad consciousness of what I looked like. When I was a child, I had an overbite. Which I've corrected through just taking care of it. But I was a very plain child. Most of us were beautiful children, and I was Mama's plain child. My sister, Maude, the beauty. I have a picture of my father – sitting in my father's lap, and I treasure it. And Maude came by one day and she said, "What a pity Papa didn't have a pretty baby sitting in his lap."

O: Was she teasing?

VS: No. (Laughs) No.

O: So were they that candid and frank?

VS: Yes! Maude had a mean streak, I think.

O: Did any of your expectations, as you were such a romantic. Did any of your expectations ever live up to – did any of your realities live up to that?

Phone rings ----------

VS: We got into this romance. Everything impacted (?) in my life. As I said, I've been in love over and over. And none of it – usually they're in my head. I love from afar.

O: Well, I imagine some folks are gonna want copies of this. (Laughs).

VS: So I'm into romance.

O: Yeah, I really want to hear all you're willing to tell me about that, so just – you've been romantic all your life, and you've been in love all your life. So tell me about that.

VS: That's true.

O: Well, I love that.

VS: But they never know! That's what I told Manilla. I married a man I didn't love much. I married him for the sex, I'm sure.

O: Because otherwise you couldn't have had sex.

VS: That's right. And he had – my sister in law came to visit (T?) at camp, and she said he has the

most beautiful legs I ever saw on a man. Said that she'd be done in bronze. So I married him for his legs, I think.

O: Oh my goodness. Did you fall in love with him after you married him?

VS: No. I'd never known sex in my life, and I guess I'm very sexual. And I fell in love – if you call that love. But I wasn't emotionally and romantically, if you know what I mean. And I started having children immediately. And he was very grumpy; he was a morning grouch. And he was never happy. And I wake up happy every day of my life, and I used to do everything right. He changed me, because I never tried to be organized and that. And if you had a shirt out of place – his shirts were all out of place – I did the ironing too. They were all in his drawers; they had to be. I couldn't put anything on his dresser. Everything had to be just orderly, orderly. (Sighs).

O: Now how long were you guys married?

VS: 30 years. Finally I got old enough that I thought that I can't live this way the rest of my life.

O: So in your early 50's you divorced him?

VS: 1972, I guess yeah it was early 50's.

O: So you were 54 when you divorced him.

VS: Right.

O: But in your head, you had had all these affairs because you would fall in love, is that right?

VS: Well, I did in my mind.

O: That's what I'm saying, in your mind.

VS: Oh, yes. I mean I saw them, but they didn't know that I was fiercely in love with them. They were just friends; you know what I mean, as most of them were married already. But anyway, it’s too bad. It really is.

O: So why, if you had that capacity for romantic love, why did you never remarry?

VS: Nobody every asked me. Men are hard to find in Athens; available men are not out there.

O: Right, I understand that.

VS: No, they're not out there. And it’s always somebody I can't have.

O: So, you've never had a genuine relationship with somebody you were in love with?

VS: Yes, I've had a couple of affairs.

O: With the people you were actually in love with?

VS: Yes.

O: Well you don't have to tell me who, but could you just tell me about that experience?

VS: Well, I don't want to broadcast it cause somebody might see this sometime. But one was at least 25 years younger than I. And that lasted 11 years. But I never saw him except at his will.

O: 25 years younger than you. Can you tell me how old you were?

VS: I was 50. Maybe – I was in my 50's. It was after I divorced.

O: So he was in his 20's?

VS: Uh huh. But he courted me. And I was his teacher at the University. But I never had any relationship with him, until after I was no longer teaching. But he would leave every summer and go to North Carolina; he's a horseman. And he wrote me every week. He would come by my office; I had him in class, he was very bright. He was broke horses, was a horseman, he was everything I dreamed about. And I'd find notes on my desk, I'd find notes pinned to trees when I got home. I mean, he pursued me. And I'd never had a teenage love. I missed out on that. So I reciprocated. But he was extremely controlling, extremely sure of himself. And he would disappear and go to his horse farm, and maybe I wouldn't hear from him for two weeks. And all of the sudden, he'd appear at midnight. Or once he came when I was having a big party.

O: Here, to this place?

VS: Oh yes, and I think to myself now – it was suffering. It was not happy, cause I just – I mean I just had this desire to be with him. Just an overwhelming desire.

O: So you really loved him?

VS: Yes. I thought I did. And I guess I did, that romantic love that was all pinned up for all those years.

O: Do your children know?

VS: Yes. They knew. Lee knew.

O: They knew then?

VS: Yes. Well I wasn't married. They didn't think much about it; they didn't care. Lee called him my Greek god. He was the most handsome man I ever saw in my life.

O: Now who was Lee?

VS: That boy that just came in.

O: Oh okay. So he was handsome?

VS: Oh mercy, he was a Greek god is right.

O: Now this lasted 11 years, you said.

VS: Yes. Off and on, but very spasmodic if you know what I mean. But it was a physical affair.

O: But did he have other girlfriends in that time?

VS: Yes. I knew he did.

O: Did you complain about that to him?

VS: Yes. The last time he came. It was always secretive from the world, because of his age. But we would drive, we would go places, I would visit him. He inherited his mother's and father's home; they

died early. And I would go spend weekends, and do the horses, and you know. And he would come here, usually when nobody – it was usually secretive.

O: So he'd come late at night.

VS: Yeah.

O: Wasn't there something, though, kind of fun about that?

VS: It was very exciting! (laughs). It was very exciting. But if you're in love, you want to be with them all the time. And he decided when I could be with him, I couldn't make that decision – he was very wilful. And he came to see me one day, and we went everywhere openly. We went back to the University, we visited all the professors' offices. Cause they all knew him; he was so bright and so unusual that all the professors knew him. And we got in the car, he brought Pavarotti and we had a convertible and we went all over this town. We went everywhere, with Pavarotti playing (laughs). And I knew something was different; I didn't know what. Because he was openly just – almost openly doing all of this. And I knew there was a – he had a woman at the horse farm, in the barn. A very beautiful brunette girl, and I knew she was madly in love with him. And he called me that night and I asked him to stay after we'd been out all day long. And he said, "No, I've got to go." And he called back, and he said, "It's the only place I've ever wanted to be." And I said, "Well, something's going on because you could be if you wanted to."

O: The only place he wanted to be was with you?

VS: Yes. Is right here. And I said something's going on, and I don't believe a word of that because I said, "If you wanted to stay, you could have." I said, "Is it that black haired girl?" And he said, "yes." They were engaged. And that was that. I cried for three days.

O: So he was openly flaunting this because it was sort of a last – was this his swan song?

VS: Yes. That was his swan song. And I realized it. I knew it was different, and I knew that he was showing me off everywhere.

O: He was saying goodbye?

VS: He was saying goodbye, and that was goodbye and I knew it. And I found out that night. And he married her, and they have a child. Who is at the University now, so that's been years and years ago. But I was deeply and terribly in love with him.

O: Now do you – after that, have you been in contact with him at all?

VS: Oh yes! He tried to buy the house next door a few years ago. He came running in my house, I didn't even know he was anywhere around. And he said, "We're up here trying to buy the house next door to you."

O: When was that?

VS: About 10 years ago. Or maybe – yeah, he still had the child then. And that would have been horrible. That's terrible. But that was the highest romance I ever had. I mean that was real romance. It was my teenage acting itself out.

O: But was there not something just incredibly gratifying? Because as a teenager, you wouldn't have been able to really appreciate that kind of romance. Teenagers never can.

VS: No, you couldn't, that's true. But see I'm such a romantic, that it was just a part of my life.

O: But you were able in your 50's, which some people would say is the prime of a woman's life.

VS: I know, I think it was.

O: Yeah. You sort of had the love of your life in the middle of your life.

VS: I did.

O: But you only cried for three days, so you must've been able to get over it.

VS: Oh yes, I'd go out-of-doors (laughs). I built a pond, I think. I think that's when I built that pond. I do something active, out-of-doors.

O: Okay, so that was one time you were with somebody you actually loved. You said there was two, what was the other time? Was it before or after that?

VS: I've never been with him since, they've always been somebody I'm in love with that I can't have.

O: But you had another one; was it before or after? What was his name? Oh, you don't want to say his name, that's okay.

VS: No, no name.

O: So was the other person before this Greek god or after? Or during?

VS: Let me see. That's the only real love affair that lasted, off and on for 11 years I've ever had.

O: But you've been in love several times.

VS: Yes.

O: And you said a few minutes ago that you'd been in love, but only two times had you been able to actually be with the person that you were in love with.

VS: Really I guess that's the only real time.

O: Well how did you handle being passionately in love with somebody you couldn't have? What did you do?

VS: It’s a terrible sadness. I lived my life just the way I do, I'm very active. I told you I love nature, I love the out-of-doors, I love my animals, I love my children. I have a host of friends. But at times I'm terribly lonely. Because I'm a woman who should have been married all my life.

O: How do you reconcile that with –

VS: It’s just the life I was granted.

O: So you regard it as sort of the –

VS: Fate. In a way, I mean...

O: I'm jumping way ahead, but it seems like it might be appropriate to ask now, at least about romantic relationships. Do you have regrets about that your decision to marry somebody you didn't love? Did that –

VS: I didn't know I didn't love him; I was too young and too inexperienced to know that. And I didn't know the side of him that I became aware of after I was married. He was great fun; we were up on the Hudson River and we had to stay on duty until 11 o'clock because we had a rec hall where the kids danced and did everything. And we would go sit on the Hudson River and troll for whatever – I've forgotten what we did. I thought he was the most romantic man I ever saw, I mean he could think of more things to do. I went into New York and spent a weekend with him once. He had an apartment in New York before I was married. And I thought he was so romantic. And I mean, he was the most sophisticated man I thought I'd ever seen. And could think of such fun things to do. And it disappointed me terribly, because once we were married, I knew all he wanted – he had a vast appetite. And he just wanted everything ship shape, he wanted his meals exactly seven o'clock, 12 o'clock, six o'clock. And I spent my life cooking, cooking, cooking. And he was very energetic, and he did a lot to this place himself. I taught him to garden; he'd never gardened before but he became an avid gardener so we were constantly out-of-doors. I told somebody when I tried to divorce him 20 years before. I called it unfortunate and I said, "I just can't live like this the rest of my life. I've got to divorce him." And Ed was a friend of both of us, so he wouldn't take the case. He said, "You don't need to divorce him, you've got too much in common." And everybody discouraged me, and finally I thought, "I can't live like this till I'm an old woman." Because every day was destroyed before it started from his temper. From just being mad at somebody, or the children. He was not good verbally to the children; he beat them down. My mother always said he was jealous of them.

O: Of your time, that you gave them?

VS: Yes. Of my time with the children.

O: Well how did he handle your career?

VS: He said the University of Georgia ruined me. When he divorced, the children put him in an apartment right over here. He had plenty of money, but I got the house thanks to Bob.

O: Bob your son?

VS: Yes. I wasn't going to get anything – he was gonna take the house and everything if he could. And we wrote out of the divorce, and Bob snatched it up – he got the best divorce lawyer in town against me, and we were going to court. And I had to go through the deposition and everything, which

I hated.

O: How was he going to take everything? On what grounds?

VS: No grounds. He just – I was the one who wanted the divorce, and he had a good lawyer. A good divorce lawyer. And if I wanted to divorce him, I could divorce him and that's it. So anyway, Bob went down to the lawyer's office, grabbed that thing that they want to sign that I can have the house, cause my lawyer didn't get together. And Bob grabbed it off the lawyer's desk, looked at Danny and said, "sign this. You're not taking the house, Mama's getting the house." And so Bob just said sign it, and he signed it. So I got the house but nothing else. So I had just my University teaching salary for years.

O: When did you start teaching at UGA? That's another category but it's related.

VS: 1964. I retired in '88.

O: You moved in Athens in '40 something. 1940 –

VS: '46. '46 I moved here. Not '41, '46.

O: '46 you moved here, so you already had your children?

VS: Yes.

O: But did you work outside the home before you got your job at UGA? When you were married, were you --

VS: No. I didn't.

O: So you went to work in '64, and did he resent that? Your teaching at UGA?

VS: I went back to school for something to do. When my children got in school, my mind was always active and I always was reading and studying. And I stood in the kitchen and I educated – my brother came to live with me while I was married, and got a degree at the University of Georgia in Forestry. Then, Jose, my nephew in Brazil, he went to Suwanee and Suwanee was not the place for him because of the language problem. And it's high standards. And he had to dress in coat and tie everyday. But my brother wrote and said, "Would you let him go to University of Georgia and live with you?" So Jose lived here for – my Brazilian nephew – he lived here for five years I guess. He got his Masters degree in Geneology living here. So I sent him though school. And I was sitting here one day, and I thought, "Well I'm educating all these people and I just have a two year degree. two years. What will I do? I'm going back to University." So I was 37 years old when I went – no, '52 I went back and got an undergraduate degree. And then taught.

O: In 1952?

VS: In 1954, when I graduated. I taught at University High, and I taught at Athens High for three years after that. So that's four years. And then I decided to go back and get a Masters. I went back to University – they needed English teachers so terribly. And I went over, and he said, "If you'll work on

your Masters and get your Masters, we'll do a lot of this. You could start teaching right now." So I taught Freshman English, and got a degree at the same time. And then I got my ABD; I don't have a Dr.ate. Because they would've fired me if I had gotten my Dr.ate at the University. They won't take there own. And I couldn't go away with a family and children, so I just kept going back taking classes. And I taught 27 years at the University.

O: Were you ever able to teach anything besides Freshman Composition?

VS: I taught Sophomores. I taught Literature. I never had to teach Freshman 101 – 102 is writing going on Literature. And I would've just as soon teach that as Shakespeare, cause you had poetry, drama, and short stories. So you actually taught Literature, and then their writing grew out of Literature.

O: Did you write, yourself?

VS: No, I have written. I've written a whole biography somewhere; I've still got to work on it.

O: An autobiography?

VS: I've written an autobiography. It's mostly a family biography. I took every separate entity in my relationship with them, and then Mama's and Papa's relationship in the home and the family. And then I took the sisters because they were all very interesting, and it's inter-woven with my reactions with them.

O: Did you publish it?

VS: No, I haven't finished it. It's somewhere, somebody typed it up for me. I think its over in that dresser. I put it there a few years ago and I haven't thought of it again.

O: You need to think of it again!

VS: I know.

O: So, you started teaching in '64 at the University. And you didn't divorce until '72, so you taught for eight years. How did you handle, whether it was going to school, or teaching and doing everything that you had to do to please him – which was to be perfect, have everything perfectly arranged and have all these perfect meals –

VS: Well, he traveled. He started traveling and was home just on the weekends. And that's why my mother said, "Why would you divorce him? He's just here on the weekend." And I said I didn't divorce him; I think I was a coward. I didn't have my degree at the time, I couldn't have supported myself and the children. And he wouldn't have given me a dime, I knew that. And I think that's cowardice.

O: Well, you mean on his part?

VS: No, my part.

O: Oh, well do you think he had affairs while he was gone? Did you ever suspect that?

VS: Oh, I know he did. I got letters; I intercepted letters about it. The first time I did, I went into the closet and cried.

O: Do you think he was in love with the person? Or was it just an affair?

VS: No. I'm not sure that he had – I don't know whether he – I know it wasn't romantic love, anyway. I think he may have loved me as deeply as anybody could love of his nature. Because when I divorced, I mean it just tore him completely up. I mean he just fought it and fought it. Took me three years to get the divorce.

O: But your children were behind you?

VS: They became – I waited until they all were married before I divorced, because I thought it would tear the children up. I think it tore them up as much as if they'd been children, cause their loyalties are torn in a divorce. I found out what it is – You're supposed to love your daddy, whether you do or not, you're supposed to, you know. And so once I divorced him, he became clingy to the children. And just had them over all the time and just – he never was good to them in the marriage, but that's one of the reasons I divorced him. But he became dependent on them, and just went to Bob's office everyday. Finally, Bob called Pat and told him he had to come home from California and help him take care of his dad. That he was in his office everyday. So Patrick came and lived with him.

O: He wasn't married? Patrick?

VS: Not at the time, he wasn't. He was divorced. And he came and brought the two children, and lived in across the street in an apartment. And divorce is a terrible thing emotionally, no matter whether you love him or you don't. It's a terrible thing, I realized. It tore my life apart.

O: But was it worth it?

VS: Oh, yes. I couldn't have lived that way. Oh mercy, yes. Oh no, my life has really been happy. I'm extremely happy. I've lived a happy life ever since the divorce. I was happy even while I lived with him because he did travel, and took care of this place and built ponds and just did everything. Working mostly, is what I did. And having romances in my head.

O: So did your children reconcile those conflicted feelings about him?

VS: They did, and I'm so happy about that. He became dependent on them, before he died. And that was a blessing, because they became the controllers, you know.

O: So the tables turned.

VS: The tables turned. And they reconciled, and they still – I think they now remember everything that was good, and I'm glad.

O: So he never remarried?

VS: No, neither of us ever remarried.

O: And you couldn't remember when he died, but you thought it was in the '80s sometime. They would've been in their '40s.

VS: Oh yes, they were all married before I divorced.

O: Did you ever consider getting back together with him?

VS: No.

O: So you were really sure when you –

VS: Oh, mercy. I was extremely sure. My friends told me, said, “we're gonna get a divorce next week if it turns people into the kind of person you are now. If we could be as happy as you are.” (laughs)

O: So they saw the relief.

VS: Oh, they saw me being myself again. My oldest brother, Robert; not my oldest, but the one I was close to came to me. He said, “Virginia, you've got to do something. This man is changing your whole nature, you're not yourself anymore.” I was sad. And pretty wretched, really, even though I never showed it.

O: But your brother knew it.

VS: My brother knew it.

O: And your children knew it. Did you ever feel like they held you accountable? Or were they ever conflicted?

VS: Sally did. Sally and I – Sally took her father's side, cause he always spoiled the girl. He was very hard on both boys, just terribly hard on them. Verbally – they could do nothing right, ever. But Sally never got that, and so Sally really took his side in the divorce. And Sally and I weren't close until maybe 15 years ago, and we're very close now. She understands, because she's divorced now too. And I think she understands everything, but she didn't then. They didn't think daddy could live alone. I'd taken care of him all his life, you know what I mean, really. And they didn't think he was capable of living alone. They thought Mama had just deserted him. But Bob came to me and said, “How did you stand it as long as you did?” But I did because I had this place. And I had the University. And I had the study, and everything like that. And I had a life outside of the marriage so it was wonderful.

O: How was it for you when he died?

VS: I was sad. Not sad to lose him, I was sad the way he died. The way he had to die, because he was almost helpless.

O: What did he die from?

VS: Congestive heart failure, and he drank; I didn't tell you he was an alcoholic. He was an alcoholic.

O: Throughout your marriage?

VS: Oh, throughout the marriage. He started drinking when he was 19. But he held prestigious jobs –

he worked out of Washington.

O: So after being recreation superintendent –

VS: Oh yes. He went to jobs outside – when he stopped doing the recreation, he went with the Air Force and he became the liaison between the Air Force and every city in the southeast. And he traveled constantly. And he was never – even though he drank, and I knew he drank on weekends and he drank at night. You never knew it – his coworkers never knew that he'd had the alcohol. His mind stayed exactly the same. He smoked a pipe, and you never knew; you could not tell. I knew, but most people could not tell. And he held two very prestigious jobs after that for years, working out of Washington DC.

O: So you were sad when he died because he died –

VS: Well, I was sad because of what he did. Gene Connell and Dorothy, but Gene in particular was his best friend in the world – I think I was in love with Gene, too. I told you, I'm always in love with somebody. And he'd take me down the river and do all this stuff that I loved to do.

O: Was his wife jealous?

VS: No. Never, never a bit.

O: Because you were her friend too?

VS: I was her friend too, and she was always interested in Bridge and French and stuff like that. And never wanted to go down to the river or do anything out-of-doors. And so I was his outdoor companion, and she didn't care at all.

O: Now how old were you then? When that was going on?

VS: While I was back at the University, so I was in my late '50's probably.

O: This was after the Greek god?

VS: Oh, this was before the Greek god.

O: Maybe during? Maybe you were –

VS: Maybe during, I don't know. Could've been. But what was I gonna tell you about Gene – Oh I was going to tell you. When Wayne died, he requested cremation of course. He requested that I not come to his memorial service. I was not to be there. And he requested that his ashes be taken to my favorite river in the world, the (?). And thrown in the Alapaha that I had enjoyed with Gene. More than anything in my life.

O: Was he jealous of Gene?

VS: No. I don't think he was ever jealous of anybody because I never did anything actively. I was just – romantically in my head in love with all these people that I could've been so happy with.

O: But why would he want his ashes spread in the Alapaha?

VS: Don't tell me – I don't know. He loved Gene, too. He really did. And I never knew. I think – maybe I better not say it. It was because it was my beloved river.

O: But now he said that he actually came for holidays until he died.

VS: He did.

O: So why would he not want you at his memorial service if he could bear to be with you?

VS: I don't know. I didn't know that, but I went anyway. I had a big, black woman that I loved, Maddy – stayed with my for 20 or 30 years just once a week, but we were close. And she said, "What do you mean you're not going, of course you're going! Get yourself ready, I'm going too." (Laughs). So Maddy and I – he had a lot of Washington friends – men respected him and admired him a lot. He had more men friends than anything else. And all those Washington people who were close to him all those years came, and I sat over here on this side and all his friends sat on this side. And Maddy and I went in and sat on this side. But then when they took his ashes, I was requested that I not go. And I remember being in that bedroom and feeling so sad, because I just felt so alone. With all the children; he'd gotten all the children down to my favorite place in the world, and I was sitting here alone. And it – I just felt wretched about the whole divorce and everything else. Not that I ever would have gone and remarried, no. I couldn't live with his grouchiness. He spoiled days, and he spoiled the children's days. But, as Mama said, "Well, he's gone all the time except weekends."

O: Was she alive when you all divorced?

VS: Yes. I think she was.

O: Well, you said she died in '64...

VS: No, she wasn't then. But I was threatening to divorce the whole time. And I found that letter from this woman while she was here, and then I knew I had grounds. Cause I found three of em. And I was going to take those to a lawyer. But I didn't; Mama talked me out of that. But women liked him, a lot.

O: Was he handsome?

VS: No, had those beautiful legs! (Laughs). But he was well built and he smoked a pipe and he was completely bald.

O: He looked distinguished though.

VS: Wasn't bad looking, but I mean he wasn't handsome. He was handsome in a way I guess bald headed men can be handsome. But he had those beautiful legs, those Greek legs.

O: Do you have pictures of him?

VS: Somewhere, I don't know where. Sally's got pictures of the whole family. I think mine's in a drawer somewhere. It's a picture. I think I know what it is. I need to go to the bathroom, so I'll – Break ----------

O: In Madison?

VS: Tour of homes in Madison; first year I came here. And all these southern women had white hair, they were completely made up with rouge, lipstick, everything. They didn't look as if they'd ever been out-of-doors. I was just appalled. And they were all so polite, and so – I don't know. It was not a bit the way I grew up to be. Or any of my old relatives, they were still – it was like a facade; like a southern facade.

O: Well since we're talking about it, can we switch to that? Talk about – we're not finished with marriage and motherhood but can we just talk about – well, I'll just ask the way I generally ask it. If you were to have to describe or explain to somebody outside this country. I mean, in this country, there's an awareness that the southern region, people are different, you know. And you kind of understand what that means, although a lot of people think it's over done. But outside the country, like say in Asia, maybe. In Europe, they do have some awareness of the southern United States being different. But lets just say an Asian; you had to explain to your friend from China, for instance, the difference between a southerner and somebody from California or New England, or whatever. How would you do that?

VS: Well, I think I'd have to take my impressions of a southern woman when I first came to Athens in 1946. They never seem to go outside; they live mostly in the house. They mostly stay dressed up for the occasion with makeup on; the ones I knew. They never thought of hiking. But once that's a facade. And once I got to know the women well, they're just like women everywhere. They just are more repressed, I think, than women in other parts of the country. And stayed that way for a while. Now I see no difference whatsoever.

O: Okay, but certainly, Virginia has always considered itself southern. But how does a Virginia southerner differ from a Georgia southerner to you? Not now, because you say that now you don't see that. But lets say 40 years ago.

VS: Well 40 years ago, I had a sister living in Richmond. And I visited a lot, but I was a teenager. And as far as places like Richmond, Virginia, and Athens, Georgia, or Atlanta, Georgia, you would see almost no difference. They usually had a lot of interest, I believe, and were more worldly in that they traveled more probably.

O: Virginia women?

VS: Virginia women. But there was not too much difference. The reason, as a Virginia woman, the mountain region was always very different. In the mountain region, the people – the women – have always been very independent. Because they had to work alongside the men from early times. So they were not protected by the men the way southern women in cities were, that lived in grand

homes, you know. I suspect that the people we would see – the very ordinary people in low income – I expect they lived mostly alike everywhere they are. I think it's just the upper class that make this distinction, and dress, and attitudes, and manners toward men, toward being independent. I believe that.

O: Okay, lets just take that class of people. I mean I appreciate your making that distinction, because so often women just get lumped in a category of people when in fact there are as many different categories of women as there are categories of men. So I'm glad you made that distinction. But lets just take then that middle and upper class of women. You think that the Virginia women are more worldly, and Georgia women/South Carolina women/deep south women are more repressed.

VS: More repressed and more protected. And want to be protected.

O: Now why do you think that is? You've been here for many years. Why do you think it's so?

VS: I'm trying to think, I really...

O: Have you asked that question to yourself?

VS: Yes. But I always – the answer in my mind was that we were always reared in a different way, to be so terribly independent. And in Roanoke – I knew people in Roanoke, and they were more independent too. It seems to me that I don't think that really southern women – I don't think they speak their minds. I think they are bred from the time they're young as girls, to let the men have complete precedence, even if it's the boys in the family. And they stay quiet, they don't state their opinions very much. And I don't know why that is, except that they were trained like that. "Oh, let the men speak. Hush. Hush", you know. And that's the only thing I can figure, you know. And they had servants; I bet you this is part of it. They had servants so they didn't have to work. They didn't have to be independent; they had cooks who cooked for them. All they had to do in the upper classes, years and years ago in the south, they all had slaves and if not slaves they had servants. And the servants spoiled them. It might have a lot to do with having servants, you know that?

O: Okay, sure.

VS: I just now thought of that.

O: Others have said – what we've discovered is that they – even women with servants and slaves, most women still did a lot of work. They still had a lot of work to do. There is no doubt that having that much help with the work made a difference, and the understanding that white woman was sort of almost the mother even to the slaves and the servants. I mean she had to be this maternal figure to these people.

VS: Yeah, that's true.

O: So she was given part of the pedestal – you know, pedestal phenomenon? And so it was

supposed to be an elite position and place to be, but of course women – actually a lot of women who pretended not to know better knew better, I think all along. Sometimes they just played the game because to fight it was, you know, you were fighting a system that was – They finally did.

VS: Very few people who would always fight. We had a cousin, who grew up in a very wealthy Kentucky family, a southern family, and she bucked the whole system. She was the first woman ever to put on nickers; women's pants – baggy nickers – and came and rode astride. And in my part of the country, no woman ever rode astride. I still have my grandmother's side saddle, because it was unseemly for a woman to straddle a horse. And she'd jump on a horse and jump on a man's saddle and go galloping anywhere she wanted to. And she was reared in one of those families that we would call – what we're talking about – where it was servants with everything. So part of it may be personality.

O: Well, sure. It's all those variables of course. But was your family strongly identified with the State of Virginia or were they more identified with being southern? Did that mean anything?

VS: No, we were more Virginian. We never considered ourselves – we never talked about being in the south. We were, we knew, and we considered ourselves very southern, but completely unlike Georgia as I found it when I came here. The women had almost no freedoms that I could see.

O: Here in Georgia?

VS: Here in Georgia; in Athens when I came. For instance, one snowy day, it was impossible to get a car or do anything, so I started to walk. I wasn't going to walk all the way to town, but I was going to walk into the shopping center, just for the fun of being out in the snow and to get something I wanted. And that's the 1940's. And do you know there were a few cars out, and to see a woman walking alone out in the snow meant that she was a tramp, probably. And two cars stopped and the men tried to pick me up. And I was just horrified. I thought, "can I even walk in the snow?" And I was just shocked by the whole thing. And I found out then, no woman in Athens ever walked. At night, they wouldn't let me walk, even on Cob Street. They said, "Oh, no woman walks alone at night." And so it was the lack of freedom of movement that I noticed more than anything else.

O: And did you find a way to challenge that without necessarily getting yourself into some kind of trouble or whatever? Did you find a way –

VS: Yes, I always did. I challenged it by buying this place that I call the farm, and leaving all of that. All people did was play bridge. And I didn't know how to play bridge. And because I was the wife of the superintendent of recreation, the whole city thought 'we have to invite them to dinner', do you know what I mean? I knew everybody. Because the board was all the important people in Athens. Who had gotten this together. And we were invited out constantly. I'd come home crying; I couldn't stand it. I

went to eight tables of bridge, progressive bridge, and I could hardly play bridge; Wayne had taught me all I knew. And I sat there at the end table not progressing at all, and finally I threw my cards that night and walked out the door crying. I did! And just said, “I can't play this. I can't do this.” Just threw my cards and walked out.

O: What was the fallout from that?

VS: They just thought I was kind of crazy or peculiar. But not much fallout, I mean they really – most of these people were not the powers that be, if you know what I mean. And I don't know why people – I've always wondered why they accepted me so readily when I was so different in my attitudes.

O: Well why do you think that is? Because that's one of the questions I've been mulling over in my mind as we met. What was it that made you acceptable when you were so different?

VS: I was intelligent. I did everything everybody else did, you know what I mean. Except play bridge; I didn't play bridge. But otherwise, and really I think I was interesting. Because they couldn't imagine a woman of education and intelligence, coming out to this old place. It was miles out; Dean Tate told my husband, said, “You can't do that. You can't take her out that far from town. Tramps get off of that railway, you can't take her out that far.” And so they thought I was a curiosity, because they knew the other side of me. I mean I taught Sunday school, I went to the Presbyterian church. You know –

O: You were safe. Relatively safe because you weren't Godless.

VS: Oh, no. And they were fascinated. I really think they were fascinated. By the chickens, by the cow, by the fact that a woman who could teach and eventually play bridge, would still be milking a cow. It was an anomaly.

O: Did you entertain here much?

VS: We always had very close friends. Our best friends were the Bedgoods, who lived very near us. And then all these older women that were always bored would come at five o'clock with white gloves. I mean all dressed, seriously, for five o'clock visit. That's when you visited in Athens. At five o'clock, you didn't have to call; if they weren't home, you left a calling card. Everybody had a little silver bowl for calling cards. And I might be – I remember one time, Pat had his foot in a tub of water; he'd had a cup, and we were remodeling this house. And here came three women with white gloves for an afternoon visit. And I was just appalled. But I always just acted as myself; well my child has come in the house.

O: Did they come on in?

VS: Oh yes! And then they'd invite me back. In fact, they'd have huge parties for us. And I hated every one of them, and I'd say, “I'm not going again.” And (?) would say, “You have to, this is gonna be our life here. You have to.”

O: How about your children? Were they ever –

VS: Well they were so little then, that they knew nothing about it. One was six months, one 19 months and one 4.

O: But as they got older and you – did it bother them?

VS: Yes. Yes. When Pat was about 14, he was sitting over by the fire and all of a sudden he said, “Mama, you've ruined our lives.” And I said, “what have I done?” He said, “You've made us country children.” He said, “everybody I know lives in the city, they all study together at night, they all go in groups. I just live out in the country; I'm a country hick.”

O: How old was he when he said this?

VS: 14.

O: What'd you say?

VS: I said, “Well let me tell you something, Pat. Even birds can decide where they want to live. I wanted to live out here, and hoped you all would.” But I said, “If you have any resources, you can choose your place to live. And if you're unhappy, I'll just go right in the middle of Five points and I'll buy me one of those brick houses right in the middle of it. And you can study with your friends at night and do anything else they do.” And he just went white (laughs). And I would have done it. He never mentioned it from then on, and then when he got to be about 15 or 16, they could drive, and this became the house where all the teenagers gathered. Sometimes my house was so full, I didn't have room to walk.

O: I was going to say, I would have expected that young kids would have loved coming out here.

VS: Oh they did! There were times I really did – Pat would sometimes take his to the river or they would go outside with groups of five or six boys. But Bob brought all his right here, and I'd been teaching all day. And I was tired, it was about 4:30 or so. And I came in my living room, and they were all piled up on the couches; I mean sprawled out. They were in late high school, they didn't get up when I walked in the house. And all of a sudden I became terribly angry, that I didn't have a place to go that was peaceful after teaching all day. And I stomped my foot. And I stood like that, and I said, “I want to tell you all something, boys. This is my home, I've been working all day. You're sprawled out here as if it were a country inn. It’s not, it’s my home.” And I said, “from now on, you're welcome to come, but you come and you knock at that door. And if it’s convenient for you to visit, that'll be fine. If it’s not convenient, I'll tell you so.” Well, they got deathly quiet. And they all went out. And one of em, who lives here now, went out in the next year or two and went to Australia. And he stayed about 10 or more– 15 maybe. And when he came back, he came out here and he said, “You know that was the saddest day of my life.” He said, “we weren't permitted to do that at our houses, but it was our country

inn.” And said, “I was so sad, that changed my life.” And I didn't care! I had a life too. And so they all came back, eventually. They were still friends, but I just couldn't have that any longer and if there'd been a man here, they would never have done that.

O: Had you and your husband divorced?

VS: Yes.

O: Okay. So how did Bob respond to that?

VS: He was upset. But one night, he had a whole group of em here, and Sally and I were here and we went to bed – it was a spend the night party, I think. And they got to talking really ugly, like late teenage boys can do, telling old, nasty tales. And Bob stood up and he said, “My mother and my sister are sleeping in this house; I hope they're asleep, but you don't talk like this. My mother and sister are here.” And I was proud of him for doing that. But I think it took its toll on the children, I'm sorry to say. Because they didn't have that group of close friends and my mother, when she came to visit, she said, “Virginia, Sally's staying too much alone. She needs groups of friends, she needs little girls around.” And Mama was conscious that they were pretty isolated. But they're so happy now that I stuck to it. They love it and everybody else loves it. But it was unusual then.

O: So you paid a price for the freedom that you had?

VS: I paid a price.

O:You paid a price, but it’s paid off, has it not?

VS: It did.

O: I mean it seems like now...

VS: I mean it’s the middle of town, now! (Laughs). But I'd never forget Dean Tate, telling Wayne, “Don't take that woman out there, it’s not safe.” And it was country. It was complete country; the little country store up there, two houses up here with older people whose husbands had died. And that’s all – there were three houses on this whole hill.

O: Were you ever afraid out here? Without your husband –

VS: Oh, mercy yes. I was so afraid, because the doors weren't safe then. And not very safe now, but I couldn't lock some of them. And I'd wake up in the night and here noises that frightened me, and I'd get the pistol – I have a pistol still by my bed. And I'd get the pistol, and I'd see that all the children were alright. And I'd sit there with the pistol, just nearly shaking.

O: This was in the –

VS: Early 50's. Late 40's, early 50's.

O: Well, your husband would have still been here by then. Or would he have been traveling?

VS: He'd be traveling. He traveled all their lives, since Maude was eight years old, he was gone

Monday morning and came back Friday at night. So I was alone with those three young children most of the time.

O: Well did you ever, because of that fear, consider selling and buying in town?

VS: No. I erased it the next morning. I did have one break-in in all the time I've lived here. I had spent the night with Bob, that night, I believe. The night before, I left a bag of – a weekend bag in a chair. And I came home from teaching and I'd gone to teaching straight, and hadn't come home. I came home and found that door – glass all over the floor, that door broken into. I found nothing in the house disturbed, but every TV and every radio I had – people had been under the beds unplugging them. And they'd stolen and thrown some things around. And the door – broken glass all over. Well, that frankly scared me to death. And I wouldn't stay here for a week. I called the police; the police came and they said, “We cannot burglar proof your house. The windows are too low, so the only way you can do it is to put iron bars on em.” And I've had a German Shepard, I've always – until now, last year my German Shephrd died; I've always had big German Shepards, which helped. And people were afraid to come up – they said, “That dog will get you.” But I had many fearful nights.

O: So being afraid –

VS: Was a part of life. (Laughs)

O: That's right – you weren't afraid of being afraid.

VS: No. I'm over that now.

O: Well, I was going to ask if you had decided you just weren't going to get another dog?

VS: I want to get a German Shepard but I've got to get one old enough that he won’t knock me down. And so I've been to see one.

O: One that's already trained.

VS: Yes. And he started jumping up and down and I knew I couldn't have him.

O: So you're in the market.

VS: I'm in the market.

O: Well, I want to go back to mothering, but I want to ask you some questions about – you just spoke to the sort of cultural differences of southerners. But you can talk about all the things that make the south southern all day, and ignore the big issue of race. And the south, of course, is identified – I mean any thinking person knows it’s not limited to the south, racial prejudice. But the south is certainly heavily identified with troubled race relations. And so my question is: Scholars try to figure out how do we become aware of what it means to be white or black? We all know that when you live in the south, there's certain etiquette for white people and a certain educate for black people and you don't cross it whether you are white or black. The consequences for if you're black could have been

much more dangerous, but both races had a particular code of behavior that they observe. And a lot of people – a lot of writers who write about race relations in the south and just racial identity in the south, write about the time they became aware of what it meant, you know. What it meant to be white, or what it meant to be black. That there's a time, typically it's in childhood. I talked to somebody recently who said she wasn't aware of it until she was a teenager –

VS: Well, I'm dying to tell you a story. I was about five years old, and we always had blacks who worked for us. And – in the house, and out too. And they brought their children with them. And I must've been under 7, I'd have to be – Papa died, I must've been about 4. And we were in the garden, and we always had what was called a flower pit. And you dug a deep hole in the ground; it had steps on it, and in the winter, you put your geraniums and all your beautiful summer flowers in the flower pit and covered it up. Well that day, Ollie, who was the black woman who worked for my mother, had brought her little boy who was just my age – we were the same age, and his name was Hanson. And Hanson and I were watching Papa put the flowers into that flower pit. And all of a sudden our hands were right together, because we were kneeling down and had our hands on the wood part. And I'll never forget it; I looked over, and I remember it still because I remember it later from Papa. And I patted his hand, and I said, "poor little black hand." And that's the first time I had an understanding that his skin was different from my skin. Cause we were children and we were doing the same thing. And I said, "poor little black hand."

O: Now, what made it a poor little black hand? Did that –

VS: Yes, the color! Because you didn't want to get dirty – here we'd get dirty and your hands are black, you've got to go wash em off. And I realized his hands wouldn't wash off from the dirt. It still stayed black. And so I patted it, and said, "poor little black hand." I'll never forget that. He looked at me real funny.

O: So in your mind, even as a four year old, you were expressing – I'm asking – you were expressing a recognition that there were consequences from his black hand?

VS: Yes. It's that there must be! I must've known that, or I wouldn't have been so sorry that he had black skin.

O: So you felt, that it sounds like there was an element of compassion there.

VS: Oh it was. He was my little friend, and here, he's got black hands! I guess I sort of said they were dirty, probably.

O: So that's really early.

VS: I'll never forget that.

O: (Story of own experiences, ignorance of whites)

VS: You know I don't tell this, but I examine myself thoroughly, and I have still retained a little prejudice. Sally working for Delta had black friends, and I didn't quite understand that close relationship. It was so strong in my childhood. We loved em, but they weren't a part of the family at all. We always had them around, they taught us to dance, they taught us to do the Charleston, everything. But I still retain, in spite of everything I do, I retain a memory of that, and I'm conscious of that.

O: Well, I think that we're fooling ourselves if we say we're not.

VS: I do too.

O: See, a person who says they're color blind is blind to their own –

VS: I wonder about that.

O: Yeah. But you see, I think it goes both ways. Or it goes all ways.

VS: I do too.

O: You know, the difference is that it's usually white people who've held the power, so, that's a major dynamic there. But to say you're color blind now, is really dismissed as foolhardiness.

VS: Well, I've got a lot of stories regarding this.

O: Well, if you will tell them, it would be helpful to hear them.

VS: Oh, I will. My mother, years ago – years before the question you know. When I rode the train or the bus home, there was a different car for the blacks on the train. But in the bus, they had to go to the backseat, always. No white ever sat in the back. And Bloomfield(?), West Virginia was free. They could sit anywhere they wanted to. But once we came through Bluefield from Kentucky, they would get up, leave their seat, and go to the back once you cross to the Virginia line. And I watched them do this many a time. And it was accepted, I just knew that's what they had to do. But my mother, who was the most generous, wonderful woman in the world, years and years ago – a black woman was on the bus, and everybody if she sat down people moved, and left her alone – they wouldn't sit by her. And she was about midway – it was when they didn't have to sit in the backseat. The bus driver would tell them to go to the back, you know. And Mama went over and got up out of her seat and went over and sat with that black woman and conversed with her the rest of the bus trip. So she was that kind of woman. I grew up with people who –

O: So your mother was crossing the race line before it was popular to cross the race line.

VS: Oh, oh far beyond. Because she didn't think it was right.

O: So, okay. Well see, that is an incredible statement there. Just that –

VS: It is, and it was to me. But she was such a kind, wonderful human that it didn't matter what she's supposed to do, here was a lonely person everybody was avoiding. And so she'd cross any line to do

what she thought was right.

O: Now, your mother died in 1964 so she did not – she died the year the civil rights act –

VS: Yeah, she never saw it. But she did call me – or wrote me one time, and told me that the high school in Floyd now had black students in it. And that they were riding the bus together.

O: What did she think about that?

VS: She thought it was fine.

O: Did you remember – was there any acknowledgment in your household or among your family – you were married by then. But when the *Brown vs Board of Education* passed in '54, did you – that eventually meant that the schools would have to be desegregated. Do you remember anything about that?

VS: Oh mercy, I'll tell you another story – I'm full of stories! I was teaching at the University the year they first integrated – Charlayne [Gault-Hunter] and Hamilton.[Holmes]

O: You were here?

VS: I was teaching at the time. And so Sally and I went, because they were demonstrating at the University and I had to pick her up at Art school. She had a night class or something. And we got as far as Baxter Hill, and the streets were just full of a mob scene. Because they were surrounding the house where Carlene Hunter was supposed to be living. And it was a mob scene – they were going to get her out of there. And Sally and I were stuck in that traffic, and watched the whole thing. We finally got through, but a friend of mine – Francis Wallace – sneaked her out of where she was living at the dormitory, and took her over to Francis's who was an old maid living in an apartment. And took her over to her house and that's where Charlayne stayed a long time.

O: So there was a white mob who wanted to get to Charlayne?

VS: Oh yes, oh yes. It was a terrible mob scene. I was frightened. And then the police had to escort her to every class. She and Hamilton both had a police escort for the first two or three weeks that they entered the University. They took them back and forth between classes – this police escort. But now's the funny story. They finally became sort of accepted that a few were going to come. So usually, if they had a problem, I always told the head of the department; they always gave them to me. So I went into class one day; the first day of class at the university. And here there was one black, and they had completely isolated him. He was sitting in the back row and all the other students had come just as close to the front as they could, and it was only 18 – it was 36 room, and only about 18 students. And here he was, like in the bus, clear in the back seat. And I thought, "Oh, my God. I can't have this. What am I going to do?" And I was thinking this fast. "I'll alphabetize them." So the first name – I call em Mister and Miss, all of em all my life while I talk to them. And the first name was

a Mister Black and I said, “Mister Black.” That was his name. The students put their heads down on their desks, and he had to come all the way up and sit in that first seat. And I had to keep a strait face. I will never forget that as long as I live.

O: What a story. Now what did the other students think?

VS: Well, they were tickled! They thought it was the greatest – funiest thing in the world that he would be Mr. Black. They knew what was going on.

O: Well how did it affect him?

VS: He ignored it completely. He just got up and walked in a very dignified way to the front seat and immediately I started naming E's and – as fast as I could to get a seating assignment, you know.

O: And then did they stay alphabetized for the rest of the –

VS: Oh it was alright. Once he became a part of the class and had his seat, it was fine. But they were isolating him. It was about the 3rd person after Charlayne and Hamilton.

O: Do you think your mother's willingness to sit with that woman on the bus influenced you to where you would –

VS: Yes.

O: Because you didn't have to do that. I've heard stories of people who just allowed that kind of--

VS: Oh, no. I mean, I've always had to ????? what's not fair (?). And that was terrible – I thought it was awful to isolate any human being like that.

O: And did the rest of the semester or rest of the term –

VS: It went just fine, never had any problem whatsoever.

O: Did he do okay in his studies?

VS: Oh, he did great. Was a good student, did great. I don't know that I was (?????) with anybody, but gradually they accepted – it took awhile. But the other students finally accepted him. But let me tell you another story – a black story! It’s about blacks and whites. I always had a family that lived about two miles away who worked for me by days sometimes.

O: Here?

VS: Yes, oh yes. And Bob was about 11 I think. And I had some work to do down near the barn – we were doing something, I was working with the two little boys. And the little black boy was the son of a woman who worked for me. But he decided to come and help mom do something. So I was down there all day long with the little boys, doing things together. Well it got to be supper time and I knew the little boys had to have some food, so I put both their plates up and thought, “I can't separate that little boy and put him in the back room where they would ordinarily eat, you know, by choice.” And I thought, “I've got to put him at the table with Bob.” So I set two places on the table and put him in with

Bob. And they ate, I made him go in and wash up and I gave him a clean shirt of Bob's. And the two little boys sat there. Well, Rosa was the name of his aunt. She lived across the street from him. And she came back to work Monday morning and I mean she was mad as a wet hen. And she put her fist on the table, and she said, “I hear that you let Jerry sit at the table with you.” And I said, “Yes, they'd been working together so I let him eat with Bob.” And she said, “He'll never eat there again!” And the next time that little boy came, she jerked him up from where he was and put him in that back room and set his plate in the backroom.

O: Did you ask her why?

VS: You didn't have to. She was so entrenched, that blacks and whites had to be separated, that she wasn't about to let anybody cross that line – especially somebody she worked for.

O: Do you think it was because she feared what would be the consequences for him if he got in his mind that he could eat with white folks? That he might get –

VS: No, I think she was angry that I, as her mistress, would do that – would overstep the boundaries of race. I think they have a very great sense of position, too.

O: How do you think we learned that, though? Because you didn't have to – I talked to a 100 year old black woman who was apprenticed to a white family from the age of 8. Never left the family – she lives on their property to this day. Never married. But I said, “how did you know, at eight years old?” She said she knew – she never sat on the front porch, and she never ate. Not until the 1980's did she eat with members of that white family. Because they forced her to. But I said, “Well, how did you know?” She said, “Well, somehow I just knew what to do” – her sister was also living with this white family. But how do we come to know these things? Like I remember that myself asking how come Bill – the man who did the yard work – why do I have to take his plate out back? Why does he have to sit on the back porch step? You know. Nobody would ever answer that. The only thing that I would ever hear was that that was just the way things are, you know. That's just what we do. And so I'm just wondering, how do we know that, when nobody sits us down and instructs us?

VS: Well, I don't know. See before, I think I didn't know that – when I patted the little black hand. But I don't know why – I just thought I was sorry because his skin looked dirty. It was black instead of white. And white's a better color than black, in a child – or anybody's mind. You don't like black as a color.

O: So for you it’s an innate thing?

VS: I think it was.

O: That race was innate.

VS: Yeah. But boy, every-time I tried it it’s nearly backfired. When I let that little boy eat with Bob and

that woman came storming at me. “How dare you!!”

O: So were there other times that you tried to cross that race line before it became legally mandated that it backfired?

VS: Yes. At Christmas time, they used to bring foreign students in – they didn't have any place to go. So families would offer to let them stay through Christmas, with a family, instead of boarding them out in the University property. So I said yes; I would take an Indian student. And she was an older student – she might've been in her 30's. And she was cold black – you know some Indians are. And she was just cold black, but she had no other African – I mean Negro features. And she wore a sari, she taught us all how to tie a sari. And we took her to the country club for lunch – it was before Wayne and I were divorced. And there was one black woman who usually served us, and she was really nice – I liked her a lot. And you know, when she came to our table and saw that black woman sitting with us, she absolutely almost refused to serve us. She'd bring us our food, and then she'd bang her food – she'd bang her glass, she'd make a clatter. And you could tell she was furious because we had that black woman – And I don't know whether it’s because we've overstepped the line or it’s because they're jealous. Cause they're servants still and here you got somebody black sitting with you.

O: So did she recognize that she was Indian and not African?

VS: No. She didn't know. You couldn't tell the difference. She did have a sari on, but she was black. Really black. And so I've had some strange experiences with that.

O: So your experience has been that the most opposition came *from blacks*. The most opposition to integration came –

VS: Yes, to me, yes. That 'you don't do this, you're a white woman. You're my boss, you don't do this.'

O: That is interesting.

VS: I thought it was so interesting.

O: Okay, it sounds like – my question is do your opinions on race differ from those of your family of origin? But it sounds like your mother had pretty open minded ideas –

VS: Oh, she was completely open minded. Although they didn't eat with us. We had a big dinning room with a big round oak table, and we had another experience. Mama had a heart attack – this was before she died, about a year. And all we girls went home so we could change her bed everyday and put clean sheets and just keep her like a nurse would. So three of us went home, and it got to be a lot of work – washing and doing all those shirts and everything. Sheets I mean. And Mama said, “you children need help. It’s a big house. Go up to Floyd” and I don't think she said it, but we always called it 'Niggertown'. Should I say that?

O: You say whatever – of course!

VS: Well, that's what we called it. We didn't have many – the mountains didn't have many blacks. There was a very small community. And she said, “Go up there, and just find a little 15 or 16 year old girl. Just go up there and ask somebody, they'll wanna work.” So we went to Floyd, and we found this little – about 15 year old girl. And she said, “Oh yes, she'd love to come.” We told her it'd be washing dishes and things like that. So we got in the car and we brought her home. She was real cute. And we told Mama; she was in the house. And so we asked her to set the table in the dinning room. Well, (laughs) Mary, the redhead, who's still alive at 100, came back and she said, “Guess what? She's put her plate on the dinning room table with us.” There were just four of us with her. Said, “What are we gonna do? What are we gonna do?” And I thought – we went in to Mama's room and said, “Mama, she's put her plate in the dinning room with us, what should we do?” And Mama was such a funny woman, she covered up her head and said, “You figure it out.” (Laughs). So, for some reason, even though I was the youngest of em all, they sort of pointed to me. And I went cheerfully into the dinning room, and I said, “Oh, it’s such a beautiful day. Lets all take our plates and go have a picnic in the back yard.” So we all got our plates, so we didn't have to sit with her, and went over into grandmother's yard and had a picnic.

O: Now, that is interesting, for she didn't know...

VS: No, she never knew why.

O: No, no, but what I'm saying is that she didn't know not to put her plate. It sounds like it wasn't an act of defiance on her part, it was an act of –

VS: Oh, no! She thought she was supposed to.

O: Okay. But in Georgia, that would have never happened. You know. The fact that she was in a very small minority black community, she didn't have the same –

VS: Well, it was after integration.

O: Oh, I thought –

VS: No, it was after integration with the schools.

O: So you were an adult?

VS: Oh, I was married. All of us were.

O: Okay, I see. So what were you doing back in Floyd?

VS: Oh, we went to take care of Mama. A lot of us spent our summers up there, and Mama was ill and had had a heart attack, so three of us went home to take care of the situation.

O: And now who was Mary?

VS: Mary is the redhead who is still alive.

O: Your sister Mary?

VS: Sister Mary. Mary and Ann and I all went.

O: I didn't realize it was – so that would have been in the '70's?

VS: Yeah.

O: Well now, if your Mama was alive it would've been in the – cause she died in '64, so it would have been probably –

VS: But I think we integrated schools before '64.

O: You could've. A lot of schools integrated in '63.

VS: Well see, I think we did. So I think she had integrated by that time and had been eating in the cafeteria with the other students.

O: But your Mama – okay, that's interesting. That's interesting.

VS: Mama... "You go figure it out."

O: So your opinions on race relations, have they changed over time? I mean ,it sounds like you've had a relatively – you've been more open than most.

VS: We always tried to be open. I think we all knew it was wrong, you know what I mean. So we tried harder to be open, but there are certain barriers that we couldn't – I mean, they didn't eat with you.

O: Well does that bother you today? Do you have issues with it today?

VS: No, because Maddy was '85 when she started working for me. And I said, "Maddy, you're not going in that backroom. You and I love each other, we work together all day. We're gonna sit and we're gonna eat our lunch together. And so Maddy and I ate together for years. And except if company came, even if Pat, one of the children came, she would get up from the table and go in her backroom. She wouldn't eat if one of the children came, just she and I. She felt comfortable.

O: Would your children have had problems eating with her?

VS: No. No. It was Maddy.

O: Now how long did Maddy work for you?

VS: Thirty years or more.

O: So here in this house?

VS: Uh huh. Just one day a week. I had help full time; when I first came to Athens. You got em for seven hours a week. I paid em seven dollars – a dollar a day. And she was wonderful. And when I was gone once, she came to my house and kept the children for a week. And on Sunday, she took 'em home with her, and they all ate with her family.

O: Did you have a problem with that?

VS: No. And they didn't either.

O: Yeah. So do you think that having Barack Obama in the White House has helped race – has that

helped the issue of race?

VS: I don't think so, no.

O: Do you think it's made it worse?

VS: I don't think it made it any better. I think people – white people in particular – forget that he is black. He's so intelligent, and so well informed, and so unintrusive. Now if he were a different character, a more demanding character, more visible, you know what I mean. But I think he's almost invisible.

O: Well, he's tried not to make race an issue, you know. He's tried to keep it from being so much an issue. But you don't think it's helped? You don't think that people – being a very articulate, and in some ways brilliant black man, has –

VS: I don't think it has.

O: No. Okay. Well anytime a story comes into mind, just stop me and if it has anything to do with race, I want to hear it. But we'll kind of move on. Well before we went down that path of race identity and southern Identity, we were talking about motherhood – marriage and romance and children and so fourth. And you did, now, my question is how did you handle the "Double burden" or the burdens of home maker, and then you get this full time job teaching or, before that, you were going to school. So you had everything to do, so you had outside help. Did Maddy come and help you?

VS: Yes, Maddy helped me when I first started. After that, I had help just one day a week, usually. But I could get other help; they always had somebody to iron. I never did the ironing. Somebody was always, even at night, ironing and getting the children's clothes and everything ready.

O: Okay, so at least you had that kind of help. Was your husband – did he ever let up any on his expectations of how meticulous things would be, or –

VS: Well, no. He just traveled so much, that I didn't have to contend with that.

O: So that became a relief?

VS: Yes, oh yes.

O: Did you do much volunteer work or unpaid work?

VS: Yes, I thought I should volunteer. When I lived – I'll tell you another black story. When I lived here, I had a big black woman named Milly. And I lived in town on Franklin street. And Milly came to help with bathing the little tiny children; six months, 19 months. Just with everything but the cooking. And we all lived in one huge room with a youth bed, two baby beds, and our big bed; that's the only place available in Athens, Georgia. So Mily would come and help me in the daytime, and you always, in that day, had your help, the maids, go get a test to see if they had venereal diseases. So I sent her to get her health card, and she had Syphilis. And she was bathing my babies. Well I went berserk. I got

hysterical about it, cause to me it was just some horrible thing when you heard the word, you know what I mean. So I wrote my Dr. cussing and I told him, and he wrote me back and he said, “Virginia, there are not many ways to get that disease. And you know what they are. Bathing the babies is not going to hurt, so don't get hysterical about it. Go ahead and let her help you.” So I did. But then we sent at – one time, they sent people with syphilis to Alto. And there was a syphilitic – if that’s how you say it, clinic. So I sent Milly to Alto, and she got cured of syphilis.

O: Did they have to pay for treatment?

VS: I don't think they did, no. I think it was a free clinic for syphilis. But she got herself straightened out, and was rid of syphilis. And I don't know what I was telling you here, or for what.

O: Well, I was asking about you having help, for help in the house and you were telling me about –

VS: Yes, yes. So I did, and she did come full time.

O: Okay, did you all talk about that? You and Mily – did you all talk about the disease and –

VS: No, we didn't talk much, I remember. She was embarrassed about the whole thing, and a little bit – not angry, but belligerent. That I made her go. Not enough that she ever really showed it, but you could tell. She was a little bit defiant about going.

O: But she went on.

VS: But she did.

O: Could you describe your relationship with your children, first when they were children and then after they became adults. And then additionally, were you ever aware that you treated your daughter differently than your sons because of the sex difference? Cause you told me that your mother spoiled her boys, and so there was at least that awareness. That's at least three questions, that's too much, so pick one.

VS: That's alright. When they were little – I grew up in such a big family that we were not affectionate. I never remember kissing my mother, or having her really hug me, till I was about 11 years old. And we were out in the yard – we loved each other, we knew that, but we were not physically affectionate. And I think I craved that affection. But we were sitting under the grape arbor, and she said, “Come over here, Virginia, give me a kiss.” And it embarrassed me to death. I'll never forget, it was such an unusual thing. So when I had my babies, because I was lonely for affection; I'm sure now, I know that for cuddling, cause there was so many of us we never cuddled. (Helen and John got the cuddling). So I just cuddled them when they were babies; I just sang to them and rocked (laugh) and cuddled. Wayne would say, “Stop cuddling that child, you're gonna spoil em to death” and I said, “I'm gonna spoil this last one. I'm not going to listen to you.” If they cried, he wouldn't let me go see about them. Unless he felt they really were hurt., “You're spoiling them.” So I had that 3rd one about a year apart,

and I said, “you're not going to tell me what to do with this baby, I'm going to cuddle him all day long if I want to.” (Laughs). So I really did that. Poor old Pat, he was just four with two to cuddle. Sally kind of missed it too, but Bob got the most cuddling. But Pat had a billy goat and a big collie dog, and I always felt sorry for Pat because he was sort of pushed off when he was four by these two young babies just a year apart. And I remember him out in the yard with the billy goat and the big collie dog, but I think he's a little bit of a loner to this day because of that. But then when he was 3, and this is about childhood and mothering, he got Scarlet Fever on the day we went to go on a vacation and go down the Potomac river and camp along the way. With scarlet fever you have to be quarantined, so we were all quarantined – the neighbors would not (?) and leave the food, and we'd go pick up our food. Well poor little three year old Pat got Nephritis, that terrible kidney disease. Because he was put on sulfur drugs, and sulfur will get in your kidneys if you don't watch and get plenty of water. And his throat was so swollen he couldn't drink. And so I have two sisters who are nurses, and they both came. Both of them got the germ and had to leave. The strep germ causes all of these diseases. It causes blood poisoning, it causes scarlet fever, it causes – there were about five of em we got. Anyway, he went to Garanger Hospital, which they had an outbreak of scarlet fever at the time. And so he had to be put in isolation, and that poor baby stayed in isolation from August until the day after Thanksgiving. From Nephritis. And the nurse called me the night before that happened – you'll see what I'm going to say. And she said, “I have to tell you” because I couldn't go see him, I had it too. And she said, “Mother, he may not last the night.” So I had a wonderful pediatrician in Washington, and oh I thought I'd never forget his name but I can't remember his name right now. But anyway, he requisitioned Penicillin from the Army. Up until World War II, we did not have penicillin. It was only the Army had Penicillin, it had just been introduced. They put that child on Penicillin, and in a week he was home. Oh, it was the greatest thing on earth. But Sally got it in a crease in her skin at three months old. And she had to be farmed out to the neighbors because we all got whatever it was in one form or another. One got blood poisoning in her finger. But anyway, that was an awful, awful year. It was just horrible.

O: Pat was 3?

VS: Mmhm. He was three years old.

O: And Sally was an infant?

VS: Uh huh, she was an infant.

O: And Bob wasn't born yet?

VS: He wasn't born.

O: So that year of '44, that would have been the year of '44.

VS: Yes, and that's right in the war – that's toward the end of the war. But he requisitioned it from the Army, and saved that little boy's life.

O: How did he get that? Who pulled the strings?

VS: He had power enough. He was a big pediatrician in Washington D.C. And he knew the ropes, and he probably knew some General or somebody. But he requisitioned it, and got it.

O: Now what were you all doing in Washington D.C.? What was the –

VS: Oh, Wayne – I lived in Washington D.C. For six years before I came to Athens. I lived down in McLean, actually, in a big farm house. But anyway, that took a lot of mothering, as you can imagine, and a lot of suffering and sorrow. Not being able to know whether they were gonna live or die. But anyway, I was very affectionate with them even though Wayne didn't want me ever to touch them. "Let em cry, you're spoiling em." (Laughs). But I was very close to the children, and they were my companions. And when we came to Athens, I would take them – since Wayne was working – I couldn't drive when I came to Athens. I was 27, I could drive, but Wayne wouldn't let me drive. My husband. He said, "you'll wreck the car," and he frightened me so about expenses, and having a wreck and how expensive it would be." And he frightened me so much that I wouldn't drive. But one day, I was sure that I was going to drive; I didn't care what he said. So I sneaked the car out, got my drivers license. And –

O: How'd you get yourself to the drivers license place?

VS: Somebody went with me. Some friend went with me, and got my drivers license. And somebody told him – he had to be home, or got home. And they said, "Virginia's out getting her drivers license." And here he came. (Laughs). And I already had it! So then that's one of the recreations – I'd put all the children in the car and we'd travel every country road (Phone rings)

VS: But, she thought that he needed protection for some reason. As he aged, I guess he did, maybe. And they always saw me as in control.

O: Even when you all were married?

VS: No. No. Just after we divorced.

O: But in fact you were, after you divorced –

VS: But I was really, because he traveled full time. I mean how can you not be in control.

O: Well, by default. But did he continue to keep that job traveling after you all divorced? Was that still –

VS: Yes, he even went to Michigan at one time, and had a job up there for about a year. The children all visited him there.

O: What part of Michigan, do you remember?

VS: I don't remember. I can't remember that. But he always had very powerful men friends. Powerful in Washington, D.C. And he always brought them home with him. Instead of getting a hotel when they came to Athens, traveling, he'd say, “Virginia will take care of us.” So my friend always said I ran an Inn. And I practically did, I'm sure.

O: So did you cook for them?

VS: Oh, cooked, did everything. One Sunday night, there was this one that just came constantly. Every Sunday, every weekend he was here, cause they came in on weekends and he was working this area too. And one weekend, I was so tired of cooking full meals for that man who was a powerful eater. And I said, “I'm not going to do it.” And I had leftover vegetable soup, and I put on that big pot of vegetable soup, and – it was Sunday night, and I said, “We're having soup for supper.” And so we said soup is all we had. And you know he didn't come back for meals after that. He got the hint, I think. And as adults, yes, you're talking about relationships. We're very close, and they treat me like one of them. The boys boss me around, I said, “you're just like your daddy.” They don't really with essential things, but, “Mama do this. Mama, what are you doing that for? Mama --” you know what I mean? (Laughs) But it’s a good relationship. And I have it with my grandchildren and my great-grandchildren, which is wonderful.

O: How different is it grandmothering than it was mothering?

VS: Less responsibility. It’s far more wonderful, because you love them and cuddle them and they take them home. (Laughs)

O: So you got two great-grandchildren, how close are you to them?

VS: Oh, I just adore them. The oldest one, well now three of em, the boy divorced – Pat's son. Pat and his wife are divorced, and so she took the children and left and went to Arkansas and never would give him – he didn't know where they were. So I didn't know my grandson until he was 20 and married. And he called me on the telephone and said, “You know who this is?” and I said, “A student – you sound like a student. I don't know who.” He said, “I'm your grandson, I want to bring my wife by.” So they have established a relationship now, from the last 15 maybe 20 years. 15 years probably. And yesterday, his wife brought the three grandchildren. They'd be my great-grandchildren that I never see. And they brought – his ex wife – brought the children to visit Pat and Janice. They called me last night. And now, I haven't seen em probably but four times in our lives, and the boy is learning to drive, so he's 15 now. I thought maybe he was 10, I don't even know how old they are. But they're bright, wonderful children. But there are a lot of divorces there, so. But they're doing fine, I hear. But the next one then is Harrison, whom I just adore. He's the brightest child I've ever known. And I don't usually say that about my children, or anybody.

O: Now whose is he?

VS: He's Whitney's. Bob's daughter's. She has two boys; one's nine months. But Harrison, is very verbal, and when he was about 19 months old, less than two years, he could talk and tell you everything and he was in the hot tub with his daddy and he came in the house and his mother said, “Did you turn the hot tub on?” And he looked up at her and he said, “Actually, my dad did.” (Laughs). But he's that kind of child. “Actually, my dad did.” And now his favorite word is – he uses 'gorgeous' a lot. (Laughs). But he's just full of life, and a beautiful child to look at.

O: Now how old is he now?

VS: 3. He was – I had 20 here for Christmas.

O: Wow. Did you cook?

VS: No, they cooked. But I had the tables set – we took an overlong table that Lee bought, and covered em all with green cloth so we had tables from the Christmas tree all the way to that door. And had the tables set with a place setting for everybody. It was beautiful! It worked just really well.

O: It looks like Christmas is probably a big holiday for you.

VS: Oh, yes. Thanksgiving, we go somewhere else. I go to somebody else's house. But Christmas – they love this house. And Lee brings his children and has for years, too. So we had 20 in all.

O: Do you think that mothering has shaped the person you are? Do you think you're a different person?

VS: Oh, mercy yes. I told somebody the other day. When I became a mother, I lost all my freedom. You know, I've always loved freedom. I lost all my freedom! I was somebody else's attendant, forever. I had no time for me ever. It was hard. I think giving up your freedom as a human being is awfully hard for some people. Other people just *want* to do that. But it was difficult for me to give up my freedom, even though I adored them.

O: It’s a life of service.

VS: Oh, pure service!

O: So do you think it made you a better person?

VS: Yes, I think it made me a much more unselfish person.

O: If you could go back and do the mothering thing again, would you do anything differently?

VS: No.

O: Okay. Could you describe what a good mother is? I know that sounds like a hokey question, but what is it to you?

VS: I think a really good mother lets the child be independent from her. I think she promotes independence. I don't think she makes all the decisions for a child, I think even as a child, if there's a

problem she tries to let that child solve it. And I just think they need a lot of physical affection, and I couldn't listen enough to all of em because I was teaching. And I'm sure, the time in particular when I was teaching high school. There were times I didn't have time to listen; I was too hurried trying to get supper ready for five people. And I do think that that may be – because Sally finally asked me, "Please, Mama, do something else. I want you to be home when I get home." So I started teaching Kindergarten, so I could be here.

O: Wow, that was a pretty desperate cry it sounds like. For her to say, "Please do something else." Cause had she been used to you being at home?

VS: Yes. I was always here to welcome 'em from the bus, when they came. And when I started teaching at high school, we came home together. And then we had chores – we all had chores. And it wasn't the same as for me welcoming them, and all the work done.

O: Do you think mothering today is harder than it used to be?

VS: Oh, I think it's much more difficult to let them be individuals. Most people are urban now, and I think they need the land. I'm such a believer in the land and nature, that I think children are growing up with these little boxes that they look in to play games like this. I think it's terrible! And I don't know what you do about it, cause everybody's doing it. I didn't have television until Pat was 14. I refuse to have it now. I think they have a difficult time, because it's an easy babysitter. And mothers are so busy with their lives, with so many clubs and stuff that they have to do. Plus all taking care of the family, that they let them do this as a babysitting device. And I just think it's going to be terrible, I think we're going to have a new generation of people. I think it's going to affect our whole next generation forever.

O: Well, I think some of us see it already, even at the college level you can see the fallout from computer and technology generation.

VS: I could see it when I went back and visited the University. I went back and the offices used to be open, you know, and people visited back and forth with professors and students would come in for conferences. Every door was closed and you could hear the rattling of a type or something. I don't like it. I'm really worried about it.

O: Well, you'll get another chance to say something about that but as we conclude this section, unless there's something else you want to add, I would just ask you what are the things that you admire most about each one of your children? So that would be three separate things. three separate children, what do you admire most about Pat and Sally and Bob?

VS: Alright. Pat never did well in school. He was dyslexic, and we never knew it. It was before dyslexia had been known, and so he never made good grades. He made D's and C's and that with studying and coaching. It bothered him terribly, I know. I had him tutored. But he has turned into a – I

always knew how bright he was, but I couldn't unearth it because of the dyslexia, I think. And now, I admire him so much. He is a man of the land; they have 10 acres. We call him the garlic king, and he has 21 rows of eight different kinds of garlic cause deer don't eat garlic. He has other kinds too. He's a potter, all that stuff on the mantel, Pat has done. He's the most creative potter you ever saw in your life; he's a real artist. He can do anything, so he farms, he does pottery, he's a musician; he has his own band, a blue grass band and they go all over. He has very little money, but he is one of the most talented humans I've ever seen at 70 years old – he is now. And is just a wonderful human being.

O: Now, how many children does Pat have?

VS: He has Brit – has two girls and two boys, but he's never seen those two boys. He was isolated from the 20 year old. That boy, 20 years old, asked he said, "Is Pat around? I'd like to see my daddy." But they're not close because Brit – Pat has disdain for people who just want things. And want more money, and work harder to get more money for more cars, bigger cars. He doesn't like that. And Brit is like that. She wants things; the best of everything. So they don't get along – I just mean they don't see eye to eye, and they don't see each other enough to matter. But I admire Pat because of his creativity, his hard work. He's just a wonderful human being. And he's married to a wonderful woman.

O: And he's got a gallery in town? Could I go to –

VS: No, he has his pottery shop in his own house. Well, it's a separate house. It's as big as this part of the house, and he has a wheel and she has a wheel. So they both are potters. And he makes very little money; he never has any money ahead. They eek out enough to live the life they want to live, and I admire them for that. And Sally, is a tremendous human being. She started working for Delta as a reservationist, and worked for Delta for 33 years. Driving back and forth to the airport, at least 40 miles a day for 33 years without an accident. But that changed her from a shy little child that she was as a girl, into a very capable, I would say somewhat bossy (laughs). She's tiny, she's not like her Mama; she's not a big woman. She's not tiny, she's more of a 5'4, something like that, but seems tiny to me. But she – I have never seen any human who can get as much accomplished as she does. Now that she's retired from Delta, she's become a landscaper. And she's turned her artistic ability – Herbert, when she was at the University studying art, said she's the best artist he's ever faced. She's given up art, and now – Well, she's too busy as she says. She gardens, she does everything. And she's taken up landscape architecture, and she wishes now she'd taken landscape architecture instead of art. And she loves her mother, she's devoted to her mother. We understand each other perfectly now for the last 20 years, I guess. She's 66. After the divorce was over, she acknowledged; she knew all the time, but she felt protective of her father. But we're just great, great friends, and she comes about three times a week. And we just have a great time. And I admire her for her strength,

her artistic ability, her hard work, her gardening ability; she mows the grass. Her husband is the consultant for some firm and is gone all the time, and she runs that whole household. And adores Elma; she has three dogs, two of em three legged. She has cats (laughs), and horses, and she loves animals and loves horses in particular.

O: And how many children does she have?

VS: And she has just 1, and he is a landscape architect. He lived with me for 11 years and went to school at the University, and after doing six years of landscape architecture, he decided he'd rather be a veterinarian. He married a vet, and now he has a hospital and his wife has a hospital. They're owned by an old veterinarian. An old, very wealthy veterinarian. But each one runs a hospital for animals.

O: Here in Athens?

VS: No, in McDonough. And at the moment they have adopted two Hispanic children; I don't know why they don't want to have children of their own. But anyway, I don't know why, but they've adopted two little Hispanic boys. And they're in Florida because he won some kind of baseball thing and they're staying at some Marriot in Florida while this little adopted boy plays. He's 11, I think. And that's her only child. And Bob is a whirlwind. (Laughs). Bob had a real estate company here for years. Now he has bought – he's a year younger than Sally. Sally is '67, he's '66. At his age, he's just bought Birchmore Pool and Spa, and his son, Jason, who just called me – who by the way is my love. I had him a lot since he was two years old because his mother just had a hard time with childbirth and so I got to know him when he was an infant. And kept him a lot. And I just adore Jason, and that's Bob's oldest son. And he has a daughter, Whitney, who is Harrison's mother. And Bob is a whirlwind. He can't stop, he can't sit down, he talks to you standing up. I admire him for his energy and for what he's able to accomplish. And sometimes I really worry, because he rushes into new things and he ends up doing it, but you wonder how in the world he can, if you know what I mean. So he's one of those.

O: So it's like he's got a lot of ideas –

VS: Oh, he does, but he follows them through! He's down there working; he says, "I should be retired." And he's down at that – working every day at that pool and spa, and they've broken even. And it was in a terrible hole when he took it over. He made that man pay all that off. But he's brought it back. Which is wonderful. So he's a business man and he's not – he likes things; he flies a plane, while the others are artistic. He always felt bad because he said, "Sally's an artist, Pat's an artist, what can I do?" And so he always sort of outperformed, by doing dangerous things. And when he was a teenager, I got a lot of white hair, because he loved to drive cars too fast and even race cars at one time, when he was in Valdosta, living with Gene Connell. Race stock cars. And he flies a plane; he's

been flying a plane since he was about 22. And he flies now. He had his own plane, but now he has the use of a man's plane just to fly him back and forth to St. Simon's island, where he has three condos –

O: Your son or the man?

VS: Bob has three condos. And he rents them – he bought them as a business deal, but they're not renting very well now. So he's always – I don't know how he keeps doing the things he does, but I think they're all rented at the moment.

O: Yeah, I don't think they have problems on St. Simons –

VS: Yeah, I think they're all rented now. And he keeps one for the family, and so Whitney spends a lot of time with these two little boys and her husband because her husband is a consultant and can work out of his own home. So they stay at St. Simon's a lot. But, if Bob came in, he would – everybody would wake up (laughs). And he'd say, “hey how are you?” (laughs). But then all conversation would stop, because he has so much energy. And I admire that, but I worry about him.

End of part 4----------

VS: Do with religion, I can assure you. (Laughs). Anyways –

O: Education, tell me about that.

VS: Education. I started school when I was six years old, walked two miles on a dirt, country road. A beautiful road, full of woods and wildflowers on every side, which I loved. And across a river on a big swinging bridge about as high as this ceiling – 30 feet high, above a river that bounced in the middle. Walked up to this Presbyterian school, that I told you about that was a great school. And I had French, I had music, I had all the essentials until I finished high school. And I told my students once, I mean it was a full education – we had Latin, we had French, we had – I didn't ever take a lot of math. I had Geometry, that was as far as I went in high school. And I was valedictorian of my class and I sang, “Hark, hark, the lark” as a solo at the same graduation. And I told my students this one – with tongue in cheek. And I said, “yes, can you believe it.” I said, “There were four of us in my graduating class.” (laughs). But anyway, it was a full, wonderful experience and walking made me very strong physically. Cause I walked form the time I was six to the time I was 16; took four miles every day up and down hills. And it was wonderful, my mother was always cooking food when we came home. It was cheerful, it was happy. We walked with a group of friends, one of em, Manilla, that I still are close friends now. We had wonderful experiences on the way, like a buck sheep that the boys would get in and taught. And they tried to let him but him because he was a fighting buck sheep. And sometimes, once we saw a snake that stood on his tail and carried on. I found out later there is such a thing. Black snake – one of the black snakes, a whip-it I think, a whip-it snake. Anyway, not often, because

I'm scared to death of them; I can't stand them. But it was blissful, and we always had friends to walk with. And once I was caught in a terrible storm, and to this day I almost get under the bed when it storms – I was alone, and I was really young, about 10 I think. And it was just striking lightning trees all the way around me, and I ran home, and Mama had all the rest of them – When lightning came storming, she put em all in the bed. She told stories. And I got home drenched, and had been afraid of lightning ever since. But that was a growing experience. The walking was part of it, as you can tell. And we had wonderful teachers who taught us very very well. In fact, I had to take the entrance exam for college and French and I made a 94 at the University when I had to take my French test. So it was a thorough, good education and training. That's kindergarten, that's 1st grade we had. And we had the Baby Ray Primer. Baby Ray is one of the primers. I think of it now, they were always dressed in orange and brown suits. The little boy was, and I have forgotten the girl. But Baby Ray was a prodominant character. And then, because we had lost all the money for our college, Mrs. Gwynn knew of Pikeville College – Presbyterian college, and I went there and I told you I was dreadfully homesick. But it also was a very fine scholarly school. And I took music and voice there, every year. Mama sent me milk money to do all that, because that was during the Depression. And I never learned to play the pipe organ, but I loved to listen to it. And to this day, that and the violin are the two most incredible instruments to me. But I took voice and I took music. And I played the piano to earn money – extra money for tap dancing classes. And we hiked, as extra curricular. We had chapel everyday; we prayed everyday. We walked 250 steps down to real church every Sunday, and I believe we volunteered, to go to the jails to sing for the people in jail at that college. And that quickly, that's about it isn't it?

O: Well, and then you came to University of Georgia and got a Masters –

VS: Yes, and then – no that's what I mean, for Pikeville for education. When I taught the one-room school, on a two year teaching certificate. I taught two years in 3rd grade in the Floyd high school, which had all the grades. Which were good experiences. And I was married in the middle of that, and went to Illinois after that and didn't teach anytime for a long long time. I just raised children. I just had Pat, then I went to Washington D.C. During the war, and I'll tell you more about being in the war. You probably want to know about World War II.

O: Well, I have a whole section on history so –

VS: Well, I want to tell you that though now. And that got me through Pikeville – I think that was the name of the school. And everything was always religious, as you can tell. We went to chapel everyday. I probably had too much religious experience (laughs). I mean, that's all you did. You did all the things, but that was a predominant thing. Then I came back, and I was standing in the floor [in the

kitchen]. I'd educated about three people let them live with me while I sent them to University. And I was sitting in the middle of the kitchen and I thought, “here you're educating all these people, and you're 37 years old, and you don't have a degree yet.” And I was always embarrassed about that. I always thought I should have finished college, so I thought, “Well, if I go to college, what will I study? What will I do?” And I had no more idea than a goose. And all of the sudden, I thought, “I love to read. I always love to read. I'll just go to the English department and I'll get a degree in English.” So, I did just that, and I made Phi Beta Kappa, and I made Phi Beta Phi – which is the student's – well, I like to study. That's all I can say, I just like to study. And all the students, young students, and here I was an old married woman with three children and at 37 years old. And they all liked me, and they'd all come out here and we'd study together. They said, “you know how to study for tests.” So we'd all come out here; all the college students (laughs).

O: Did your kids like that?

VS: Oh yeah, the kids loved it. They were always gone somewhere, doing their thing. My children as adults have always been independent. And they had a lot of friends; they didn't care at all what I did. And Wayne traveled, so they were always out with friends or doing something by that time. They were pretty well grown up. And lets see, I got a degree in English –

O: Bud didn't they tell you – you said at some point, they kind of encouraged you because then you could teach – the department, it sounds like, encouraged you to get your degree in English because then you could teach English there.

VS: Yes. I guess Mary Kindle, was the principle of our school, and she said, “you are a born teacher.” Because when I did my – as an undergraduate at the University of Georgia, I did my apprentice teaching under her. She turned the whole class over to me, and I still have students I taught as an apprentice who come to see me. One of them has written two books recently. But I enjoyed that experience a lot, and that was at University High. And then I went to Athens High School and taught for three years, and then went back to the University and got my Masters. And taught Freshman English, and I loved every moment of it. And I'll tell you one story, I like to tell stories. I had this big ole boy from south Georgia, and I was teaching poetry. And I love – it’s my favorite genre. I just adore poetry to this day. And he raised his hand, and he said, “Mrs. Shields, I'm going to be down in South Georgia plowing a mule, how in the world is this poetry going to help me?” And I got quiet, and I said, “well, boy, let me tell you something. Those rows are going to get mighty long, and it's hard to think of nothing but a straight row. You need something in your head to think about, maybe poetry will help. You've got something in your head to think about before you plow.” But I had a good relationship with all the students, always. And I think they always told me they learned a lot. And I loved it, which

makes a difference. Makes a great difference. And I loved the students. My brother said, “how can you love the students?” The one who's (?) I said I don't know, I think they're loveable (laughs).

O: They might challenge you today.

VS: They do challenge you, and I wouldn't want to be teaching today. I don't know why, but I wouldn't want to be teaching today.

O: Well, I could tell you some stories that would make you know why, but I won’t do that. So did you ever think of anything – it sounds like you enjoyed that. It was very gratifying and satisfying. Did you ever think of anything other than teaching that you might have also enjoyed?

VS: No. I think I was born to teach.

O: Did you ever wish that you had had a Ph.D and been a tenure track?

VS: No. I never cared. The only difference between a Ph.D and not having one is the Ph.D beside your name. If you have studied all your life, and you've studied toward a Ph.D, and have read in depth, you're as knowledgeable as a Ph.D, you just don't have the –

O: There's no doubt about that, but the expectations of you within the position –

VS: Oh, I know.

O: And it sounds like you missed the worst of it. Because of all the other crap –

VS: I did, but I'll tell you, I was never able to get beyond being an instructor at the University. If I'd had a Dr.ate, I could've worked toward full professor.

O: Right, but you would've had all that crap and the beauracracy that you didn't have to deal with.

VS: That's true.

O: Committee work, all these other expectations of you. Publication.

VS: Oh I know, I would have had to publish, publish. So that was a good part of it, but the sorry was the bad part. The sorry was miserable.

O: It's slave labor, practically.

VS: Yeah, it’s slave labor. But I loved it, so it’s not slave labor.

O: Well, right. And the students benefited from your knowledge, but the University benefited because –

VS: They didn't have to pay me. (Laughs).

O: That's right.

VS: But there were five of us in the same state. We were all married, we all lived in Georgia, and we all had a good core group.

O: But you weren't considered adjunct, were you? Didn't they have some kind of full time position?

VS: Oh, no, it was full time. We were considered a full time professor, even though the title was

instructor, we were full time professors knowing we would be hired year after year after year.
O: Alright, yeah. There's more and more of that now, because they can get away with paying less. When did you retire?
VS: '88.
O: What was that like, retiring?
VS: I was worried to death about retiring, because it had just absorbed my life for so long. And I volunteered for a lot of things. I volunteered – let me see, what did I volunteer for? Well, I belonged to a Junior League, so I volunteered for that. I volunteered for something at the church – I've forgotten what that was. I volunteered for recording for the blind. And being frightened of not having enough to do after working all these years, and when I got home, I didn't do that for but a couple years because with – I call it my farm – I just had more than I could do. And still do. It's like that boy said about poetry – I can be alone all day, and I'm not lonely. My mind is just having a wonderful time. And I'll pick up a book, or I'll remember something, I'll grab it.
O: When did you start writing those memoirs?
VS: About 10 years ago.
O: Oh, so before you retired – oh no, after you retired.
VS: After I retired.
O: Yeah, alright. Well there's more stuff about work, but I want to move on because there are other things I want to get. Actually, why don't you tell me about World War II, and what that –
VS: Alright, I will because that's interesting. We were in Illinois when war was declared, and one of Wayne's friends said, "We will be drafted unless we get into something." And they didn't want to be drafted; they didn't want to go to war. And they were very knowledgeable, they were all from New York, they'd all graduated, got a Masters at New York University. So one of em said, "We're all in degrees of recreation." So they said, "Lets go into Washington D.C. And volunteer for Red Cross. Get a job with Red Cross." So at least two of em went to Washington D.C., I dragged Pat – Pat was the only child I had. We moved from Illinois, where I lived on the river and loved it, to Washington D.C., right in the middle of the war. I lived next door to a woman whose husband was in the Pacific, and everyday we watched the papers. Wayne was finally drafted – he was not drafted because he had three children for a long time. Finally he was supposed to go to be drafted, and he had a back problem. He didn't realize he had it, but there was some vertebrae touching the other, and they sent him home as a 4-F. They said he couldn't march. So I was grateful, because I lived in that big house in McClain, and I was already prepared to board the teachers. Because they had five or six bedrooms. And I was going to board the teachers while he was at war. That didn't happen. He worked

for Red Cross, and my sister came and lived with us. And she worked as a secretary for the head of the whole Red Cross in Washington D.C. And they rode together to work everyday while I took care of the babies at home during the war – that's all I did, was take care of those babies. But we watched everyday for news of Mary's – that's the woman nextdoor – her husband in the Pacific. And we'd go back and forth, and listen to what was going to happen. And I lived kind of outside the war in a way, because I had John and Albert, my oldest brother was in Washington, stationed in Washington in the Army, but he never had to go overseas. But we went back and forth – he came to my house constantly. I've always wanted a farm house, and I always had a big farm house, even in McClain. And the other brother served in the Navy, and he served in one of the islands, and I've forgotten where. But he's red haired, and he got so sunburned, his whole back was one big freckle almost. And he became a commander, I think. That's the one who taught at Suwanee. My youngest brother actually flew during the war , and my mother suffered terribly because he was her baby. He went to England to fly into Germany, first. And the first day he got to England, he's always – he's like Bob, and he's always into everything – he wants to explore. And he went out the first day on a bicycle, and he wasn't very used to a bicycle, on English roads. We didn't have many bikes on dirt roads. And he had an accident and bummed up his knee, so he couldn't go on the first flight. And that first flight that flew over the channel entered France, I believe instead of Germany, went down. Every one of his fellow pilots drowned; the plane crashed into the ocean. John was the only one of his crew left – he trained in Valdosta, at that airbase there. And that really – I mean he almost was never the same. He was just 17 years old when he volunteered. Mama let him volunteer, so he's just 18 when all this happened. And he flew all during the war, but he flew in plain clothes because they would've been shot down as spies if they'd ever been grounded.

O: Now, was he in the air force or Army?

VS: He was in the Air Force. He flew, he was a pilot. But they flew prisoners of war – what did they fly? Something about prisoners of war that they flew back – espionage, they flew back and forth in plain clothes into France and did night flying the whole time.

O: Well, they might've flown prisoners of war back over here, you know. POW's –

VS: It was something where he didn't wear a uniform – he didn't wear a uniform, because it was a spy plane of some kind. But anyway, he survived the war. My mother – we'd go home, and my mother would be in the bed at four in the afternoon with her head under the pillow. And she was not that kind of woman, but that was her baby boy flying overseas everyday, and she realized it. So I knew war first hand from Mama and John and from Mary Robinson and her husband in the Philippines. Because we went back and forth seeing how they were. But most of them were in Washington D.C., and they

didn't have service overseas except for John. But the one thing I do remember, we had food stamps during the war. You could buy maybe two pounds of meat during the week, and you had food stamps. You had meat stamps, and you'd try to make meat go as far as it could possibly go. So I decided to raise chickens, so I had a big backyard, and I raised about a hundred chickens in the back. And they got to be a fine size, and we couldn't afford to feed em any longer. So I had to can them, and I actually cut the heads off those chickens and picked those chickens, and I canned 40 in one day. And that was with a little baby running around, Pat. But we had meat then, we had meat for a long time. I had a pressure cooker then, so I could can during the war. And then you had gas rations, so you got only a few gallons of gas a week, enough to get into work for Wayne. And once in a great while, we'd have enough gas that on Sunday, we could drive maybe 40 miles and not feel too guilty about it. So we'd take a little trip outside of Washington D.C., to one of the little nearby towns occasionally. And Pat grew up hearing all about this, when he was about three or 4. And I don't know whether it affected him – I don't think it did. But Ann and Wayne were both at Red Cross, so I didn't have to worry about them. But I remember as well as anything in the world the day – what day was victory declared? December the 7th?

O: No, that was the day the war was actually – Pearl Harbor was bombed.

VS: That's right, when Pearl Harbor was bombed. I can't remember – it was August, maybe.

O: No, it was cold. I'm pretty sure it – it seems like I remember them – well, Roosevelt died in April, and the bomb was dropped in August, so the war was declared over in –

VS: About September.

O: Well, yeah In Europe. The war -- it was finally over after the bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. That was in August, so – But in Europe it had been declared over in –

VS: It had?

O: Yes, because of the – because of the big issue, that's one of the reasons we went ahead and dropped the bombs. Because we didn't want the Russians in Berlin when the war ended. So we wanted – that's one theory about why the bombs were dropped when they were in Japan. Because we didn't want the Russians making any more advance than they already made. So –

VS: Well, I know Roosevelt was always blamed for not holding his own during that conference with the Russians.

O: At Yalta.

VS: Yeah, at Yalta.

O: He was sick, you can look at him and tell –

VS: Oh, he was a sick man.

O: He was desperately ill, and he didn't make it to the next conference, of course, because he died.
VS: But anyway, what I do remember is going into Washington D.C., the night the war was declared over, and the streets were as full as they are of protestors right now. There were sailors, there were soldiers that were kissing and hugging everybody they could find. It was the greatest jubilation I've ever seen in my life.
O: That would've been in August.
VS: That was in August. And we stayed downtown until about midnight, in the streets celebrating that the war was over with everybody in D.C. And that's about all I really remember of World War II.
O: What I remember happening in the cold weather, I believe is the liberation of Paris. Because I'm pretty sure that was in the winter. So after the war, you had your last baby in '45.
VS: Yes. I came to Athens in '46; he was six months old.
O: Well, he was born in August, so were you pregnant when you went downtown for the – do you remember that?
VS: Yes.
O: Okay, then that would've been –
VS: Well I had Sally in my arms with me; the children went too.
O: But you would've been very pregnant with Bob.
VS: Yes I would have.
O: Because he was born August the 21'st, so this would've been like August the 10th maybe, August the 9th.
VS: Yes, I must've been very pregnant. I'd forgotten that part.
O: Wow. Well, can we come back to that if we have time and just let me ask you some questions about core values. Is that okay? Do you mind talking about that?
VS: No.
O: And this kind of goes into spiritual values. What would you say has been the core value that has shaped your life? Who you are and how you function throughout your life. We all have many different values, but what would you say is the one driving value that has shaped your life. You've already mentioned a few.
VS: Well one of em is honesty. And accepting the situation as it is and doing what you can about it, and not worrying. So I believe in acting, I don't believe in wringing of hands. And I believe in meeting situations head on, and I believe in sharing with neighbors and anybody else that you speak your mind, you get the anger or whatever is between you over with. And you don't brood on it. I can't understand people who sit and brood and don't go see the person and say, “look, lets talk this out.”

And get it over with. That's a core value of mine. I believe in loving your neighbors as yourself if you possibly can; of course we never do. We don't live up to that, but that is the divine commandment, that I've tried to live by. And I think love is the motivating force, and discipline. And I think self-discipline, discipline. I think human beings need discipline. Not harsh discipline, but I think they need to be told what to do and what not to do, when they're little. I believe that other freedom, and one thing I do, I don't want to tell all the people what to do, but I don't want anybody interfering with my freedom. I'll fight on that principle.

O: That's kind of captured what your beliefs are. Have you had what you would consider a profound spiritual moment?

VS: No. I know that some religions, you have to have that moment before you can really become. My mother worried all of her life because her mother was a primitive Baptist, and unless you'd had a vision, you couldn't become one. And Mama could not have a vision to save her soul. And she worried all her days about not being able to have a vision. And I won't say that I have. There have been times and moments in my life and still, that I'll be out-of-doors. I remember once when I was about 15, and I'd been swimming in the river, and I came home and it was just about sunset. And all of a sudden, the whole landscape just started to shine. And the trees even looked different. And it was a moment almost of transformation of some sort in your vision of the earth. And I've had those in my life, and I still have them sometimes. When I'm out on my golf cart. And the whole world just seems transformed and the whole earth-- just everything out in nature just becomes one, you know. With a great stillness. And I guess that's a sort of profound experience.

O: Well, that's what I'm talking about so –

VS: And I've had a lot of those. And I still do – I'm lucky that at this age, I can still have them, I guess.

O: Well, that's what I'm talking about when I ask about – I mean for me, I would consider that a profound spiritual experience.

VS: Yeah, those are profound spiritual experiences. And I have those often.

O: Have you experienced something that you would consider a miracle? I mean, those are obviously spiritual experiences, but has anything happened that you would consider –

VS: Well, I think that Pat's being safe from death is a miracle. That we were able to get penicillin, requisition it, get it there the night before he might've died – that to me is miraculous.

O: Absolutely. What experience has given you the greatest joy?

VS: Making love, I think. I think that's a joyful experience.

O: So at least once, with one person in your life, a mutual, reciprocal thing.

VS: Oh yes, yes. There are other joyful experiences. I think when I was a child, swimming in the river

was the most joyful experience. Or sitting on the rocks, wet, in the sun was a joyful experience. I had a lot of joyful experiences.

O: It sounds like for you, also, that just the nature is joyful.

VS: It is. Mine are nature experiences, usually.

O: Do you think there is such a thing as an afterlife?

VS: Yes, I believe so. I don't know what it is, but I believe there is a creator, and I'm not sure – I'm very unsure. I somehow doubt that we will know that when I get to heaven – I say heaven – that I will know my brothers and sisters. seven of whom have died. I somehow can't believe that. I wish it were so, and I just leave it up to faith. I don't know what it will be. And there may not be an afterlife. I don't know.

O: Is there anything that you're certain of – it doesn't have to have anything to do with an afterlife. But is there anything that you're certain about?

VS: I'm certain that loving other people is the greatest treasure we have in life. Whether it be friends, family. And our communication with them. I think that's a – probably the most wonderful thing we have in life. And I feel so sorry for those people who can't reach out and communicate. And who are embittered. I think that's – and health. Because I think that it's basically health that enables us to release joy.

O: Health?

VS: Health: H E A L T H. Because I think sometime, if you are sick and in pain, it would be terrible! I mean you couldn't understand why. So health is probably the greatest blessing on earth. And loving the earth, cause it's always there.

O: Because of that love of the natural world, have you been – does the environmental movement or ecology, is that a passion for you?

VS: No. No. I just have my own ecology.

O: You don't worry about what –

VS: Oh, I worry terribly! But I don't know at this age anything I can do about it, except take care of – I think it's everybody. I believe this about everything; if everybody took care of his own, with all his knowledge and the best he can do, we'd be in better shape than we are.

O: But has it been important for you to participate in recycling, and do things that –

VS: Yes, I do recycle and do all that. And I garden, and I take care of the earth. Recycling leaves, and all of that sort of thing to build up soil. Which is a part of recycling, too.

O: Do you compost?

VS: No. I used to, don't anymore. I just let nature take care of it. Letting great piles of leaves that

people rake up disintegrate. I had a horse, and I used the manure on the garden. That's all recycling.
O: Yes it is, of course it is. You know how scholars are interested in cause and effect, although there is no way to prove cause and effect.
VS: No.
O: To what extent do you think your life as it's turned out has been a result of decisions you've made, and to what extent do you think it's been circumstances beyond your control? Does that make sense?
VS: I know what you're trying to say. I think chance has an awful lot to do with it. If I hadn't gone to New York, I would never have met Wayne. I went to New York because my sister lived in New York. That's a chain of events that occur by chance, I think. And yet I do believe that there is some force, that our decisions do matter; every decision we make matters. But I think that overall, there is some force that occurs not through your efforts, but just through circumstance that brings you to where you are today. People say, "How did you get to Athens?" And you know, I didn't plan that. I didn't make that decision. And Wayne would not have made it had he not become friends in the Red Cross office with Betsy Powell, this old lady who's in her late 90's now, in Athens. Who told him that Athens was a wonderful place to live, they needed recreation director. I mean, that's just circumstance that caused he and Betsy to work together. That's why I'm in Athens. So I don't know.
O: Well, no, that's precisely the kind of thinking that I was asking about. But then there's the decision you made to go to Graduate school –
VS: Oh yes, you make decisions too that affects your life. The decision to buy this place was purely a decision because I wanted to live out. So both, I think both.
O: Oh of course, it's definitely both and; you can't say one or the other. But it's kind of a matter of degree, you know. It's a philosophical thing. What period of time – and that time can be anywhere from a day to a decade. But what period of time was the happiest and the most rewarding – most gratifying for you?
VS: Childhood. Childhood and old age.
O: Now that's interesting. What is happy about old age?
VS: Wisdom. Acceptance. And faith and belief.
O: Those things get stronger?
VS: They get stronger.
O: What belief of yours is stronger now than it was say 20, 30 years ago?
VS: Well, I have a greater belief – I guess in God. And a creator. I have a hard time with Jesus, at times.
O: Do you feel the presence, sometimes. A presence that is comforting or consoling, or whatever.

Just strengthening?

VS: Yes, I think I do all the time. I feel, maybe, presences. My life is so full of myth, from 1700's from where we lived, you know what I mean? And the tales we told and the neighbors and – It becomes a life of the mind.

O: Is there something in those tales, in those memories that kind of transcends time? Is that –

VS: Oh, yes. I think completely transcends time. As I said, I still don't feel old.

O: But it's brought you something; age has brought you something. It's brought you –

VS: It's brought me – I used to be very restless as a person. And frankly, I might as well be frank – I think it's sexual recklessness. I mean restlessness. And you have that – I cried a lot. And I think I cried from frustration, partly.

O: But you don't need to cry now? That need is not there now as much?

VS: No, I don't cry a lot. But I think it was always being in love and wanting somebody.

O: Wanting and not being able to have?

VS: Wanting and not being able to have.

O: How different do you think your life would be if you had had somebody that you wanted?

VS: Well, I think it would have been absolutely beautiful. I don't think there's anything more beautiful, and I don't know many people achieve it – I said in my long life, I've never known – I don't know that I've ever known any completely happy couples. Most of them that I've known, they settle in, but their characters struggle against each other. And I suspect if you live with somebody, that is constantly day after day, that that's what it becomes maybe. Because we're all so individual, that it's hard. But I do believe there's a love between human beings that can encompass all of that, and be perfectly content.

O: But it takes reaching an age beyond the rest of the sexual energy –

VS: It takes far beyond sexual love – it takes a deep, spiritual love.

O: But may I just go back and ask that that one sort of intense sexual –

VS: No.

O: Don't ask?

VS: No, you can ask it. But I realize now, that was something shallow.

O: Oh, okay. Well what I was going to say was that in one sense, that was – because you never had to experience what you just said, you then had to deal with this person in a day to day which really kind of stifles –

VS: That's what I mean. And I don't think we would've fought.

O: Sure. I mean, I bet you would.

VS: I'm sure we would, cause we're both two powerful personalities. And I wouldn't put up with his domineering day to day. We would've had to fight that out. But I do think that – I think now, I think in age, you learn so much. I think you could finally find a spiritual partner.

O: Well, may I just ask you to read that book and tell me then after you read it, what you think about that? Because I think that's what happened. Which it gives me hope, that such a thing can exist, you know. I was telling you about the book, where the woman – fell in love with this man twice her age, and it wasn't that it was platonic, but it was very much this what you were talking about. This spiritual – and actually, I've read more than one book with that kind of relationship existed. And it was almost purely a spiritual compatibility.

VS: Well, I hate to tell you this, but I'm in love right now. With somebody with whom I could have this kind of relationship.

O: And is that a possibility?

VS: And it's mutual, but it's not a possibility. He's married to somebody else, whom I know well. But the two of us could have that spiritual – we've been together enough platonically, and we both have the same feeling, I know that.

O: And so will you be able to have that relationship with him?

VS: No.

O: But you know that it's possible –

VS: Oh I know that it's possible. I know what it could be. I know what it is when we're together.

O: Is that a good thing for you?

VS: Oh, for me it's good. I've reached the age – I don't have the sexual frustration. When you're younger, you have the sexual frustration.

O: Which is a part of nature.

VS: It's just a part of nature, yes. But the other is a more spiritual thing, that I'm sure would be sexual, too. But it's a complete and utter understanding and trust.

O: And do you have some contentment that even if it's not able to –

VS: Oh yes. Oh, I love to see him, every time I see him he's just a treasure.

O: I'm so pleased to hear that. I may want to come back to that, but that's – I mean, it sounds like, to me, that okay, the childhood was the happiest time. But really it truly now is the happiest time of your life, would you say that?

VS: Well, I've always said that. I loved childhood, but this really, in a way, is the happiest time. In the last years, after my divorce. I became a different person, because I got my soul back.

O: So – the other question is – what would be the unhappiest time? Was it the period of your divorce?

Going through the –

VS: I think it was before. I would sit here, before I divorced, and he might be in that chair. And he always read – he read sports illustrated all – he loved sports. I went to more sports than anybody's ever been to in the world. And he was good at it. I mean, men loved him. Tennis – played tennis, he played everything. Played football in college. But I never knew what he was thinking – there was never any spiritual communication between us. He might sit there, and to me, I would be so lonely you wouldn't believe. With his body sitting right there. And I would be looking out that window, so sad. Because of lack of any kind of spiritual communication, realizing that I was more alone than if his body weren't sitting there. There was no spiritual communication.

O: That sounds – that was very sad.

VS: It is sad.

O: Well, the next question is: What was the saddest period of your life?

VS: Marriage was the saddest period of my life, except when he traveled and the children were my joy. He gave me three wonderful children; my neighbor told me that once. He understood the relationship and he said, “But Virginia, together you've had three wonderful children. Don't forget that.” And I don't. And he was not all bad, he just didn't suit me. I told him once, when we were fighting about something, probably going to some football game which I never liked. My sister in law, that my brother married when he was in his late 40's – he didn't marry Albert. He married a woman 20 years younger. She was very wealthy, came from a wealthy family. When they wore hats, do you remember? She loved to wear hats, she loved dirty jokes. She loved to laugh. She loved to eat. And I said, “Wayne, if you had married Ann, you'd have been the happiest couple in the world.” He said, “That's true.” He would've been a good husband, she'd have loved him to death. And she would play the part; she was a good cook, and she didn't have much of a brain in her head that I ever knew. But she was happy and giggly and, you know, just loved the surface things. Just constantly going.

O: Now who is Ann? Tell me again.

VS: She was my sister in law. And he would have been the happiest man, because he loved to show off. He was an excellent dancer, and when we got – they used to have those big dances at hotels and places you know? You probably don't remember.

O: Well, I know what you're talking about.

VS: But they used to. And he always – he was a good dancer, he was voted the best dancer in college. And he'd get me over in front of the orchestra and just put me through all sorts of gyrations, because he liked to show off. And Ann would've loved that. I hated it. And so it wasn't that he was a bad man, we just weren't suitable.

O: You weren't suited for each other.

VS: No.

O: And you were a deeply thinking person, and he just wasn't into that.

VS: That's right. He didn't want to think beyond Sports Illustrated. He drove back and forth to Washington D.C., he knew all the important people, he performed, you know what I mean. So he had that kind of mind. But nothing – no spiritual connection whatsoever.

O: One thing I didn't mention in the beginning, but you mentioned them, so you don't have to stop and reiterate now. But if you were to have to choose three major turning points in life for your, would that be hard to decide what would be three of the major turning points?

VS: I guess going off to college alone was one of them. Getting on a train, which I did later on, and going far away from home; that was a turning point. Because I no longer was dependent on family; I was completely alone on my own devices. Traveling and doing everything I had to do. What I didn't tell you, but in college, once, and this is important – that's why I think it's a turning point. We got an outbreak of – oh what is the terrible disease, that's contagious. Is it meningitis? No. Anyway, it's some terrible disease that is terribly contagious. And we got an outbreak of it, and just two people were hospitalized. So they got rid of all the students in the middle of March. Well I had no money – I was always just skimping with money to get a bus home. So my Bible professor loaned me five dollars; I could get home to Virginia from Kentucky on five dollars. I got five dollars, and Mama didn't know I was coming – we had no telephone, the lines didn't work. So I got as far as I could on the bus – I got to Roanoke – I had enough money to get a bus not to Floyd – I couldn't get that far. The closest point home, and I knew I had to walk, was about eight miles from home. And I got on that bus, I got off that last bus I took at seven o'clock in the morning. I'd ridden all night long from Kentucky, and on the coldest morning in March, I got off with my baggage. And I walked that eight miles home. And I probobly was on a road I've never been on before; I knew some people who lived on it, and I stopped at the house. I knew the Vests lived there, and I was so hungry. I hadn't had anything to eat. And I went in, and even though they were strict Quakers – they were wonderful people, big white home. I went in and told them, and they said, "Oh, you must be hungry." And they set me down, and fed me, and I got my bag and got home almost dark. Mama saw me coming and couldn't believe it – she lived alone then. And that's a turning point. I mean you're completely responsible for yourself.

O: How'd you feel when you got there? Did you feel accomplished? Did you –

VS: No, I just knew I'd made it. (Laughs). That's all. Now I feel accomplished.

O: Exactly, I was going to say.

VS: Well, at the time it was just what I had to do. There was no other way. And I faced a lot of those

situations, but going off to college – cause I've been protected by family until then – that was a great turning point. Divorce was the other – Marriage was a turning point, and then divorce was a turning point, of course.

O: Do you have regrets, mistakes, either one, whichever one you prefer?

VS: What?

O: Regrets or mistakes that –

VS: No, I don't. I've just done the best I could.

O: Okay. If you could live over again, are there things you would do differently?

VS: No.

O: Okay. Well, you're an exceptionally, extraordinarily reflective person. Surely earlier in life, you envisioned what life would be. Is it better than you envisioned or has it not been as –

VS: I never knew what would be out there, so I never planned toward it. Like I was set out of line, at the barn and looked out at the horizon, everything just happened and you took advantage of whatever happened. From day to day. I think your day to day decisions are what matter in life.

O: Has there been a single individual or even more than one who has changed your life by being such an influence, or has been –

VS: Oh yes, many people have influenced my life. Mrs. Gwyn, I told you, decided she was going to educate me. She educated my brother, who went to Hampton Sydney. And she took me – she told Mama, said, “if you'll let her” – she had moved from that school, to a school called Al Goma, and she said, “If you'll let Virginia come and live with me, I'll see that she's educated – a fine education for the rest of her life.” So I went to Al Goma, and you know what she taught me? I realized she was going to make a slave of me. She taught me to clean the sink. (Laughs). And to this day, I can't dare to leave the kitchen unless that sink is scrubbed. Right now I know the dishes are in it, but at night, I will scrub that sink and keep that sink – and that space clear, because all of a sudden I was sitting, scrubbing that sink the way she told me to. And all of a sudden it came to me – I was just about 15 – and I thought, “She's got me here to be a slave.” (Laughs). She's taught me to drive her car – we went out to her manor, and I was driving her car with her. I played the piano, and then I wasn't playing because I could read music fast – I was turning the pages for this super elegant rich woman who played the piano. So I was scrubbing sinks, turning pages for this wealthy lady reading music. And learning to drive her car so I could take her places. And I thought, “She's making me a slave. But damned if I do this.” So I wrote Manilla, my best friend, and I said, “Manilla, I'm leaving here.” I was a senior in high school, and I said, “come and get me. Get Mr. Shank to drive you to the top of the mountain.” Because it was way down a mountain, and you could walk through fields and get there. And she got

Annie, my sister, and Harriet, her sister, and Manilla – we all walked to school together. Mrs. Gwyn didn't know a thing about it. I had my bags packed. They came in, and I marched in and I said, “Mrs. Gwyn, I'm leaving. They've come to take me home.” And the four of us, about three in the afternoon with my bags, went through the fields, walked up that mountain through a path – I mean it was a long, long way to where Mr. Shanks truck was. And I got free. (Laughs).

O: Did you tell her that you felt like she was making you a slave?

VS: No, I just told her I was leaving. I told my mother – Mama said, “Why did you do that to Mrs. Gwyn? She'd have given you such a good education.” And I said, “I didn't want to stay. She was making a slave out of me.” (Laughs). So I've had some weird experiences. And that day, as we walked up that mountain, we saw horses mating. I'd never seen that before. They were in a barn, and they were carrying on something terrible.

O: What did that make you think of?

VS: Huh?

O: Did you know what they –

VS: Oh yes, being raised on a farm, I knew all about cattle sexing, you know. That sort of thing. It scared us, because we didn't know that wild horses would be in that state. So we ran. Ran fast up the hill. But I've had lots of turning points, that was a turning point.

O: Leaving her, yeah.

VS: That was definitely a turning point. What would my life had been if I'd have stayed with Mrs. Gwyn? God knows. Phew!

O: That was before you got to Pikeville?

VS: That was – yes.

O: So those were considerable experiences for a person – and you were still an adolescent.

VS: 15 years old.

O: What today gives your –

End of part 5----------

O: What today gives your life meaning or purpose?

VS: Everything. Nature, my children, the out-of-doors, the people I'm in love with. The people I love, neighbors. Lee comes in constantly, just banging like he is. He's here at least two nights a week banging at the door. (laughs).

O: What is your biggest worry now?

VS: Uh, I guess I don't think unreasonably about death, but I do think about death. I'm 93.

O: Going on 25?

VS: Huh?

O: 93 going on 25?

VS: (laughs) yeah. Well I do realize – I don't realize it until I realize, I think how long can I live? Because I love living. And I think 93 – the children say 'you'll live to be 108.' They've given me till 108.

O: Well, you got some good years left.

VS: (Laughs) Yeah, I do. But listen, I don't think about – don't dwell on that, but I do think about that as being the next step somehow. At 93 you have to.

O: Well, yeah. But you're not worried about it, you're just –

VS: No, not worried, it just comes to me once in awhile and I want to push it away when it does.

O: What is the greatest source of inspiration for you? That's very important to me. What inspires you?

VS: Huh?

O: What inspires you?

VS: That's a hard, hard question. Books don't inspire me. Music inspires me, sometimes. I sing with the Millers, still. We go to nursing homes and sing.

O: It sounds to me like being in love inspires you.

VS: I was going to tell you, that being in love is my greatest inspiration. I've been in love with somebody all my life, I told Manilla. Including her father when I was about 11 (laughs).

O: That's a wonderful thing, though, don't you think?

VS: Yes, the ability to do that amazes me. That I can still fall desperately in love.

O: That's wonderful.

VS: It really is a good thing. And I realize that – the ability to do that, to look outside yourself and fall in love with another human being is a good thing, no matter if it can be – what would you call it.

O: Well, physical.

VS: Yes. But it is a thing of the mind.

O: And the spirit, I would say.

VS: Yes, and it’s a thing of the spirit. But it’s wonderful to have that to think about in your mind.

O: And to still have it inspire you, I just think that's just incredible – it’s beautiful.

VS: It does, it does.

O: What are you proudest of in your life?

VS: What?

O: What are you proudest of in your life?

VS: I'm proudest of finally being educated enough to do what I really love to do, which is teach at the University. I didn't like teaching grade school much, the disciplinary problems were so great that you

never got to really teach. In the University, you didn't have the disciplinary problems and you could really teach. People come – Daniella comes, Daniella is a Czechoslovakian girl about 37, who works for me one day a week. And she's wonderful, I love Daniella. And she brings – because she's Czechoslovakian, she has a hard time with English – her little boy does. So she brings me his lessons when she comes to work and she'll say, “I have some lessons, I can't do. Can you help me?” And we sit at the table, and I realize, “Oh, I'm sorry.” And I'm just as happy as I can be teaching again! So I really love it. I love the puzzling, I just love it.

O: How would you like to be remembered? What do you want your legacy to be?

VS: Nothing, except just to remember who I was. That's all. I don't want to be known as a great teacher or great anything.

O: Okay, but you want to be remembered –

VS: As an interesting human being who loved people.

O: IS there anything that the people who are close to you – your family, your friends, you neighbors – whatever, don't know about you that you would like for them to know?

VS: That I would like them to know? They certainly don't know about my love affairs (laughs).

O: Do your children realize this? Are people who know you, do they realize what a passionate person you are?

VS: No, no. No. They know I'm passionate, but they –

O: They don't know that it manifests in love?

VS: Oh no. No.

O: But that's key to who you are, I think.

VS: It probably is.

O: Part of you is missing – I don't know that children can necessarily appreciate that, but anybody who appreciates how rich that is, you know, is missing something by not knowing that about you. It’s so unusual.

VS: Well, I realize it is. Judy, my good friend – I have a close, close friend named Judy who is half my age – she's the age of Bob. And we're extremely close – we go to lunch all the time and we take trips together – I went to Oxford, England with her and took students to Oxford University for two years in a row. And –

O: Who is this? What's her name?

VS: Judy Shaw. She was an administrator at the University. She came from the English department as a little assistant and rose all the way up to being a provost. She's something else – she's the brightest human, but she's so full of fun. She loves country music, and we'll get in the car and turn on

country music. She's the person I have fun with, and she knows everything about me. Including my loves (laughs).

O: Is she provost now?

VS: No, she retired. And what was I going to tell you about Judy?

O: Well, we were talking about how nobody knew about this side of you.

VS: Oh yeah, Judy knows all of this. And she just hoots! We went on a bus trip together with the person I'm presently in love with, and she just hoots! She says, “Oh, no!” (laughs).

O: Well, one thing I must ask, does he know? Or she know? I mean, I'm assuming it’s –

VS: She knows. He knows the way you know deep down in your conscienceness. We both know.

O: But you don't talk about it.

VS: Oh, no, we don't talk about it.

O: But you know he knows.

VS: I know he knows. I mean, he gives me great hugs. He's a great hugger, and I drive with him places, and he brings me home and gives me a great hug. And I think about a year ago – about six months ago, he said, “I'm going to hug you.” And we got into this great hug, and I told him I loved him and he said, “I love you back.” So, even though his wife was in the car we said that.

O: She doesn't sound like she feels threatened.

VS: She doesn't know it. She's not the kind of person who would be aware of such a thing. They've just been married a little while – he had one wife and lived with the wife for 37 years. And the wife told him to marry this woman.

O: Oh, because she died?

VS: Yeah, before she died. She died of cancer, he nursed her through for 37 years. And she said, “When I die, marry this woman.” So I don't think they're ideally suited at all, but they're both religious, or so I'll say.

O: Is he younger than you?

VS: He's a minister.

O: Ah, is he younger than you?

VS: About 15 years.

O: You just have a thing for younger men.

VS: I do. (Laughs). Men get old before women do! You've always got to have a younger man. (Laughs). I do have a thing for younger men, there's no doubt about it. I've been accused of that.

O: Well, I don't know if this makes any difference to you, but the women that I've interviewed with the richest life experiences have very similar experiences.

VS: Really?

O: Younger men dot their lives.

VS: Really?

O: Yes, I just love it!

VS: (Laughs), oh that's funny. But we so outlast men.

O: Well, yeah, but there are certain men who just gravitate to older women and it's –

VS: Oh I know. There are men who gravitate toward older women.

O: But it's just like your experience, I'm talking about – I'm not talking about two or three years, I'm talking about 25 years, you know. 20 years that separate them.

VS: I know.

O: It's a passionate, long standing –

VS: Oh it is.

O: So, I just love these stories. So, these people may not know about it, but it's not necessarily something you're going to tell them. I mean, it's not something you want them necessarily to know.

VS: Oh, no.

O: But it's a huge chunk of who you are, so it must be good to have a friend that you can share it with.

VS: Oh it is. Oh it's great. I have Manilla, whom I write to, and I have Judy who knows everything about me and I know everything about her. And she's a great – we're good for each other because she's full of fun and laughter. (Laughs).

O: It's so wonderful that you're having such great fun now.

VS: It really is. And it is wonderful, and I've been all my life – I've been able to have and hold close friends. And that is wonderful. And to keep them, for the most part, until they die. Poor old Gene Connell. Oh we were so close, and he died of a heart attack. Far too early.

O: How old was he?

VS: Probably in his late 50's – he might have been in his 50's. I think so.

O: You already said you've been writing your own memoir – your own autobiography. What would the title to this life you've told me about so far – what would the title to this life story be?

VS: I have no earthly idea.

O: Come on, lets come up with something. "Virginia Lancaster-Shields;" What would the –

VS: I just put, "Her life". Because that's what it is, and it has really been a glorious life. I've been aware – awareness is half of life. And even as a child, I was aware of that little black hand, and I can still remember that. Thank God I have a good, good memory, and I can see that little black hand in my

mind just as well as when it happened.

O: Is there anything that you wished you would have covered more throughout? I mean, there's plenty of questions I didn't ask, but is there anything that – what about talking about your life – revisiting your life, what is most rewarding about it? What about it helps most? Or you find the most beneficial?

VS: I love the fact that I have retained my memory, and that I can live so much in memory because of that. That's a great thing. Cause you can relive all these great experiences and almost feel them again.

O: When you talk about the young man that was in love with you and pursued you, did those feelings return when you talked about it? Does –

VS: No. I worked through that one. Now that I've worked through it, he caused me really more misery than he caused me pleasure. Because everything was on his terms. Everything. And I was such a goose that I permitted that.

O: And you just said yourself that you're not giving up your freedom for anybody.

VS: No.

O: But you were almost willing to for him?

VS: Almost, but he told me one time: He said I have dominated every woman I have ever been with. And he said, “You're indomitable.”

O: Wow. Oh, that would be a great title!

VS: (Laughs).

O: “Virginia Lancaster-Shields: Indomitable Woman.”

VS: Yes, that would – he told me that one time. He said, I've been able to” – and he'd known a lot of women. He had had experiences far beyond what I had had because of his beauty, and his precociousness and his mind. And I wasn't – I didn't take anything virginal. He had had affairs with women – older women before, I knew that. His mother's friends.

O: Was the woman he married older?

VS: Oh, no. She's much younger. A very sexy, good rider – she looked beautiful on horseback. I went to a horse show where she rode. And she's beautiful woman. I always – everytime I saw her, she was kind of dirty. Cause working in the barn, so I never saw her as really a clean person. But she was – in her way, she was beautiful. And when she dressed up in that uniform –

O: Riding habit.

VS: Riding habit, she was beautiful.

O: How old do you feel, Virginia? In your mind, how old are you?

VS: About 38.

O: Is there anything about that age –

VS: No, it just came to me at the top of my mind. I don't think I'm 40 yet because I went through a worrying period when I was 40 and I'm over that. I think I became very aware when I was about 36. I remember thinking that. That's when I went back to University.

O: When you were 38? Or –

VS: 37.

O: Ah. Well you began, to some extent, that was a waking up period for you. So maybe that's why 38 comes to mind. You had begun to wake up and –

VS: That's true. And Wayne, I went to visit him once. My sister was here – Helen, my youngest sister. And she said, "There's no reason not to go see him. He ate Christmas dinner with us, lets go across the road." They put him in an apartment right across from me when he got sick. Said, "Lets go see Wayne." And she just kept on, and I said, "Oh, Alright." So we went over and we go to talking, and I still remember, cause he knew what would get me. And he was in a really good humor and he looked at Helen, and said, "She was a really good broad until she went to the University." And I stamped my foot and I got up and I said, "Don't you ever call me a broad." (Laughs). And then I left!

O: But he was well aware?

VS: Oh, he meant to! He was doing it for meanness.

O: But he was well aware that the University changed you, and for him it was not in a good way but for you it was an awakening.

VS: Yes, that's what he always said – I did not know it was an awakening, because I had awakened a long time before I went there, that's why I went. But for him, I became independent. And I got money, so I could divorce. So that's what happened. I had a job, so I wasn't fighting about the children anymore. And they were all married anyway. But anyway, I don't know but I've always thought that if I had really – no, it wouldn't have been a good thing. It wouldn't have been fair to my children to divorce with no way to earn a living for them.

O: Right. So the timing – it sounds like you don't have regrets because the timing has – you kind of let the timing take care of things.

VS: It's been pretty good. It worked out.

O: Well I'm going to ask you just a couple more things, and them I'm going to close down. This is back to history. Did you ever read the book the feminine mystique?

VS: The what?

O: The Feminine Mystique?

VS: I had years ago – I read a part of it. I never read it all.

O: Betty Friedan. So do you remember how you responded to it when you read it?

VS: I didn't respond to it very well. I don't believe in woman's lib.

O: You don't?

VS: No. I think that we attain – I never needed woman's lib. I think that women can be free if they want to. I always have thought that. And I didn't believe in all this burning bras and all that crap (laughs).

O: So what do you think the legacy of the woman's movement has been?

VS: I don't think it's been much of anything – I think we'll go back – I think we've already started to go back to the other way. My grandchildren have, my granddaughters.

O: In what way?

VS: They're just exactly like I was doing, with their children, with their husbands. Doing what their husbands want. Not to their detriment, but I mean they've just gone back to the feminine role. I don't think it had – women get better jobs and they fight more though, because to get to the top, they have to really fight.

Door bell; company comes.