

## Virginia Merrifield nee Coles

Tape 1 of 1

- Question:** What is your maiden name?
- Answer:** Coles, old English, and my dad was from England.
- Question:** And Virginia.
- Answer:** Uh huh.
- Question:** And you were born, I hate to be rude and ask when you were born, but?
- Answer:** What year you mean? 1923.
- Question:** And you were born where?
- Answer:** Richmond, Virginia.
- Question:** Is that where you grew up?
- Answer:** Oh, yeah, I was born and raised there all my life until I graduated from college and got married. Bill promised he would stay in Virginia but it didn't work out. Too hot for him. So I moved out here and have been here ever since, I mean on the west coast, or around the country. I've never lived in Virginia again.
- Question:** What did your dad do?
- Answer:** My father worked his way up from being a clerk at the YMCA when he came here from England, and lived in Canada for awhile, and worked his way up to be next in line for full directorship for the YMCA in Richmond. He concentrated mostly on membership, soliciting membership, very outgoing, very pleasant, smiled all the time and everybody loved him so he really collected members.
- Question:** Does that mean you spent a lot of time at the YMCA as a child?
- Answer:** Yes, and what was so funny is all the director's there had girls and at that time YMCA did not admit girl's at all. Never had any advantages of pool, tennis courts, or anything, you know, but that's the way it goes you know. They're still having girls because we have five, four grand daughters, and five great grand children, one of which is a boy, but all the others are girls.
- Question:** One boy?
- Answer:** One boy, out of nine I guess that's not too bad.
- Question:** So you had sisters then?
- Answer:** One sister, still living.
- Question:** And where does she live?
- Answer:** She lives outside of Richmond at a place called Mechanicsville.
- Question:** Obviously her husband didn't fib to her and say

## Virginia Merrifield nee Coles

Tape 1 of 1

**Answer:** No, he's from Georgia actually, southern accent boy.

**Question:** What was it like growing up for you?

**Answer:** Wonderful, wonderful. Loved being a kid. We only lived a block and a half from what they called the city playground. Everything was there except a swimming pool so I never learned to swim. I learned everything else relative to sports and the city hired a director and we had a sports director and a playground supervisor and a person in charge of recreation so it was a wonderful experience. I practically lived down there because I loved that.

**Question:** As a child were you aware of the depression?

**Answer:** Oh yes, but not to any great extent. I knew things were tight. I remember dad putting cardboard in my shoes because they had a hole in them and I remember every banana was shared with my sister and things like that, you know, we got a little Easter basket and mother doled it out a piece at a time you know, nothing was ever extravagant and I remember going to the store with a quarter for mother and she wanted a pound of hamburger and a loaf of bread and it was always two cents change so my sister and I thought we should have those but no way we had to bring those two pennies back. I even went through college on a dollar a week allowance, so needless to say I didn't go anywhere or have much, maybe that's why I studied.

**Question:** That is always amazing when you put it in perspective like that with a quarter you could go down and get a pound of hamburger and a loaf of bread.

**Answer:** Came to twenty-three cents, and brought back the two pennies. I remember hamburger was eighteen cents and whatever the difference was the bread, five cents I think, but anyway, we never were hungry or anything like that but my parents I guess protected us from that sort of thing. Everybody was in the same boat so to speak but we had a brand new house. We never had a car and I guess my parents chose to have a better house and something that would be more lasting than a car. We had street cars in those days and later buses, but the YMCA always supplied him with a pass so why would he need a car and nobody else our age had cars either. We didn't even have a telephone until I was in high school so those little things you don't realize until you get older.

**Question:** And that's what is kind of interesting looking back when you read a history book today if you read the depression, yeah tough times, but it sounded like everybody was starving.

**Answer:** My dad only made \$25 a week to start with and four of us lived on that and you know we always had what we needed and everything was supplied by our parents but never heard any sad stories about suffering or anything. I remember the shoes, but it didn't matter everybody else did the same thing, then later on they were rationed so I guess I have a phobia with shoes now. When I want to buy shoes all the time because I never had them when I was little, but you know that is just a fun thing.

**Question:** So your sister was older?

## Virginia Merrifield nee Coles

Tape 1 of 1

**Answer:** Two years.

**Question:** So did you have to go through hand me downs and all of that.

**Answer:** I suppose, I don't really remember, I ended up being taller than she, so you know she may have been taking my things, I don't know, but I'm sure we probably did. It was no big issue though if it was the case you know.

**Question:** So you were the high school class of?

**Answer:** I graduated 1941.

**Question:** So you graduated.

**Answer:** Yeah, 1941, I can't believe I don't remember this but anyway because I remember Pearl Harbor I was up at the dances at VPI and I just barely turned eighteen or I don't think mother would've let me go.. but they were always chaperoned. Four of us went up there for the dances and we were driven by Mr. Sun, so I guess she trusted him to that extent but.

**Question:** Now what was VPI?

**Answer:** Virginia Polytechnic Institute which is the grand grand equivalent of VMI, which was military, but the VPI was half military and half civilian so you could go there and not be in the military. So when the war when Pearl Harbor happened, the guy was up there for the weekend, I didn't know what.. that the way you know, Pearl Harbor, I said well what does this mean, he said it means I'm going to war you know so I didn't get the impact of it until I got back home. That was on a Sunday and we were waiting to get a ride back. We'd been up there Friday night and Saturday night and came back on Sunday. It was wonderful fun but he was a military person so he knew he would have to go.

**Question:** So were the dances live bands?

**Answer:** Oh yeah, they were live bands. Once a year they'd have a live dance, one weekend the cadets could invite their girl friends and we all stayed in the homes of professors up there and two of us at a time. Each professor accommodated two students and so we stayed at some college professor's home and the rest of the time the cadets took care of us during the day and came back at night to pick us up for the dance. And once you were at the dance you didn't check out again until they were ready to take you home and they had to be back within five minutes after that so no chance for honky-tonk, no chance for anything maybe a good night kiss and that was it, but we went mostly for the fun, you know it was really exciting. Everybody wanted to get invited and I was lucky I had a friend there.

**Question:** Your friend from there, did he get shipped off then?

**Answer:** I don't know because you know I imagine he did because after the next year I met Bill, my husband now, so I wasn't interested in any more gentlemen and I never heard from him any more so I imagine he went to war. He was studying to be an engineer though so whatever that involved up there. It was a wonderful college.

## Virginia Merrifield nee Coles

Tape 1 of 1

**Question:** So where did you meet Bill?

**Answer:** I met Bill at the YMCA oddly enough. Dad went there on Saturday nights to see that cots were set up in the gym and they had fifty cents a night for soldiers to come in and sleep for the night you know on these cots. So mother always chaperoned a bunch of us to the dances at the USO... you know what the USO was. So anyway, we stopped in there and checked with dad we were a little early and I heard this most beautiful music being played in the library so I walked and peeked around the corner and it was Bill playing Moonlight Sonata and I came running out and told my mom there's the most handsome man I have ever seen in there playing the piano and not long after that he walked by, I nudged my mom and said, there he is, there he is, and my mom went over and said would you like to go with us to the USO dance and he did and apparently he got my phone number from mother because I don't remember giving it to him but he did call later and we started dating.

**Question:** So your mom didn't say, oh those are the boys in uniform.

**Answer:** Oh no, my mom was the most wonderful person in the world still in my mind. She always trusted us. You know you're innocent until proven guilty I guess, her only requirement was that they go to church with us on Sunday and they never stayed overnight at our home they stayed elsewhere and then they joined us on Sunday morning. My grandfather was a minister and my dad may as well have been he was too good to be true so that's how we dated all the guys. Even after we were engaged and Bill was overseas I still went out. We had that understanding because you know we hadn't really known each other but for just a year and then that was off and on when he wasn't flying and off somewhere and so we had a dance at the college we'd phone up the air base and say send us a squadron of men preferably officers, and then because there weren't any men around. We just trusted those guys and they came in a whole group and we danced with whoever and I guess a lot of romances developed out of that I don't know.

**Question:** How old was Bill?

**Answer:** He was 21 and I was 18 and when he came home in October he had his birthday on the ship he came back on the Queen Elizabeth and I was still 19 I was a senior in college at that time in fact when we went to get a license to get married I was still 20 but my birthday was, well I was 21, but you know they don't believe that because that was the legal age for marriage and I remembered I had just registered to vote, I was so proud that I could vote, had to be 21 then to vote. Bill went down to the car and got my mother to verify that I was 21 when I remembered that so by the time he got her I had it straightened out with my voter's registration card. So I said I don't need you mother so that ended that. He came home on the 10<sup>th</sup> and we were married the 21<sup>st</sup> and if you don't know what a time is getting a big wedding together in ten days, it can be done, during war time, and the church was practically on an hourly basis you know and I had been to that church all my life and we had a big church wedding so the gal that got married like 3 hours before we did everything was set up so we didn't have to worry about that. We shared the cost of the flowers we were almost going to share the veils because you couldn't get a veil anywhere until one of my sisters friends had one that was 4-5 years old but it did the trick and it was much prettier than the one she had so that worked out great. Being in college I had about ten girls I wanted in the wedding. I went down and picked out the dress for them and they only had six so she said you'll

## Virginia Merrifield nee Coles

Tape 1 of 1

have to pick six of them so we went down the nine of us and whoever the dresses fit. I kept one for my sister because she was my matron of honor, she was married then, and my maid of honor, and four were left and whoever could fit in them that's who had them so we managed somehow so the others cut cake you know and served punch so they were in it but.

**Question:** Now is this, make sure I get my chronology straight, is this after the war ended?

**Answer:** Yeah, this is after the war.

**Question:** So just after the war ended.

**Answer:** The war was still on, it hadn't ended, he came home in '44 and he went over in '43 so a year and a half.

**Question:** So you are still facing the war shortages.

**Answer:** Oh yeah everything was rationed and I know his mother sent me two pairs of silk stockings which were out of the question and I don't know where she got them but never the less she's from San Francisco where Bill lived and she said I want you to wear one pair under your wedding gown, well what happened was we had crinoline, what was that stuff, that catches on everything and man I just ruined those stockings and those were worth about ten dollars at that time if you could get them, you know, but I remember she was so happy that I would have really nice stockings because at that time we were using sun tan lotion and rubbing it on our legs to look like stockings you know. I guess that was vanity in those days you know. But most of us wore saddle shoes and stockings in those days especially if you were in college you know you didn't have to dress up. There was nothing but girls there anyway during that time just a few boys so I guess we just made do with what we had.

**Question:** So when you met Bill he had already been through his training and

**Answer:** He was in the process. I met him... when I met Bill that weekend at Richmond at the "Y", he was in training out at Richmond Air Base and so he was up flying off and on. He was on a B-17 crew member so he was in town sometimes and sometimes he would be out of town so it just depended and then he got shipped to Nebraska and a couple places for additional training and so forth and then he was shipped overseas.

**Question:** When he got shipped overseas you hadn't known him long?

**Answer:** I'd known him about May to the following May about a year, but not steady because he was gone a lot and still training so there were times I didn't hear from him from 6-8 weeks.

**Question:** When he left to go over seas did you get to say goodbye to him or was he?

**Answer:** Oh Yeah I went with him to the station, everybody cried. We went to the main street train station and he took off from there and I gave him a little ring that a boy had given me but I think he promptly lost it but... I didn't have anything

## Virginia Merrifield nee Coles

Tape 1 of 1

else to give him and I felt like I should give him something you know so then I came home on the streetcar all by myself and then I sat there and cried for 2-3 days and then my grandparents were down from Boston and like I said he was a minister and he gave me a lot of comfort and all that stuff you know and meanwhile Bill gave me a diamond ring so it was serious... but dad was a little upset that suppose he came home crippled or not at all the things you should be looking for you know and I said well we'll face that if they happen so we didn't get married before he left which was what Bill wanted to do but we thought better of it.

**Question:** Your Dad was the realist in the family. Shake you up a little bit?

**Answer:** I know, I know, but my dad... that was the first time I'd seen him really that interested. Mother was the disciplinarian. She'd send us out for a little switch and we'd come back with about six inches long you know and then maybe bring one back maybe ten inches long and that I mean two girls they aren't too bad, we didn't get into any trouble, that I could think of except when I was really little and I fell in the fish pond and my sister got mad because I didn't bring out a fish. I could have very well been drowned but anyway that's the way kids are. See my grand dad would go to the prisons Sunday after noon and preach to the inmates and take my sister along to sing and we'd stand on a chair and we would sing Jesus wants me for a sunbeam or Jesus loves me, or something, you know and I guess apparently did something I don't know but afterwards my mother would walk us up to the poor home which was a block or two away from the jail and they all the children wore the same kind of dresses, maybe it was an orphanage, I don't know, and then my grand dad would come over there after he left the prisons and preach to them for the evening service so mother always took us and we I walked around the edge of the fish pond and I just fell in. Well I was soaking wet of course and had to go home on the streetcar so she borrowed a dress from one of these kids and we walked home through all the back alleys and everything else in one of these little dresses and that was where we found the little kitten. I don't know if you read that in the book I wrote, and we brought the kitten home under the dress, and of course he didn't have his eyes open, he didn't know what was up at that time and we told mother he followed us all the way and of course she was walking right with us but I guess if you don't know any better you say whatever you want to say.

**Question:** What a wonderful childhood, I mean.

**Answer:** I did, I had a wonderful childhood, I really did. I think mainly because we were Christians and had always been from childhood on up. We had great respect for our parents. I mean if we ever did get in trouble, I did talk a lot in school, and another friend of mine every day we did stay in for talking or giggling you know and to this day we're still friends And we get on the phone sometimes, she lives in North Carolina, and we giggle and laugh just like we did back then you know, so I'd had to stay after school a lot for that. We liked it though because we got to shake the erasers out, you know, beat them against the fence or something and that was supposed to be bad but we both loved it because she and I both wanted to be school teachers and we would sneak chalk if that were the case you know. My dad set up a little school room in our third bedroom and a little blackboard and my dolls were my students and Mildred and I, that other friend, and every other day we'd go to each other's house and play school, you know, and also after we stayed for giggling when the teacher left the room we'd take papers out of the trash and stick them in our books to go home to correct and if she'd thrown them out we figured she didn't want them you know. We did all kinds of little things like that. The janitors

## Virginia Merrifield nee Coles

Tape 1 of 1

got to know us very well. We'd go along and when they'd go in a room we'd go in the trash, but only a few times you know.

**Question:** You ended up teaching?

**Answer:** I ended up teaching.

**Question:** What about Mildred?

**Answer:** She got married early like nineteen and then she'd gone to business school when we went to college, she went to business college, and ended up as a secretary, a very good one, and she just retired recently at seventy-five but she lost her husband very early and she was head librarian in Washington North Carolina for their library there and she dedicated the rest of her life to books and the librarianship. She still volunteers there now at seventy-eight. And school was fun. We took our lunch every day in a paper bag, brought home the paper and the bag, you know, that was one thing I guess from the depression. The depression didn't hit us badly in any way till about junior high it was letting up a little then I guess, but I guess it taught us to be frugal and to care for how we spent our money, so it probably had a purpose, in spite of that.

**Question:** I know my grandmother, one thing that I remember, she passed away when I was fairly young, but coming from the depression, if we went over to bake Christmas cookies with her when it came time to lick that bowl it was terrible because there was nothing there to lick.

**Answer:** I know it. Well, mom did that. Being two of us one got the spoon and the other got the pan, or whatever she made whatever she'd made it in, mostly it was fudge. She made wonderful fudge. I remember once we were playing with our dolls down at the empty lot at the end of our street and I heard her call me but I didn't want to go and it was really bad I didn't go because when I got home she said I just made fudge and since you weren't here your sister got the spoon and the pan. Oh man I was mad. So I guess in a way you learn those little things. You don't ever forget them.

Anyway, back to the war I remember everything was rationed and I remember mother gave me two dollars to put in my purse every time that I went out that if I ever saw a line anywhere to get in it because more than likely we'd need it and I had that money which was a lot of money to trust to me at that time. And I did. I got soap flakes. You could get a little box of those probably half a size a piece of notebook paper, of LUX and at that time I think they were only eighteen cents or something like that so I'd bring those home periodically. The thing I remember most was her rationing, you know we all had ration books each person but mother took care of them for us the family the four of us. We each had a bowl of sugar in front of our plate, we sat in the same seat and had our meals together so we had a bowl of sugar in front of each person's plate and it was up to us to dole that out until the next ration so we were very very careful how we used sugar and the same with other little things like some kind of fruit even was not available. It was shipped out to the servicemen and you couldn't get anything like chewing gum or candy bars, those were absolutely unreal. I stood in line once for a Milky Way Bar and mother didn't consider that really essential but you never knew until you got up there what you were going to get so that's why I guess the rationing wasn't that big of a problem because mother made it stick. You could trade with other people like we didn't drink coffee we drank tea, my dad being English, we were all tea happy and my friend

## Virginia Merrifield nee Coles

Tape 1 of 1

Mildred her father was an avid coffee drinker so they would trade us sugar stamps for coffee stamps. They got more coffee and we got more sugar but I was in college at the time so I really wasn't too aware of what was rationed, I just know mother kept track of it all and nobody got more than others at that time.

**Question:** Did you live on campus when you went to college?

**Answer:** I did not live on campus. I would go sometimes in the summer, we'd go for weekends, like I played on the basketball team, but William and Mary had a branch in Richmond, like you have the University of Washington now and Tacoma, and we had a William & Mary in Richmond, so I was very fortunate, otherwise, I wouldn't have been able to afford to go to college. I had to apply for some kind of grant they gave at that time for the youth, and then I worked my way four years through college back in the stacks at the library. I found some interesting stuff back there but I'm literally being truthful when I say I had to use a flashlight to see. They had no overhead lights back in there and I mean it was horrible, I hated that job, so the year that Bill and I were married, I was a senior then, I said I'm not going to work this year besides I was president of the student body at that time and I had a lot of commitments, a lot of obligations, so mother said Bill can help you out with your college and I was 21 then so I didn't work. I had a wonderful senior year.. big flush fifty dollars a month which was unheard of you know but I paid my parents for room and board which was fifteen dollars so the rest I had and I sold Christmas cards too. Being president of the student body had advantages. They let me set up a booth in the hallway and I took orders for Christmas cards so you know I had enough money I was a little bit creative there.

**Question:** The GI Bill didn't apply to spouses?

**Answer:** No, and that was my senior year and I know to this day I feel bad that I never told my parents how much I appreciated that because you know Bill went back on the GI Bill and even then we only got ninety six dollars a month to live on but we did, then later we had our first child and it went up twenty five or thirty dollars or something like that. The idea then was old fashioned that wives didn't work you know. Today it's always where do you work and where does he work, but in those days because of the war women were working out of necessity but Bill was still old fashioned, there was no way I was going to work and after our son was born I worked before that to help him through college and he held three jobs at that you know and we barely made it but we did.

**Question:** While Bill was overseas did you correspond?

**Answer:** Every day. I wrote every day and that is where my allowance went, but sometimes dad would take it and say well I'll drop this off for you today, you know, before I put my stamp on so that was really nice. That was ok. I had everything I needed and stuff and so it didn't worry me in the least. I didn't have any more. Other girls did, but nobody had a car. One girl had a car and you know she was very responsible so if you got to ride in that you thought you'd really arrived you know and my other girl friend, Ellen, that I still correspond with that was my maid of honor in our wedding, her dad worked in the automobile business. Automobile warehousing, parts and things like that, and he made really good money so she had a lot of money and was very generous so she'd treat all of us. Then we'd usher at the Mosque Theatre when they had Nelson Eddie and Joe Penna, I don't know if you remember any of those people, and various Minnie Pearl Lee, you know



## Virginia Merrifield nee Coles

Tape 1 of 1

certain so called celebrities of the day, and we could go and usher, seniors in good standing, and we ushered the people, you know, found the seats for them and then as soon as it started we could sit anywhere there were empty seats. So we got to see a lot of things, you know, just by ushering and you know when you find an outlet you take it, providing it is legal.

**Question:** The sad thing is for the kids today you'd have to define what an usher is because they've never been to a show with ushers.

**Answer:** Now you find your own seat if you have any luck at all, but, that's true there are a lot of things the kids today absolutely don't understand one bit when I first started teaching I had 38 children in my kindergarten class in the morning. I went to a different school in the afternoon and had 38 more. No teachers aids no para pros or whatever... you taught your own music, your own PE, besides you kept your own bookwork, you know the roll book and that had to be turned in every day and then we had recess duty, lunch duty, bus duty you know and sometimes I get a little irate at these teachers today who don't realize you know what they could be doing and they all answer well kids today are different. Well maybe they are I don't know I'm on a school board now and I work with kids a lot just as a volunteer but I find them still sweet, still willing to cooperate if you take the time and use the right technique.

**Question:** You know that's funny, now that you mention that how much you had to do as a teacher I can think back to Mrs. Bell, my kindergarten teacher, and yeah she did everything, music...

**Answer:** Besides that when I was in school in kindergarten and through even when my son started school in North Dakota when we were stationed out there no teacher could be married. That was a blue law. And they were advertising in the paper in Fargo, North Dakota, for a kindergarten teacher. Well I had that one in school you know and I figured well I could handle that and bring a little income in and I called up there and the first thing they asked, well are you married... well yes, don't bother to apply until August 30<sup>th</sup>, and if we have no teachers that are single then we will consider a married teacher. So I really let loose that superintendent what I thought. I said I realize this is a 40-year-old rule and I said man change it. This is changing times you know, this is ridiculous, well, so I taught at college. I went over and applied at North Dakota State University. I read where they were opening a new child growth and development center for the college students and I got the job. I think I was 30 and my second son by then was 2 or 2 1/2 so I knew he could go with me. So I always stayed home with the children until they could go to one school or the other and of course that was the best job I ever had. That was every day until one o'clock. I taught the child growth and development classes to the college students after that in the afternoon and advanced problems of children to another group of graduates. That was the best job. I loved it. I was young and you know we chaperoned all their dances and everything because I was only like ten years older than they were so we really enjoyed all the things they did. Chaperoned buses to the ski lodges and all that stuff.

**Question:** This is post war and America is excited and growing again and.

**Answer:** I remember teaching at the college I was asked if I would like to come and sign up to go on social security. Well I didn't even know what it was so he says everybody is doing it. When you get older you can draw funds from this thing.

## Virginia Merrifield nee Coles

Tape 1 of 1

Sounds good to me. If everybody else is doing it, I'll do it too. And it passed. I do remember when I was selling at a dress shop when I was in high school on Saturday, mother really didn't want me to do that because Saturday was the day she thought I should rest because we were very active in school. You know we played ball and did all kinds of stuff kids do and I got \$1.98 on Saturday night for that one day. It was twenty five cents an hour and they took two cents out and I remember asking what that was for and she said social security and I had heard of it but that was my last experience where I was paid for anything you know and at school when I was working my way there you know the money all went to my tuition. I never saw any money per say, from that.

**Question:** Well, I'd be glad to have them just take two cents out.

**Answer:** I know, wouldn't you though, I guess. Well, it's paying off now, you know, you know it's not a heck of a lot, but it's money you wouldn't have saved.

**Question:** It's better than a poke (inaudible) in the back with a sharp stick. Now you talked about writing to Bill every day.

**Answer:** Uh huh, well, he wrote to me every day he could. We had a system. I would get usually 5-6 letters at a time and they were all censored. Either they were cut out or blacked out because once they went into the V-mails the tiny photographed page they could black that out very well but the others had to be cut out by the censor and so forth, but every noon I would phone my mother at home and I would say, I'd just let it ring two times and then I'd hang up. It was on a pay phone and then mother would call me back and she would say yes you did or you didn't get any mail and that is all we'd say. You know my dad was a little fussy and he thought that was very wrong and I never told my grandfather but he probably wouldn't have minded I don't know. It was wrong but I didn't have the money and I couldn't wait until I got home and you know and it would be either good news or bad news you know, I either did or I didn't. Once while Bill was missing in action the next of kin was his mother so she had gotten the telegram about it and I didn't even know about it. Everything was telegrams in those days you know that was the fastest communication other than telephoning, but anyway she wrote to me, we wrote about once a week and exchanged information and where Bill was and what he was doing if we knew and she said wrote to me once and said I am so thankful they located Bill. She was a wonderful person and she never worried me in the least and I respected her and I didn't do it either and but we never heard anything really bad. I have to tell you one thing though when Bill went overseas my sister was pregnant with her first child and Bill knew it and he wanted to know when the child was born and what it was you know because he would be an uncle eventually not then but so at that time they had printed telegrams, you could never make up your own, you know, you had to print out whatever was written there, there was one for everything you could think of, childbirth, and the only one I could find was son born today and mother doing well, and then I signed my name instead of Ruth's name and he got really teased that he had this child you know and had left this pregnant woman behind and he has never gotten over it. He says why didn't you sign her name, everybody knew Ginny, but they didn't know who Ruth was you know. Well, that is just one of those funny things that happened, it was nothing life threatening or anything so that was it.

**Question:** When you was writing back and forth did you write about average day stuff or?

## Virginia Merrifield nee Coles

Tape 1 of 1

**Answer:** Well, he knew all my friends and I would tell him what was happening with them and of course I always told him how I missed him and how I loved him and that I hoped he was well and all that stuff and what was going on at school because he always teased me that I majored in bridge because there were no men as I told you and so you had somebody hold your seat while you went to class and then you'd come back and boot them out get your seat back and finish your bridge game but anyway I would tell him about the weather and other people he knew and clip ins from the paper and what was going on at school and church and that kind of stuff. Never were very long because half of them didn't get there, they were sunk on the way over in the Atlantic somewhere and then he would only write like one page with a lot of space in between lines and he couldn't he couldn't even mention he was in the 8<sup>th</sup> air force till one time he drew a picture of one of the guys, cause he is real good at sketching, and there was an 8<sup>th</sup> air force patch on his arm and I didn't think it'd get by the censor but it did and I said I've been reading all about the 8<sup>th</sup> air force in the paper but I didn't know whether I should say anything about it or get him in trouble so I just let it go but I knew then he was in the 8<sup>th</sup> air force and so I could follow in the paper a little bit more intelligently about the war.

**Question:** So before that you didn't know, you knew he was.

**Answer:** I knew he was in England and he was at Peterborough You know and he was flying in a B-17 but I didn't know it was in the 8<sup>th</sup> air force. I guess maybe I wasn't that knowledgeable about squads and numbers of battalions and all that stuff. I didn't understand any of it anyway except I knew what squad he was in and his bomb group because that's where I sent it to the 351 bomb group and 360<sup>th</sup> something or other.

**Question:** That is where ignorance is probably bliss.

**Answer:** Probably and if I read something about it in the paper I probably would have been really concerned but I had my hands full trying to stay in college, you know, and I was very active, and played basketball and I was in anything I could get in. I was in the glee club and I was on the newspaper staff, you know, kept me busy plus I'm just that way I like to do things like that.

**Question:** It's interesting because I've discovered kind of a theme with people I've interviewed this week, your high school class have you kept in touch with

**Answer:** I didn't for nearly twenty- five years. They had their reunion then and I got notice of it but I was out here and it was impossible financially plus I was teaching full time and I didn't have the time or the money to go out for a weekend which I'd have loved to but one of my friends wrote me that had been there and told me about this one and that one and the next thing. Well did go to the 50<sup>th</sup> one and we still had two hundred and some people, last year they had their 60<sup>th</sup> and it lasted 2 hours or 3 hours I guess. They met at a country club and they had cocktails and lunch and everybody went home for their naps I guess you know and one friend wrote me back and said it was so good as much as I'd have liked to see you because they are all half dead and she writes me since who's passed away all these people I knew and my sister still keeps me informed because she knew all my friends. She still corresponds with a lot of my friends too because they live right there and they meet for lunch and exchange news and things like that.

## Virginia Merrifield nee Coles

Tape 1 of 1

**Question:** Were there many from your class that went into the service?

**Answer:** Oh yes, almost all the boys did in fact the principal really was very upset that some of the boys were quitting high school to join the military but that wasn't my class my class was in '41 that we finished but they all graduated to my knowledge because we had like 800 graduates. It was a big high school. John Marshall High School. We only had two high schools in Richmond the other was Thomas Jefferson so you can see what the south does. So anyway, we were enemies football wise and everything else the two high schools. Thomas Jefferson is still standing but they tore down the John Marshall High School and moved it way out in more of an area not downtown more conducive to residential traveling and so forth because Richmond per say is not what it used to be you know, it grew and grew and of course it's a tobacco town and awfully smelly you could smell tobacco, but Edgar Allen Poe's home, the shrine for him is there, and it was right in the middle, you know got all these factories of tobacco and here's the little shrine sitting there and the same for Robert E. Lee's house that he had in Richmond and that's a little bitty house sitting between all these huge monstrous you know fifty story buildings and things like that but it is very traditional yet you know. They have monument avenue where all the great soldiers of the civil war but anyway Richmond is still a beautiful city but everybody lives outside of it you know. It's all business and stuff like that.

**Question:** How come you have chosen to stay so involved with the memorial foundation?

**Answer:** The World War II?

**Question:** Yeah.

**Answer:** Bill is involved in it you know, the foundation was his idea and I support anything he does, and we've always been a team and we try to show an interest in what the other has all the time. We don't always go to everything the other one has but right now that we are retired it's just as well to go as to stay at home I guess. You know, unless you are tired or something and it's our chance to get out and have dinner because we live out in Grapeview which is a good hour from Olympia and which is the nearest place to anything interesting to do. I mean Shelton now has a Dennys and a Wal-Mart and that's about it you know so you got to live and do things or you'll die on the vine so it keeps us interested and busy.

**Question:** You and Bill have been, I mean there are others, but you and Bill have been real committed and a lot of time involved in that.

**Answer:** Well I believe in it. I've thought now if I could go and see a mini-series being discussed by Civil War soldiers or if I could see Abe Lincoln on a tape, that's one thing I'd like to see on the tape you're producing is, President Roosevelt. I know everyone has seen and heard him elsewhere but he was a vital part of that and it would be nice for the kids to see the whole picture but you know that is entirely up to producers what they put on this thing, but I just believe in it and I think it teaches the kids loyalty and in a way it has brought kids together to know what their parents did and their grandparents because they have never experienced this. They don't even know what a depression was, never knew what the war was about as youngsters and even older they don't understand what their parents or grandparents went through and it opened up a new world for women as an impact to

## Virginia Merrifield nee Coles

Tape 1 of 1

technology and these are all things older people have to become involved in you know they won't be up-to-date or knowledgeable and of course computers are one thing I won't even touch but at least Bill's in that. I'm not mechanically inclined and it makes me nervous and I'm not going to do it. So that's the only thing we don't do together I guess but so be it.

**Question:** It's interesting because you have a unique perspective on children having taught and still being involved with the school board and all that and that's kind of with World War II you know my argument was if you could remove the II from it and just say this was about war in general so I guess my question is do you think people have changed, or are people people.

**Answer:** Well I think basically people are people but they have changed a lot in their value system and morality and things like that. I'm not saying that is what people today want to do and do, it's their business what they do, but I still believe in basic I guess you could say The Ten Commandments. I think society has to have rules and regulations to live by and to be fair and just to everyone and I don't think that is happening in today's time. I don't think the modern generation is setting a good example for the young people to follow and being on the school board I felt I had the opportunity to inject a little wisdom, I don't mean that bragging, it's just that the truth is the truth, stealing is still wrong and basic things like that and I think we need to do that, those basic concepts and a philosophy of life that is appropriate and I don't know if that's old fashioned. I don't have any argument from it when I bring up certain things. There are things the school can't do and but I think Christmas is one example that I think they should be able to the real purpose of Christmas which is not being done and I can't go against what 265 school boards and I'm sure there may be 10% that might agree with me I don't know but we're not there to run the schools we're just there to see that they're run right and most of that goes by legal standards and so that's what you stick to. That doesn't mean you can't say something about it at your own meetings and I think the school where I am at Pioneer has done a great job and they have great respect their for the school board and we have respect for them and the things the children produce and we are very active in what the children are doing and I love kids. Every year I go with the kids when they do the cat in the hat and they scramble the eggs, the green eggs and ham.

**Question:** MIM.

**Answer:** And it's really interesting to watch them especially like little kids but if I had to teach again today it would be either college, kindergarten, because all in between they are so screwed up, at least in my opinion. A lot of it needs to involve more family input and I think we're moving that way and I think September 11<sup>th</sup> helped a whole lot. I don't know but it seems maybe I just want it to be that way, but it does seem more that way to me.

**Question:** I think you're right I think it's brought back some realization to what's important in life.

**Answer:** Well, we're sort of off that fast track of everyone eating when they want to you know and going back to more family orientation. I know in our family we always ate at the same time every other day and every other day depending on dad would work two nights up til 9 o'clock so we had early supper and then on the other nights we'd have late supper which was normal and so Monday, Wednesday

## Virginia Merrifield nee Coles

Tape 1 of 1

and Friday we had late supper and we always ate breakfast together and dinner and it was always formal, I mean we all sat down and we prayed and joined hands and ate our meal in peace and talked about what happened that day. Really had a wonderful time. Sometimes we'd be at that meal two hours unless Little Orphan Annie came on or The Lone Ranger or The Shadow or something like that then we would go and be excused. We always were excused. Dad always held mother's chair for her to sit down and we never ate without her. That's the policy Bill has carried on in our house. The boys don't sit down until I'm seated and they don't get up til I'm done and no matter what the situation, maybe make a difference if they were heading off to a game or something but we always had that procedure. And Bill and I still do. I don't know what the boy's do. I know they pray before every meal. I don't know what they do about their eating. They are grown up now and their children are grown up so they do their thing, you know, and so forth.

**Question:** That is funny but I'd forgotten about it, there were some similar, but we had to ask, may I be excused, I'd forgotten all about that.

**Answer:** And we'd always ask to pass things at the table, we didn't stand up and go get it. Poor dad always got something left over. I remember once dad said we really ought to learn to eat spinach and my sister and I both hated spinach. And mother'd just give us a little bitty spoonful but Ruth would just gag on it you know so finally one time dad said just want you to taste it and I'll give you a dime if you eat it all. Well to me that was really great because I'll take a chance on it you know and I ate mine and got my dime and Ruth just couldn't so I thought I should have her dime because she didn't eat it but it didn't work out that way but to this day she won't eat spinach. I don't really care for it either but I will eat it you know. I got my dime so I guess you can call it reward or bribe or whatever. But it was an incentive anyway. I think mostly because she didn't eat it, I thought I shouldn't you know sister's are or siblings. And I guess if George Bush can't eat broccoli then she doesn't have to eat spinach. Oh Gee.

**Question:** Well, gosh, thank you very much.

**Answer:** I hope I gave you some information to the war, I guess we got off the subject

**Question:** Well see it's all important to the full picture of what was life like leading up to it because that explains more why our soldiers were the way they were and the people at home were the way they were. You can't talk about the war without talking about the depression and family.

**Answer:** But we didn't play cards in my house and we didn't you know I mean spades and clubs and old maid I think we had a set of that and there was no drinking and no smoking. Well of course at that time smoking was so prevalent because we lived right in Richmond the tobacco center of the world and later on my sister did start smoking and she is paying for it right now but I never did smoke I never even tried it because I didn't have the money and I would not do it as long as I was in high school because I'd have been booted out of there. We had such respect that whatever our parents told us we did and my sister never did there either but she got out later in the world and she was an executive to a bank president and she was swept up in that modern living and everything but she never drank.