

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY
NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH VIRGINIA RENDALL REYNOLDS
FOR THE
RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES OF WORLD WAR II

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Kurt Piehler: This begins an interview with Virginia Rendall Reynolds on March 4, 1997 in Princeton, New Jersey with Kurt Piehler and ...

Barbara Tomblin: Barbara Tomblin.

KP: I would like to begin by asking you some questions about your parents, beginning with your mother. She attended college, although she did not complete her degree.

Virginia Reynolds: Yes, she did. She went to what ... was now called Longwood College. It was a normal school, and she stayed there, well, she married in December of 1920, so, she must have been there two years, anyhow.

KP: She also taught for a short time.

VR: Well, yes. This was during World War I, ... and they were out of teachers in the Norfolk area, and her sister, who was older, ... was a wonderful teacher, and enticed her into coming back to teach, because they just needed teachers. ... My mother was very happy at college, and did not want to do this, but, she did come back, and so, she did teach, probably, for a year and a half, something like that, I would guess.

KP: It sounds like that was one of the reasons she never finished college.

VR: Was the war ... situation, yes.

KP: Was there a shortage because teachers were going off to war?

VR: Well, certainly, most of the teachers must have been women, so, I don't know. ...

KP: She never mentioned that she was replacing a man?

VR: No, no. Women may have followed husbands a little bit, but, I ... don't think in the way that they did in World War II, so, I don't know.

KP: Your father was in the Rutgers Class of 1918 and your mother was from Virginia. How did your parents meet?

VR: Well, my father left the university to ... join the Navy, World War I, and he was on the transport *Martha Washington*, going back and forth from England, to France, to Holland, and to Turkey. Those were the places I remember him talking about, and, sometimes, they would go into Norfolk, when they were back in [the States], and that's how they met.

KP: So, it was a wartime romance.

VR: There was a wartime romance.

KP: Did they tell you where they first met?

VR: Well, I really almost hate to say, [laughter] ... one thing, my mother lived on ... the beach, in the summertime. They had a cottage on Virginia Beach, and ... there's a park there, and I think that there was some ... aspect of being down at the park and the beach, and meeting the sailors. ... I think there was something like that. Anyhow, they met, and that was it. ... Every time he came back, he saw her. After the war, he came back, and, actually, signed up for a professional football team. ... He got as far as Chicago and sent her a telegram. He was going out to California to play professional football, and said, "If you can marry me in five days, I'll return, and we'll go out to California together." So, my mother spent a day going around asking everybody whether she should do this or not. [laughter] Course, the end was, she did, and they went out, and had the most marvelous time in California, playing football. ...

KP: What team did he play for?

VR: The Ohio Bulldogs, would that be it? I'd have to really check.

KP: It was a professional team?

VR: It was a professional team, and there were a couple of people from Rutgers who were there. ...

KP: I assume your father played football at Rutgers.

VR: He was the captain of the football team. ...

KP: Oh, okay.

VR: Yes, he was good.

BT: Where did they live, in Southern California?

VR: Must have been Southern California. It might have been Los Angeles, at that time. ... I know they were in San Francisco for a bit, but, I think that was just a trip, vacation kind of thing.

BT: It is interesting that so many of the people we interview have parents who either lived in California or spent some amount of time there.

VR: Really?

BT: Very early in the century.

KP: And then, they come back East.

VR: Yes. I think my mother was always sorry that they came back.

KP: Really, she really like California?

VR: Yes, she really liked it there. Well, of course, they were having such a good time. I mean, it was just fun, and he was the only one, as far as I can tell, who managed to get a job while he was out there, and he worked with the ... Chase Bank, cause he had worked there summers when he was going to school. So, he was able to get a job there, and the way they sorted out the money, so that they all had something to eat, [laughter] this was when the games were over, you see. Nobody wanted to come back East, and they weren't being paid, because football season was over, and, but, his parents were here, and her mother was in Virginia, so, they ... came back.

KP: Where did your parents settle in New Jersey?

VR: ... Well, they were first in New Brunswick, just off College ... Avenue, and then, in Highland Park.

KP: Your father worked for the Department of Agriculture.

VR: Yes.

KP: When he came back East, was that his first position?

VR: No. ... For a long time, he had his own ... General Electric store, and he sold the first refrigerators in town, and the first oil burners, and all of that. And then, he was with the Department of Agriculture, and then, ... sometime just before the war, I guess, he went to Raritan Arsenal, was there for, ... it's terrible how you don't remember all these details about parents.

KP: He sounds like he must have been a very colorful father.

VR: He was wonderful. I couldn't have asked for anybody better, anybody. [laughter] He was just wonderful. He spent a lot of time with us, with my brother and with me. He spent a lot of time helping mother in things, you know. He was not too proud to dry the dishes at night. I didn't know any other father who ever did that kind of thing. He used to play with us on the floor with marbles. ...

KP: That is interesting, considering the social division between men's and women's work at the time.

VR: I think it was just changing. ... I think some of the men, perhaps, who had been away, during the service, maybe, when they came back, they were a little more homebound than their fathers had been, for instance.

KP: That is interesting.

VR: ... His father was, I didn't know him, but, I think, a wonderful man, but, he was a patriarch, and ... there were set rules, and there was an area around him where nobody could penetrate, but, not so with my father, and, I think that, nowadays, the men are taking over just as much as the women, with home care, and childcare, and all that.

KP: I know. I am expected to do my share of the kitchen work. [laughter] I was trained by both my mother and my wife to do that.

VR: Well, good for you. I didn't train my sons this way, but, their wives have done a good job. [laughter]

BT: Did your father talk very much about World War I and his service in the Navy?

VR: Some things, yes. He was on the bridge a lot and he was a lieutenant JG.

KP: JG.

VR: Yes, and I have some wonderful pictures of him, and I have pictures that he brought back from Turkey, in particular, that I liked. So, I think he had a responsible job. I think he really was glad he was in the Navy, and that's why he ... left college, because he certainly would have been drafted into the Army, if he hadn't gotten into the Navy right then and there. So, he didn't talk about the war as such, I don't think. I don't think he saw any action at all. I don't think they were bombed, but, they were carrying all these soldiers, back and forth. He talked a little bit more about the years at Rutgers, sort of the fraternity and football, and then, when they came back, he actually coached for a while. ... This was in the days when you didn't get paid for coaching, and so, he couldn't keep that up. But, he talked a lot about the coach that they had had, he always called him Sanford? He thought he was a wonderful man, and, I think, he was doing it on a volunteer basis, but, he thought he was very good.

KP: It sounds like your father was a real Rutgers man.

VR: He was. ...

KP: He was probably delighted that you went to NJC.

VR: Well, ... I really wanted to go away.

KP: Oh, okay.

VR: But ... I went to Douglass, NJC, and I loved it. It was a good place.

KP: Your brother also went to Rutgers.

VR: Yes, he did, too. Now, he was caught up in World War II, so that he went ... right from Peddie into the service, into the Navy, and he came back on the GI Bill.

KP: What class did your brother graduate in? Was it the Class of '49?

VR: Well, I couldn't honestly say, but, I think that must be about right.

KP: With your mother going to college before 1920, was she a suffragette?

VR: Well, ... she took her voting very seriously, but, I don't remember that she was active in ... any of this. I do know that, at some period in there, they bought a great big Buick, and ... my picture of it is it was open top, or, at least, could be, and she was the only one in the family that drove it. [laughter] Now, how long this lasted, I don't know, but, she was ... of the flapper generation.

KP: Oh, really?

VR: Oh, yes. I can remember when she had her haircut, the bob. [laughter] ... They used to chaperone at the fraternity dances, and there were lovely stories about that, cause she wasn't much older than any of the girls that came, but, anyhow. [laughter]

KP: Your mother and father must have been a very dashing couple growing up.

VR: I think so. They were always the ones that were asked to chaperone at the school dances. We always had ... friends came home. I can remember, I don't know how many times they baked a chocolate cake, after I went out, so we could have it when we came home. [laughter] I don't think I would do that. They did. But, ... they had a certain flair, they did, yes, and they had a good time together. That was the fun thing. ... They really were playful, and I was oldest, and a girl, and I sometimes used to think, "My goodness, why don't they get serious." ...

KP: Was your mother active in any clubs, or organizations, or the church, when you were growing up?

VR: No. She really did not like women's groups very much. She, at one time, was asked to be a Girl Scout leader, and she was, for a period of a couple of years. She was asked to be president of the PTA and, somehow, she got out of that. She didn't want to do that. [laughter] And, that's about the time, this was the beginning of the war, actually, and she thought, "If somebody thinks I can work that hard, and I'm worth that sort of thing, maybe I could go out and get a job." And, she went someplace, and was interviewed, and the woman who interviewed her was very supportive, said she had no skills and they weren't going to hire her, but, [laughter] ... she should pursue this. It would be a good thing, and, that's when she then went to the Raritan Arsenal, and ... she enjoyed that.

KP: What did she do at the Raritan Arsenal?

VR: She worked for an officer ... and I don't know. ... They were moving equipment in and out, I think was the idea, so, there were all these papers. ... As far as I know, that sort of thing they

did, but, they had schedules, and time restraints, and things not coming in that were supposed to be going out, that's all I can tell you. I was, by that time ...

KP: You were off at college.

VR: I was at college.

KP: So, in a sense, both of you went off. You went to college and your mother went off to work.

VR: Yes, and my brother went off to Peddie, and she felt that would be good for him, cause she knew what was going to happen, that he would be drafted immediately, and she wanted him to be away from home a little bit before he went into the service. So, that's another reason she went to work.

KP: She started working at Raritan Arsenal in 1939. You mentioned that your brother was sent to Peddie in anticipation of his being drafted.

VR: Oh, yes.

KP: When did you realize that your parents expected a war? Did they think it as early as 1939?

VR: ... I don't know. I don't think it was very much talked about at home. The only time I can remember, really being convinced was ... [when] I went with some friends to Maine. I'd been doing this several summers, and the father taught at Rutgers, and he used to talk about ... what the changes were going to be, ... there was going to be a war. He wasn't a historian, but, he had ... a good sense, and ... in the summer nights, there was a lot of talk of this, and that's when I first became aware, ... that was the summer of '39, I know. ... Isn't that when Germany went into ...

KP: Poland, yes.

VR: Yes.

KP: You grew up in Highland Park. What are your memories of Highland Park?

VR: I don't think I knew anybody that was a commuter. Certainly, lots of faculty. Well, in our class, in high school, well, right through, there were ... a great number of girls, and we were all pretty good, in one way or another, and we were pretty close, and we did a lot of things together, and we still do. I think that, when we meet, there are usually about twelve of us, all growing up through the school system, going through college together, and one of my very best friends, I met in kindergarten, and we went right through school together, and we're going to their house for dinner ... [in] a week and a half or so.

KP: Did she go to NJC with you?

VR: Yes, she did. ... We all, right through, all of us. ... I don't know of anybody that went away.

KP: It sounds like your parents expected both you and your brother to go to college growing up.

VR: It was no question. ... It was always there, always there, and I think that's a good thing to do. You just take it for granted, and you talk about it. ...

KP: Growing up, that was your expectation.

VR: Yes, you just do it. I don't know what would happen these days with all the SATs and all. [laughter] But, our children were brought up this way, of course, college and university, whatever. [laughter] It's all part of it.

BT: Was the Depression a factor?

VR: Oh, I think it was. ...

BT: I am thinking that you were the oldest, but, you were a girl and you had a brother ...

VR: Yes.

BT: Was there ever the feeling that, if it came down to it, it would be the boy who went, or the oldest, or the smartest, etc.?

VR: ... I never had any sense of that in our family, nor in any of my friend's families. I didn't realize this until one summer, when the women's liberation stuff was going on, and there were a group of women, ... it's a scientific lab up in ... Wood's Hole Marine Biological Lab, and I was invited to one of their sessions. We were on the beach, and somebody was passing by, and said, "Virginia, we're talking tonight, you come," and George, in a real loud voice, said, "After she does the dishes." [laughter] ... So, there I went, and there must have been twenty-two of us in this circle, and ... they'd evidently had one meeting before I had joined, when people talked about their mothers. Now, I missed that, but, this one was talking about their fathers, and we went around the circle and it came to me, everybody had a terrible complaint about their father. Out of this group of twenty-two, only two of us felt that our fathers were wonderful. The main thing that ... stays with me is that they were not educated in the way that their brothers were educated, ... if they were educated, they went to the local school, or the cheaper school, or whatever. The boys had all of the advantages, because they were boys, and I was shocked, and ... I must have been thirty-five. I had never seen this. ... Well, I guess, in the house next door, there were four children and the oldest was a girl. The boys all went to college and she was allowed to go to the Secretarial School. ... And, she did resent that, but, all my friends, ... all of us didn't go away to school, because there wasn't the money to go away to school, for any of us, actually.

BT: You said they all went to NJC.

VR: They all went, and nobody went with a chip on their shoulders, either. ...

KP: If you had had your choice, where would you have like to have gone?

VR: Wellesley, and I still would, if I had a daughter, that's where I would like her to go.

BT: How did you even know about Wellesley?

VR: Oh, I sent for all the catalogs. ... I think I was the only one in this group, ... numbers of us, who even had the idea of going away. I think the others just knew they were going to [stay], and I was thinking that with a scholarship, with this, with that, but, ... I never applied, actually, except to Douglass. ...

BT: In high school, did you have, as they do now, someone to help you with college admissions?

VR: No, no.

BT: So, you really did not have anyone to help you with that ground work.

VR: No, I don't think so. ... There were some really wonderful faculty, and caring faculty, and I think that if any one of us had gone to them, and said, what should we do, ... it would have been different, but, ... I don't remember doing that. ...

KP: People talk very fondly about the fun they had growing up in Highland Park. We did an interview with one woman, Ada Bloom, who talked at length about going into the fields surrounding the town, the farmlands and the forests, and about how it was a tight-knit community. What would you and your friends do for fun?

VR: Well, in the first place, we lived on Lawrence Avenue, where Grant Avenue came down, so, there was a big, wide stretch of roadway, and we used to play, ... all the neighbor kids would come, and we'd play baseball there. We had our roller skates, and we'd play roller hockey, because there were driveways. ... We played there a lot, and we played with a lot of youngsters that came, sort of, from wherever they lived. I mean, lots of youngsters, and then, I joined the Girl Scouts, along with all of these other friends, and that was a whole other world to me. We had a wonderful leader, Mrs. Waller, and we did lots of things. I mean, we went to weekend camp at Neshanic. You should see the place now, but, we thought it was wonderful. [laughter] ... I can remember my father driving up, and helping put up the tents, and all of this. ... I don't know if there were as many trips as I seem to remember, but, ... it was a big part of our lives, and then, we went to Girl Scout camp, and I would walk from my house, because I was the farthest from school, and would stop and pick up Ruth Nissley Dunton, and then, we'd go to school, and then, we'd come home. There were lots of people on the way, and then, when we got to the high school, which was at seventh grade, there were the youngsters from south side, Lafayette School, and so, ... that added at least four more people ... that joined ... the circle. I tell you, ... there were more girls in this particular class than there were boys, I think, and more girls that were absolutely into everything, and, as I say, we all just went right off to college together.

KP: Growing up, did you think you might have a career?

VR: Well, I don't know when it was, I think we were still in grammar school, and somebody's husband died. He was a dentist, and this woman had two young girls, they were younger than I, but, they were in the same school system, and ... there was no insurance, there was nothing, and the mother came to school as a custodian. I think this was just through the goodness of people's hearts, in a way, but, I can remember the teachers saying, "Mrs. So and So is going to be here. She's the mother of [whoever] , and I want every single one of you to always be absolutely nice to her, because they've had some troubles, and we're all going to help." ... I can remember that, and I can remember talking about this at home, and my mother saying, "You don't ever want to get into the situation like that. You must always have something you can do." ... I tried other things, when I was in high school, like working at J&J.

KP: Oh, yes.

VR: I had a good job, for a summer job.

KP: What did you do?

VR: I was a file clerk, and it was a wonderful job, and we all had typewriters, and everybody was allowed fifteen minutes to go to the ladies room, and I couldn't imagine what to do in fifteen minutes in the ladies room. [laughter] I found out that's where they all smoked, but, I didn't. [laughter] And, Frannie Daire, she was in the Navy, she was a ... WAVE, she worked there, also, and we had a wonderful summer. We played baseball out in the field at lunchtime, but, I knew then, I'd never wanted to be in an office. I never wanted to type like that, and I never wanted to be a file clerk, ... or secretarial work. That was out. So, it was a good experience.

KP: What else did you try?

VR: Well, ... before I went to college, I worked at a hot dog stand. Course, you realize very quickly that you don't want to do that. [laughter] But, it was a good experience, and then, in my sophomore year, well, at Douglass, if you thought you were going into library school, you had to do some summer library training, someplace, and I had a cousin working at Harvard, she was older than I and she had an apartment, and I went and stayed with her for six weeks, or so, one summer of my sophomore year, and did library work at Boston Public Library, and at the East End branch, and that really cemented it for me. ... They were very good to me, and it really made me feel that this was a good thing.

KP: It must have been terribly exciting to be in Boston for those six weeks.

VR: It was ... a whole new world, and then, Jean had a vacation, and she went home, and I ended up with some friends of her parents, who lived out in Waltham, and, now that was an experience, ... they were nice. There was a father, mother, and a son who was older than I, and he must have gone to work, cause I didn't see much of him, but, this woman loved baseball, and she would

drag me to the baseball games whenever I could get away. [laughter] Well, now, I think that would be fun, but, at the time, I was a little snooty about it, I must say. [laughter] This is the Boston Red Sox, oh, dear.

KP: Did your parents take vacations when you were growing up?

VR: Well, when we were very young, we used to go to Virginia, ... to a cousin's in Cape Charles, and that, of course, was wonderful, and I think we must have gone for three weeks at a time, or so, but, then, we didn't go anymore, and, in those days, when my father had the General Electric store, the merchants all had Wednesday afternoons off. ... All the merchants decided, in the summertime, to take Wednesday off. So, we used to go down to the shore. ... We'd take a picnic lunch and ... you could just drive down there and park. There wasn't the problem that there has been for the last fifty years, practically, where you can't get on the beach, but, we used to do that. ... All very simple fun, but, ... we thought it was wonderful.

KP: Given your relatively limited travels, going to Boston must have been even more exciting.

VR: Yes.

KP: Also, the fact that you were living away from home.

VR: ... I'm just trying to think of the woman who was in charge of the whole children's department over at the Boston Public Library, she really took me under her wing, and she even had me writing reviews for books for the Horn Book, I mean she ...

KP: She gave you a real introduction.

VR: Yes, she did, right from the top, it couldn't have been better, and then, they threw me into East Boston, and that was an eye-opener, I mean that.

KP: What do you remember of East Boston in that era?

VR: Well, ... mostly what I remember is that the children would come into the library after the last afternoon movie. They had been sent to the movies with a sandwich and ten cents, and then, they would come out about five o'clock, and they would stop on their way home, many of them, and they'd swarm in. ... They had ... both parents working, and this was the safest place for these children. ...

KP: You thought of the library as what we would now call a day care center.

VR: Well, we really weren't. It was the movie house that was the day care center. They just stopped to get books, ... they did get books, some of them, but, ... just to dawdle on the way home, some of them, I think, but, ... I didn't know people lived like that, at that point. ... It was good. It was a good contrast, [laughter] ... inner Boston to the outer. ... These were working class people.

KP: It sounds like the friends of your family were mostly business people and professionals.

VR: Most of them were, ... not all, but, most were faculty. ... Judy's father was at the high school, I think, for instance, in New Brunswick.

BT: It sounds like the Great Depression did not have as much of an impact on that group.

VR: ... They had their problems.

BT: They probably were not paid much.

VR: No, but, I think there was talk of being cut back. ... It didn't happen to the friends that I knew, but, there certainly was the word. Well, it did make an impact. I'm not sure that it was such a terrible thing, but, ... it did change life a lot, because we had been living pretty high, and having a lot of fun, and doing lots of things, it seemed to me, and ... then, it stopped, in that way, and everything ... that we had, really, went, for my brother and for me, I mean. I could see that.

BT: You could tell.

VR: Yes.

KP: When did your father get out of his GE store?

VR: I don't really know. ...

KP: Was it in the 1930s?

VR: It probably was. ...

BT: Did it have anything to do with the Depression?

VR: Well, I think it probably did. I think it did.

KP: However, it sounds as if your father had fairly steady employment.

VR: Yes, he did.

KP: Did he have stretches of unemployment for, say, a year or two?

VR: No, ... Never, as far as I know, were we out of a paycheck, at all, but, it was kind of living from paycheck to paycheck.

KP: In the 1920s, it seemed like he had more economic freedom.

VR: Oh, he was. ... It was very comfortable, I think, but, as I recall, ... my mother, we'd go down to (Wolfson's?), I can remember, ... cause I would sit on the floor, and she'd buy beautiful clothes, nice things. All of that stopped, and I'm sure it affected my mother, but, there wasn't much you could do about it, and, what there was, Ken and I had.

BT: Did she make your clothes?

VR: She did.

BT: Almost everyone I have talked to, and I did not know this before, had their clothes made at home, boys and girls.

VR: ... I don't remember her making anything for Ken, but, ... she did for me, and it was hard for her, in a way, but, ... she had more style than I ever had, I mean, and I had some pretty things, and they were a little different, and then, I convinced my father and mother that, if I had an allowance, that things would be really much simpler. They could just give me, I think it was ten dollars a month, ... and I wouldn't cost them any more than that. [laughter] ... There was a little shop just beyond the side street of (Young's). I forget the name of it, but, ... a lot of us used to go in there, and I can remember the first thing I bought was a coat, and I was paying for that coat all year long.

BT: I was thinking that must have been more than ten dollars.

VR: I mean, and she would carry you. ... Well, my father said, "That's the best lesson that you'll ever have." [laughter] And, we both stuck to that ten dollars and never again.

BT: Kids, in our present culture, do not necessarily learn that lesson.

VR: No.

BT: Everything is just given to them.

KP: Did you go to the movies very much in the 1920s and 1930s?

VR: Yes, well, ... let's see, it was probably seventh and eighth grade, primarily, Mr. Nissley used to like to go to the movies. He used to like to go to Westerns, and there seemed to be a lot of Westerns at the Rivoli, and Ruth would call up, and say, "We're going to the movies tonight. We'll pick you up at such and such a time," and so, I would go. So, I went to the movies quite a lot then, it seems to me, but, what my father did was, we had a fireplace, and, above it, were two windows on each side, above bookcases, and, every once in a while, when he had an extra dime, he would put it up there, and, when I got called to go to the movies, that was the movie money.

BT: It was a dime to get in?

VR: Well, I think it might have been more than a dime, ... but, he kept that supply just ...

KP: The movie money.

VR: Right.

BT: When I was a kid, I think the Saturday matinee was twenty cents or a quarter.

VR: ... I think it was probably twenty or twenty-five cents, at night, because these would be Friday nights when Mr. Nissley liked to go.

BT: Prime-time.

VR: Yes, and then, when I first began dating, it seemed to me, we went to movies a lot, more than, I think, kids do now, more than my children ever did.

BT: There just was not as much to do. Were there high school football games in Highland Park? Was that a big event?

VR: It wasn't a big deal, and I don't remember it.

BT: That is what I remember about high school, growing up in Ohio, everything centered on the high school football games.

VR: There certainly were dances, and there were some plays, and things of that sort, but, as far as football games, ... well, Highland Park was up through tenth grade, and then, when I came along, they added the eleventh grade, and then, they added the twelfth grade. So, we really didn't have a strong high school for a couple of years.

BT: Where did you go when you finished tenth grade?

VR: Well, they added the eleventh grade. You had the same teachers, using the same classrooms.

KP: Yes, New Brunswick was really the regional school.

VR: Yes.

KP: New Brunswick High School, and Highland Park was one of the first to move away from that.

VR: ... The parents didn't want them. ... My husband went to New Brunswick.

KP: So, your parents did not want you to go to New Brunswick?

VR: ... I remember my father, ... I think there must have been a referendum of some kind, or vote, for this.

KP: Why did some parents not want their children to go?

VR: Well, I don't really know, because I don't think it was ever really discussed, in case it didn't work, but, I mean, this was a lot cozier, and, presumably, safer. I don't know that anybody thought about that at the time, but, here was a faculty they knew, here was a situation they knew.
...

KP: Do you think New Brunswick's high immigrant population might have had something to do with it?

VR: I never heard that. ... I'm sure there were a lot of Hungarians in town, because they had been brought in by, I now know, ... J&J. Never heard anything about it, pro or con, I guess. ... It [just] was.

KP: What activities were you involved in at high school?

VR: Well, I was always class secretary, and I was ... in sports, a little bit, although it was not the thing to be in. ... Well, now, it's so different, but, in those days, ... it wasn't quite, but, I did play basketball, it seems to me, and I did like athletics. I mean, I was a little coordinated. I became editor of the yearbook, which was my big job, actually, and I was always on the newspaper.

KP: So, you were very active in high school.

VR: I think most of us were. I certainly was.

KP: A lot of your friends were also active?

VR: Yes, I think so, I think so, but, I liked all of that, and not only was I on the staff of the newspaper, but, I had a boyfriend at the time who was make-up editor of the newspaper, and I thought that was a lot of fun, ... I think he really was, but, he needed help, too. ... To organize these pieces, and then, put on the headings, and all that, it was a good experience. I liked that. There was a lot to do. ... We used to get together, a lot of us, and cook something, cook meals. Four of us used to always, every Saturday morning, go to one house or another, and the mother, supposedly was to set out the menu or the food that you make up, and was supposed to teach us how to be good cooks someday. [laughter] I don't know that the mothers liked it so much, but, ...

KP: You and your friends enjoyed it.

VR: Yes, ... I enjoyed it, it was fun.

KP: Did your high school have any fraternities or sororities?

VR: [No], and neither did college, of course.

KP: They have some sororities now.

VR: At Douglass?

KP: At Douglass. Actually, they are Douglass people in sororities.

VR: Are the sororities on Douglass campus?

KP: No, they are on the main campus.

VR: I see. Well, they have some here now, too, which is a surprise. It's all very quiet, but, they're here.

KP: You mentioned that you wanted to go away, but, you went to NJC, and you commuted for the first three years. Were you disappointed that you had to commute?

VR: No, I wouldn't have preferred commuting. It was just a matter of finances, but, it had its advantages, [or] maybe they were disadvantages as well. It was kind of fun to go home at night, and have dinner, and talk about what you'd done, and, yes, I think that's it, but, ... I would have liked to have been on campus.

KP: You lived on campus for your last year.

VR: ... That was arranged. ... There was enough to do that, and that was a good thing, because that's the year I was in library science, and that was a tough, long, hard, lots of time in the library.

BT: You said you were on Gibbons Campus.

VR: Yes. ...

BT: I did not know that part of the campus existed back then.

VR: Well, there was Jameson and Douglass, which was up the road by the Ag School, which is now ...

KP: Cook.

VR: Cook, but, ... that's where a lot of the girls lived, and then, there was Gibbons, ... and it was this sort of circle ...

BT: Yes, the circle.

KP: The Rutgers men have told us numerous stories about freshman hazing and class competitions. We have learned that NJC had similar traditions. There was some freshman hazing, such as making you wear certain things. We talked to one woman who said she could not use a book bag, she had to use shopping bags.

VR: ... We always had something on our heads.

KP: You had beanies on.

VR: Yes, beanies, and there was something like a green ribbon, that I think I still have. ... It was differentiating us from the rest, but, it wasn't ... trying to put any of us down, in anyway. I never had that feeling. I always had the feeling this was just sort of ... part of getting into it, ... it was a kind kind of thing. I mean, nobody took advantage of it.

KP: So, you did not resent the hazing.

VR: None of us resented it, ... as far as I know. ... We used to sing that terrible song, "I'm a Freshman." [laughter] We can sing it now, all of us, I'm sure. [laughter]

KP: I was also surprised to learn that you had class dresses.

VR: ... I still have mine.

KP: How was your year's class dress determined?

VR: I think we must have voted on it and mine is a maroon with little gray trim. I think we had it initialed with our own initials, now, ... and, sort of a maroon leather belt, very shirt-waisty. We had our fiftieth reunion not so long ago and somebody modeled theirs. [laughter] I think a lot of people kept theirs. I don't know what I'm going to do with it, but, I have it. ...

KP: We have found that people have mixed feelings about mandatory chapel.

VR: I loved it. One reason was a good one, one reason wasn't such a good one, but, I loved it. It was the only time in the week where you didn't have to think about what you were supposed to be doing. I mean, you could just go there, and hear the music, and hear somebody talk about something else, and ... see everybody, cause you didn't always see everybody, anyhow. ...

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BT: I do not think we have ever talked to anyone who went to all the chapels.

KP: I interviewed someone who did.

VR: Well, you were allowed a certain number of cuts, and you always felt you should take your cuts, [laughter] to be a real person. To me, it was wonderful, and I was back for the convocation

for the new dean, and it was just nice being back in that chapel. ... It was a wonderful place, and ... I don't know that people really complained. Sometimes, if they had a lot of work to do, they'd feel that they couldn't take that time.

KP: My students must study either a semester of the *Targum* or of the *Caellian*, and they noticed that, once, people were admonished for talking too much in chapel.

VR: Well, knitting was a problem. [laughter] For two reasons, again, one is, she was always behind me, or next to me, ... and they were getting something done, and here I was, just sitting, but, the knitting was a problem, and they did, at some point, try to get people to stop that. That was hard to do. I think people really wanted to get their knitting done. Well, they thought they could do both.

KP: The Rutgers men have many favorable memories of the speakers, such as Norman Thomas, whether they agreed with him or not. Do you remember any of your chapel speakers?

VR: Yes, the Rev. Coffin came once, from Yale. I think the one I remember most was President Clothier. He had just lost his son and, I mean, just the day before, or something, and he spoke, and then, he did speak about his son, and we just sat there, weeping away, because we had known him a little bit. The Clothiers used to have a Christmas party for the friends of their children. It was a big party, and I used to go, ... lots of us from Highland Park went, and they had a big barn out back, and it was more like a square dance kind of party, although, sometimes, we were downstairs, and they had a nice recreation room downstairs at their house, but, I can remember him coming around at, I think it was eleven o'clock, and saying, "I'm so glad you came to the party tonight, it was so nice to see you." [laughter] And, we all knew that was the time to go. The parties never lasted beyond eleven o'clock, and your parents were supposed to come and pick you up.

KP: That is a very charming way to do it.

VR: Yes, he was well-loved, and so was Dean Corwin. Now, sometimes she would speak, and Dean Corwin was bashful, and ... had a hard time delivering any message. For some reason, we forgave her this, and loved her dearly, maybe, partly, because of it, I don't know why, but, she was well-liked, ... all the times there. She was wonderful. She's a bright woman, and she and Dr. Clothier got along so well, so that there wasn't any kind of power play between the two.

KP: The relationship between NJC, now Douglass, and Rutgers has not always been so harmonious.

VR: Yes. ... I'm certain it was harmonious then, and it was because the two of them had a great deal of respect for each other and for what they were trying to do. It was good.

BT: Did you take any of the special classes that were offered in response to the war?

VR: Yes, I did. ... I didn't take anything exciting. I took nutrition, and I think it must have been, ... it was my junior year. I didn't take anything extra, I think, my senior year, ... but, I did take nutrition, and I was living at home, and I came home for dinner ... one night, after we'd gotten the preliminaries, and I said, "Mother you really have got to cook properly. You've got to have the proper things, nutrition," and, she said, "Well, this is what we're having tonight." Well, it turned out to be liver, baked potatoes, spinach, and ginger bread. Now, I mean, who could beat that. [laughter] She didn't know I was going to do this. So, I never said anything more about balanced meals or nutrition. [laughter]

KP: How do you think the war impacted NJC?

VR: ... You know, I think everybody was sort of thinking about themselves, and where they are, and what they were going to do. ... I think people were less frivolous, a little more determined to think about what they would be doing afterwards. Some of the women were definitely thinking about going into the service. I was definitely thinking about a job. A lot of them were definitely thinking about how, and where, and when they could they get married. I think the same things that had been happening, but, just a little more intense.

KP: Camp Kilmer had quite an impact on the area. We have seen stark differences between how men and women perceive the camp. Men hardly remember it, but, women often claim it changed the dynamic of life in New Brunswick and Highland Park. Do you remember anything about it?

VR: Well, no, because, I don't really remember. I do know it was there, and I do know that some of us went to ... what was it?

KP: The USO?

VR: The USO?

VR: Yes. ... By then, I was commuting to Trenton to work, and then, I was married and away. So, it didn't make a big impact. I do ... remember one night, coming home from Trenton, and there was a woman on the train, and I do tend to talk, and probably talked more than I do now, and so, we started to talk. ... She was coming to meet her husband, who was at Camp Kilmer, and she didn't know whether he would be off to meet her, and she didn't know where she was staying, or anything. So, when I left her to go home, I said, "If you get stuck, this is our phone number, call." Well, she called, and she ... came in a taxi. She came to our house in a taxi. Now, my mother and father were out, [laughter] so, I gave her my brother's room and left a note downstairs. [laughter] "Be quiet when you come in. There's a woman I met on the train in Ken's bedroom." Well, the next day, ... I had to get up early and go to work, and there was my mother with this stranger. [laughter] They became fast friends. ... When her husband could get off, [this woman] stayed at our house for about two weeks, before he was shipped out, and then, Mother corresponded with her for quite a long time afterwards. I don't know whether he survived or not. I don't know his story.

KP: This was just a woman you met on the train.

VR: Yep.

KP: It sounds like you would not have done that in the days before Pearl Harbor.

VR: No, I don't suppose so. ... There would be no reason to, but this worked out very nicely.
[laughter]

KP: A friendship even developed between her and your mother.

VR: Yes. ... She was a lovely person, and I don't really remember her husband, because ... they must have gone out for dinner, for instance, when ... he had time free. I don't remember. I know she had breakfast and lunch with my mother. Anyhow, I'd forgotten that story. [laughter]

BT: What do you remember about rationing? The American home front was not devastated like Britain's, but, there were a lot of sacrifices made here in the States.

VR: I'm just wondering whether I had to take my cards to Douglass when I lived there the last year, which deprived my parents. I don't remember any, much conversation about this at all.

KP: Did you know about the black market?

VR: No. I didn't know.

KP: Both Barbara and I are interested to find out if there was any recruiting done by the services at NJC?

VR: I think there was, I think there was. ... I didn't sign up for anything. At one point, ... after college, I did go downtown, and go to the ... WAVE unit, and get the papers.

KP: So, you were thinking of joining the WAVES?

VR: Oh, yes, I was, and, in some ways, I've always wished I had.

BT: Why the WAVES?

VR: Oh, just because it was Navy.

BT: You were trying to keep up the family tradition.

VR: Yes.

BT: We noticed that two NJC women went into the WAVES for everyone that became a WAC or something else.

VR: Yes, I know.

BT: I thought maybe this was because the Navy recruited more actively.

VR: ... I just sensed it had a better reputation. Now, when we were at Los Alamos, there were a lot of WACs there. There were no WAVES, but, this was a miserable situation, because these women were patriotic, they were trying to get away from whatever home situation had become, not exciting, not pleasant, or whatever, and they had signed for overseas duty, ... and Los Alamos was considered overseas duty, and there they were, and they were one bunch of angry women, absolutely furious. ... Well, they had reason to be, I mean, they thought they were going ...

BT: They thought they were going to North Africa.

VR: Yes. ... Many of them ended up pumping gas, being chauffeurs, doing all kinds of scut work. Two of them ended up in the document's room, where I was working, and they were librarians. So, they weren't so bad off, but, they were unhappy about that. ...

KP: Going back to NJC, what do you remember about your professors, both the good and the bad ones? You mentioned that Alice Higgins was one of your favorites. What stuck out in your mind about her?

VR: She was a wonderful woman. She was in the library school. She wasn't the director, but, she was very ... important. She taught us cataloging, for one thing, but, ... she was a beautiful woman. She'd come from Boston, she'd been at the Boston Athenaeum, before she came to Douglass. ... So, she had this Boston (Brahmin?) manner, I think. I didn't know it then, but, that's what I would see now, and she took an interest. ... She hired me. At that time, there was a national student association, or something, where you were paid for jobs that the faculty wanted, or whatever, ... but, it was national.

KP: The NYA? The National Youth Administration?

VR: ... Maybe that's what it was, but, anyhow, she hired me, and I worked for her ... my junior and senior years, and ... I would go to her apartment, which was up Nichol Avenue, and ... these were not jobs at the school so much as jobs that she wanted done, but, they were all book oriented, in some way, ... and then, she'd always serve me tea. I mean, she was just very, very nice to me. Ethel Fair, I liked and respected a great deal. She was no nonsense. She ran a strict school. She wanted to maintain a lot of standards, and I got my ... best training there. Wasn't exactly education, but, it was training.

KP: It sounds like you enjoyed not only the library science school, but, also, your work as a librarian.

VR: Oh, yes. Well, yes, I became school librarian here, Princeton Day School, for twenty-five years, and I could have ... done it for nothing. [laughter] ... I loved it. ... Anyhow.

KP: Many women remember Dean Boddie very distinctly. We have heard that she was something of a character.

VR: Formidable, I suppose, yes. Well, this is the thing. ... There was Dean Boddie and there was another one, and they seemed formidable. ... They were strict, and they were running a good ship, but, when the war was on, there was compassion, and concern, and it was quite different. ... It just really felt different.

KP: You really felt that the war affected their attitudes.

VR: Oh, yes, they were not in their ivory tower and they were not the old maids that we might have thought they were. ... They were just wonderful. ... I really think they were. ... I had a lot of good faculty, all the way through. ... Mrs. Judson.

KP: Oh, yes.

VR: Who became acting dean for awhile, now, she was something wonderful. ... She was good. She made you work hard. ... During spring vacation, I had a paper due on constitutional British history. ... A friend that I had known who was a paratrooper had come home, and we went out every day, and every evening, and I wrote that paper on a Sunday night, before Monday, and handed it in. Now, ... at that point, I was an English major, and she called me in, and she said, "I can't understand it. You are an English major and this is what you've turned in?" I said, "I know." She said, "Explain it to me." I said, "I really can't explain it." She said, "Well, there must be some reason, tell me." So, I told her that this friend had been home, and was a paratrooper, and ... I hadn't worked. I hadn't done it till the night before. Well, she said, "Why didn't you tell me?" I said, "Well, I didn't think I should tell you that sort of thing." ... She said, "Well, I could see something was wrong. [laughter] If you told me I could have given you an extension and it would have been all right. ... I'm so glad you had that time. Take it back and do it over." [laughter]

BT: Good for her.

VR: Good for her. I mean, it was wonderful. It showed me how wonderful a human she was, and, yet, I still had to do it and I had to do it properly.

BT: That is a good example of their compassion in wartime.

VR: They may even be like that now. [laughter]

KP: Did your friend make it through the war?

VR: Yes, he did.

KP: Oh, he did.

VR: He did.

KP: You mentioned that, before the war, NJC did not want people to get married.

VR: That's right.

KP: That was really frowned upon. Both before and after the war, did women feel a desire to get married before graduation, or soon thereafter?

VR: ... Well, certainly, in those days, I think, most women were getting married at age twenty-two, right after college, within a year after college. There was the impetus, while I was in school, for so many of them to get married, because their husbands-to-be were going off into service. What the school was hoping to do was to keep the women on campus and not going from camp, to camp, to camp.

BT: Right, camp followers.

VR: And, this way, they would at least have their education if they needed it, and, when the men had the time off, they could come back and see their wives. Now, I don't know how many were in this. Doris McNulty, who just died, was one of the ones, who I remember, that got married first, and I can remember her husband coming, and they stayed at the ...

KP: Robert, I cannot remember the last name, but, I know which hotel you mean.

VR: Yes. It was in New Brunswick. Well, anyhow.

KP: It was right across from the George Street Playhouse.

VR: That's right, exactly, and then, he'd come on to campus and everybody was glad to see him, including faculty, and the deans, and all that, and there were others, but, that's the one that everybody ... was aware of. Actually, one of my very best friends got married in April, and I don't know where he was stationed, but, she finished out.

KP: So, they very actively told you, in chapels and whatever, that this was the best thing for you, your husbands, and your country.

VR: Yes, but, I'm sure that was going on, but, it didn't affect me. ... But, it certainly is what happened, and it was always a good atmosphere.

BT: The war had a real impact on the shows and productions that the students choose to put on. The faculty even decided to put on a show.

VR: Yes.

BT: I wondered if you remembered that.

VR: I do. ...

BT: It became a perennial favorite for years afterwards, then, they dropped it.

VR: Yes. ... I remember that vaguely. ... I wouldn't have been able to bring that up, and I don't know what I remember about it.

BT: I am curious because I read this in a college history and what histories pick up are not always what students remember.

VR: The interesting thing, and I don't know whether you could get your hands on this, but, at our fiftieth reunion, Mary Hartman spoke, and she had done her homework. She had gone back through whatever files there were, and she had found out probably, the paper and all, what we were like, what we did, ... and she could pinpoint all of these things that we had [done]. "Oh, yes, of course." [laughter] ... Somewhere, there's some good information about that Class of '43 and, probably, others, too.

KP: My students, from reading the campus papers from this era, are almost envious of the social world both colleges had created. They just do not have the kinds of dances, fraternity parties, and sports parties that they used to have.

VR: We just sort of took it for granted. I'm surprised that it isn't as active now.

KP: Both schools had junior and senior dances.

BT: I read that when the war started, they cut the Christmas dances from four to two. [laughter] We were lucky in college if we had a single Christmas formal.

VR: ... There were teas, and there were some receptions, at the beginning of the year and all, and there were certainly dinners at Dean Corwin's, but, ... I think that must still go on.

KP: Douglass is still better than Rutgers, but, even Douglass today cannot hold a candle to NJC in the 1930s and 1940s.

VR: ... There were a lot of things to do, and I think most everybody participated, because it's smaller, and ... it wasn't a divisive campus, in any way, it seems to me.

KP: So, even though you were a commuter, you did not feel left out?

VR: Perhaps left out in the sense that I didn't do a lot of things after five o'clock, that sort of thing. I think the things I probably missed most was just the dorm living, the talking, the running to Cooper, that sort of stuff, living together. I think that ... always seemed to me to be very appealing. That would have been fun. I may not have liked it as much as I thought I did, but,

certainly by the time I was there, in this house on Gibbons, the seniors had the top suite, and we could either have beds in one room and the desks in the other, or separate however we wanted, and then, it seems to me that there were juniors, and then, every class was represented, and I forget how many might have been in, no more than ten, probably, in a house. But, that was a very good system, I thought. I still think it was a good system, and we were on our honor, both with exams, of course, but, ... with coming in at night and all that sort of thing.

KP: So, the honor system did not apply only to the academic work.

VR: No.

KP: It extended beyond the classroom to all aspects of life.

VR: Yes, everything, and, of course, it didn't seem so surprising to me then, but, it was a wonderful way to live. ...

BT: Everyone took it seriously?

VR: Everybody took it seriously.

BT: You did not have one or two crawling out the windows? [laughter]

VR: I think that must have happened. ... I didn't, but, I don't remember seeing anybody else, but there were enough little stories going around to make it exciting. ...

BT: I only heard the stories, too. [laughter]

KP: My students also noticed that sports and fraternity stories really dominated the headlines in the *Targum*. However, they also noted that the NJC paper had a more intellectual side. Did you see that, in remembering your own experiences?

VR: I don't remember sports being dominant.

KP: No, you really have to dig for sports at NJC.

VR: I would think if there was one thing that was dominant, I would think it was the music. I mean, there were performances. The music department was strong and well-liked. There were girls in the choir, and, also, in the glee club. I would think that that was the thing that affected more people on the campus than anything else, might be, the music. ... I hadn't thought about that until now, but, it seems to me that [was true].

KP: What about your contact with Rutgers College? Did you go to any fraternity parties?

VR: Yes, but, we did not meet there. ... He was that much ahead of me. So, I never did.

KP: You never went with him.

VR: ... With him, no.

KP: But, you did go with other people.

VR: Oh, yes. ... I did not have what we called a steady boyfriend right through college, which would have meant going to the fraternity, the same fraternity, regularly, every Saturday or whatever, but, I certainly went to parties, and the dances, and all that, but, not with any one person. ...

KP: Did you go to any football games?

VR: Yes, I did, and it was ... fun. This was mostly at the Rutgers' field not across the [river].

KP: Yes.

VR: That was fun, but, in my sophomore year, I worked in Birnn's ... Candy Store, and my junior year, I know I worked at Reed's Bookstore, and these were Saturday jobs. So, I missed some of them. I think I may have gone more when I was in high school.

KP: Of your circle of friends, how many Rutgers-NJC marriages were created?

VR: I would say about eighty percent, maybe ninety percent. Eighty percent. ... The three that went into the service did not marry Rutgers men, and that's about it. I think the rest of us did, but, they met people farther a field.

KP: Did you and your classmates ever talk about politics? Do you any idea what their opinions were, particularly your circle of friends? Eleanor Roosevelt came to campus several times.

VR: I was going to mention her, at some point. [laughter] I was a waitress once when they had ... a student leaders group, came for a weekend, or something, and these were all presidents of classes or presidents of the student body, whatever, and I know I was waitressing the night she spoke to this group, and it was the first time I ever had a sense of the fact that you owe something to your government. It wasn't the way Kennedy mentioned it, but, ... she was saying, "You need to participate. You owe something, " and I thought she was absolutely wonderful. That's the first time I think I was really politically interested, and, when I went out, my father was going to pick me up, cause this was ten-thirty or eleven, there was a man waiting outside, and he began to talk. He really looked pretty scruffy. He followed her wherever she was talking, to try to get to talk to her about, I forget what it was, that he was so ... concerned about. ... I'm sure they protected her, but, he just followed her everyplace, just to be able to tell her some problem that he had, or that there was, and he talked quite awhile, and I, at the time, was very interested. But, she did make an impact. There were a lot of concerts at Rutgers, too, we all went to.

KP: Yes.

VR: I can remember getting in the bus and being all dressed up. ...

KP: The schedule, with symphony orchestras ...

VR: And, students going, and they still have them. I don't know whether students go in numbers or not now.

KP: It is not part of the common Rutgers culture. A number of people went to see Paul Robeson when he would come back to campus.

VR: Oh, I did, too.

KP: In fact, your father went to Rutgers with Paul Robeson. You mentioned that you did not meet your husband at Rutgers. How did you meet him?

VR: Well, he ... had been at Rutgers, and he ... had been invited to Dean Reed's house. Dean Reed was dean of, science, maybe?

KP: Chemistry?

VR: Chemistry. ... They had a son, about George's age, and they had a daughter who was my freshman sister. I was her junior sister, and they invited us, one night in July, ... they lived down the River Road, and George didn't have enough gasoline, and he took the bus down River Road to go to their house for dinner, and I had come down Lawrence Avenue, down to River Road ... at a different place, and I got on the bus, and we went out there, and he has a better interpretation of this story, but, that's where we met. ... From then on, I still dated, but, ... this was the person.

KP: It sounds like he thought that first. [laughter]

VR: Well, anyhow. ...

KP: He obviously became very faithful.

VR: Yes. ... See, I was a junior, then, so, we dated all through. ... He was, then, at Princeton, in graduate school, and he took his orals something like the 27th, or 28th, or 29th, or something, of May, and I graduated just at the same time. I mean, it was just within a day or two of each other. Timing was good

BT: When did you get married?

VR: Let's see, we were married in January of '44. So, I worked all summer and the fall at Trenton, in the children's department.

KP: In the Trenton Public Library?

VR: Yes.

KP: Did you enjoy that job?

VR: Yes, I did. It was interesting, in the sense that things were changing in Trenton a lot, at that point. ... It was understaffed. It was in a poor community, by then, but, it was a good experience. I worked with a woman who was wonderfully tey, and she had two sisters. One sister stayed home and took care of the house and the cooking. The other sister married Judge Katzenbach, whose son became the US Attorney General.

BT: Oh, wow.

VR: Yes. ... I'm sure I got the job because, when I went for an interview, she said, "Let's go out to lunch." This was about ten-thirty, or something. ... We went out, this was just for an interview, you see, but, then, she told me, ... they'd just received word from the Red Cross that Nicky Katzenbach, her nephew, was alive, and in a prisoner of war camp, and, in fact, I think, she had a letter from him, through the Red Cross, asking for books of any kind, and she was so ... wonderfully excited about this survival, because they hadn't heard from him in quite awhile, that anybody would have gotten the job. [laughter]

KP: You were there at the right moment.

VR: ... It's funny how these things come.

KP: Would you have stayed at Trenton for awhile, or did you see that as just a temporary job?

VR: No, I don't think so, although we had a nice apartment, and we lived in sort of a little cul de sac where there was a little ... shopping area, and near the cathedral, and it was like a little village away from the center of town. In that sense, it was kind of nice. I don't know that I had any grandiose ideas of what was going to happen at all. I mean, there we were.

KP: When did you learn that you would be going out to Los Alamos?

VR: ... My version of this is. ... [laughter] Well, we were working, and he was working at Princeton, and I was at Trenton, and ... there was a letter received by somebody in the Physics Department, ... the chairman of the Physics Department, saying that they wanted so and so, and so and so, and, in particular, George Reynolds, to come to Washington to talk about going out West, and Reynolds because his Ph.D. had been on blast analysis and that sort of thing. ... George went in and said, no, he wasn't going to go to Washington. He didn't want to go out West on this project. He knew just enough about it to know he didn't want it, and he wasn't going to go, and chairman said, "Well, you go to Washington and talk to Vannevar Bush and Conant," who was chairman of the board ...

KP: The science ...

George Reynolds: NBRC.

KP: Yes.

VR: So, George said, "Sure." So, he went, and he was talking with Vannevar Bush and Conant was in the office, and George said he wasn't going to do it. He didn't really know quite what they were doing, but, he knew enough to know he didn't want any part of it, and, at some point, Conant said, "You're not being very patriotic," and George said, "Well, I'm trying to be patriotic. [laughter] I have applied to the Navy, and I want to be in underwater demolitions in Fort Pierce, Florida." "Oh, well, I'm glad you came down to Washington. ... End of conversation, you may go home now." So, George came home and, boy, within a week, he was in the Navy, and he had orders to Fort Pierce, and he also had a list of clothes like you're going off to camp, the blues, the grays, the whites, the dress whites. [laughter] We took a day off, and we went to Wannamakers, and we bought all of this stuff.

BT: That is where we used to go get our things.

VR: Yes, and ... he had orders to proceed in, I don't know, a week or something, whatever. We went down to the shore to get a room for a weekend, or an overnight, and I thought, because he was going, I wasn't going, and we came back from the shore, there ... in the mailbox was this letter.

GR: Telegram.

VR: Telegram, "Proceed within three days to Lamy, New Mexico. Old orders cancelled." So, I ... said, "Where is New Mexico?" much less Lamy. Anyhow, I went to work the next day and I said I had to leave. George went to work the next day, said he had to leave. We packed up whatever we had to, we went home to our parents. Now, this is on my tape, and I just heard it this morning, so, I remember, his ... parents are older than my parents, and this just was a terrible thing for his mother. She was just so distraught. His father was very brave, but, this was very hard. Then, we go down the street to my parents, and my mother said, "Oh, what a wonderful experience you're going to have. Oh, I just think this is so good. You're going to have such a wonderful time." And, my father's saying, "You'll never be sorry you went into the service. When you get to be sixty-five, [laughter] you'll be so glad you were in."

KP: You father had a great time during his stint in the Navy and California probably was one of their great memories. So, for them, you were headed out West.

VR: Yes, it was exciting. So, in three days, we went out to Lamy, New Mexico.

KP: Before this, how far West had you gone?

VR: Philadelphia. [laughter]

KP: So, you really had not gone past Pennsylvania?

VR: No.

BT: It must have been a shock.

KP: I assume you took the train out.

VR: Yes, we took the train to Chicago, and stopped, and spent a night with Ruth Nissley and her husband. He was at the ... Great Lakes Training Station, and that's where they spent the war, in Chicago, actually, and then, from there, we took the California Limited, which wasn't a great train then, ... but, on this train, there were nothing but, mostly, Army, GIs, going to San Diego, and, but, it was a very, very homey situation, because everybody was in the same [situation]. Well, we finally stopped, and look out the window, and here is this, what I call, well, it was a station, and it did have Lamy, NM on it, and George starts getting luggage down, and I said, "What do you think you're doing?" "This is where we get out." [laughter] I stood at the top of the steps, there was just a little station, and a couple of dogs slinking around, and nothing, nothing else, and, everybody in the car's saying, "Don't get out here. You better go to San Diego. It will be better in San Diego." Well, finally, we got everything out, and nobody, nobody around, but, down the road, you could see some buildings, and George walked down. There were a couple of saloons, and he went into one, and came back, and he said, "There'll be a bus. There's no schedule, but, it will come." So, we got on the bus when it did come, and went into Santa Fe. Now, the scenery from Lamy into Santa Fe is really magnificent. George never saw it until two, three years ago when we went out there. [laughter] ... But, I think in the railroad station in Chicago, I had picked up a flyer, or something, about Santa Fe. As I say, I had not been West, but, I had enough sense to read this thing, and realize that there was only one hotel that anybody ever stayed at in Santa Fe, and that was LaFonda. So, I said, "When we get to Santa Fe, we'll go and get a room at LaFonda, and then, we'll see what we should do." "No," said George, "I have to get my pants pressed, and then, I have to find the naval recruiting station, and then, we'll find out. In the meantime, since you know all about libraries, we'll dump you at the library with the luggage," which is what happened. The library wasn't far from the middle of town, and off he went to ... get his suit, his pants, pressed, and then, to the naval recruiting station, and then, they said, "We don't have your name, we don't know anything about you, we don't really want to know anything about you," and then, one of them said, "But, there is an office down off East Palace," this palace of the governor's, "people go in there and they never come out. Maybe that's where you're supposed to go." [laughter] So, George went to this little office in East Palace and there was Dorothy McKibben sitting there, "Oh, George," she said, "we're so glad to see you. We have everything set. Here are the papers, and we'll have a bus take you up to Los Alamos in just a few minutes, and everything is [taken care of]. So glad to see you." She was a wonderful person. She was a great help to everybody that came through. George said, "I can't go anyplace. My wife's here and she's in the library." "Your wife? We don't have anything about a wife." "Well, she's here." "Well, I don't think we can do anything about that right now." He said, "Well, I've got to say good bye to her." "Oh," she said, "the bus will drive you around." Well, this had been taking quite awhile, one thing and another, and I'd gotten sort of tired, so, I'd taken two pieces of luggage from the library to the corner. ... I did it, and, back for the third trip, and there I was,

standing on the corner, when this dumpy, little bus comes along. I claim George didn't actually get out of the bus, he just got down one step.

GR: I was between two MPs. [laughter]

BT: You were not getting off that bus.

VR: And, he kind of hugged me and he said, "I'll let you know what happens as soon as I can," and he did take his luggage. Well, I decided I was going to the LaFonda. [laughter] I took my luggage, and I went, and there was no way I could get a room. So, they sent me to another hotel.

GR: LaVargas.

VR: LaVargas, and I got a room, and the bathroom was way down a dingy hall. I never went to that bathroom the whole time I was there. I would walk over to LaFonda. [laughter] ... I was right above sort of a patio with the kitchen help, and they talked and talked, in Spanish, of course, Indian. [laughter] It was a surprise.

KP: New Mexico, in the 1940s, must have been remarkably different from New Jersey.

VR: It was.

KP: It was quite a long way from Highland Park.

VR: Yes, it was very isolated. ...

-----END TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO-----

KP: ... This continues an interview with Virginia Rendall Reynolds on March 4, 1997 at Princeton, New Jersey, with Kurt Piehler and ...

BT: Barbara Tomblin.

KP: You mentioned that you journeyed out to explore Santa Fe, which you enjoyed a great deal, even though it was very different from anything you had ever known.

VR: It was an interesting town, a beautiful town, and, of course, lots of different people that I had never ever seen before. Lots of Indians, lots of Spanish-Americans, and ... you could see the art displayed in front of the Palace, and so forth, and I knew we were in a different environment, ... [it was] exciting. But, then, ... should I tell George's story about how he got up to the hill?

KP: You can, or, hopefully, we can interview him before too long about his experiences.

VR: Well, anyhow, he went into George Kistiakowski's domain, because he was head of the ordinance for the lab, and the person George would be working with, and he had come from

Harvard, too, Chemistry professor. ... George Kistiakowski was very glad to see him, and George was not glad to see him, and [he] sort of said, "My wife is down in Santa Fe, and she can't stay there." ... George K. said, "Well, she wasn't suppose to come," and George said, "Well, when you asked me the first time, she was to come, ... and I don't see any difference." Kristy said, "Well, just look at your uniform. There's the difference." So, anyhow, he called General Groves from the office, and said, "Reynolds is here. No, it's not good. His wife is in Santa Fe." "Oh, God." "Well, just a moment, I'll ask him. Can she work?" "Yes, yes." "Do you have any children?" "No," said George, "no." "Is she pregnant?" [laughter] "No," said George. "Well, we'll see what we can do." So, in a couple of days, I was able to go up, ... and we had housing, and there we were.

KP: When did you start working?

VR: About two days later.

KP: It was that quick?

VR: Oh, yes.

KP: You did not have a lot of time to sit around.

VR: Well, George Kistiakowski's new wife had been put in charge of personnel. So, I was slated to see her, immediately, and she put me in the documents room, immediately, and it was like spinning gold out of straw. There weren't many books in the library, but, there were tons and tons of papers. Everybody's senior thesis, everybody's Ph. D., everybody's paper that they had worked on, all had to be catalogued and in order, and, that's what the four of us were doing in the document's room, two WACs, and myself, and a librarian, who had been put in charge. And so, you go in and, literally, we would [be] cataloguing these things and typing out the catalogue cards for most of the day.

KP: Would you get all the documents from the project, or just library materials, like theses and books?

GR: Go ahead. [laughter]

VR: Well, we got every paper, it seems to me, that had been written about anything that would ... relate to the development of the bomb.

KP: So, in other words, scientific papers that were presented to groups.

VR: ... All I know is these papers, and we had this big storage ... room that they were all put into, ... and then, people call for them, of course, and then, they would have to be sent, you know.

KP: Were you made aware that there was a lot of secrecy at Los Alamos, in terms of the library and the documents? What sort of instructions were you given in terms of secrecy?

VR: Well, we all had badges, and we all had different colored badges, depending on your level. So, mine was pretty low. However, in the document's room, you had the latest information on anything, so that, George had a very high security, [and] he didn't know half the stuff that I knew, except, I didn't know what it was all for. I mean, I did know the name of somebody at Wendover Field that he was going to see. These sorts of things I could see, but, I, literally, knew nothing about what they were doing. It's inconceivable, now, to me that I knew so little.

KP: Even though you were at the center of the project.

VR: I was, yes, and he was at the center, and ... he didn't tell me very much. Well, we hadn't been married very long. I don't know that he knew what, how. ...

GR: It was very tight secrecy. I knew everything that was going on, but, I knew I shouldn't say anything.

VR: So, I didn't know anything, and, ... actually, I didn't have a great deal of curiosity about it, either. ...

BT: Now, when you left, it must have been like you disappeared into thin air for your families and friends. What did you tell your parents,? Did you tell them that you were going to New Mexico, or were you not allowed?

VR: ... Well, we could tell them we were going, actually, to Lamy, and I know that the FBI were all around Highland Park, and so, they got some information from friends and neighbors who had been questioned about this sort of idea of what was going on. But, our letters were all censored that went out

BT: It was an APO or a PO box?

VR: Yes, APO. ...

KP: What was it like to write letters knowing that someone was going to read them?

VR: It didn't bother me after the first one or two, and it took me a long time after I came back to seal my letters. [laughter]

KP: Oh, yes, that is right, because you would have to leave them unsealed.

VR: Yes.

KP: What was daily life for you, everyday life in Los Alamos? How many days a week did you work? What would the work schedule be like? What did you do for fun?

VR: Well, I think the work schedule was eight to four-thirty. ... I don't really remember now, I just don't, and, I think, I came home for lunch. I think we both just came home for lunch, most of the time, while he was there. Entertainment was mostly having dinner with another couple, or a couple of other couples, and playing hearts at night. There ... were a few concerts. George performed in one of them. There were movies, occasionally, but, not much. All these things sorta grew up. I don't think there were movies when we went. I don't think there were any church service when we went, but, pretty soon, the movie house was made into the church on Sundays that sort of thing. The most exciting thing in [the] world was to get a ride into Santa Fe. We didn't have car, so, we had to depend on friends or the bus, but, to go into Santa Fe was just [great]. [laughter] You know, you had your shopping list from the last time, and you'd just run around, especially [to] the ten-cent store

KP: What would you eat at Los Alamos? What types of food could you get? Were there any regional variations in your diet, or did you get a lot of canned food that was similar to foods in the East?

VR: Well, there was a grocery store. It was a ...

GR: PX.

VR: PX, and all the cans were the Army cans, in the olive drab, and you didn't know what they were unless you could read the imprint on the top where you might get peas, peaches, instead of pears, or something, but, you didn't really know. There was a meat counter and we must of gotten some meat. We did have our little books.

KP: So, you had to use ration cards.

VR: Yes, we did.

KP: That is interesting, because a lot of Army people could get whatever they wanted.

VR: No, we were using ration cards, and ... there was this PX, where they had ... lots of food. ... It wasn't exciting. It wasn't western food. It was just Army stuff.

BT: Did you cook at home? I was going to ask you about your quarters.

VR: Well, we got a nice, little, brand-new, sorta looks like the housing up here, just beyond us, the student housing, one family on one side, one on the other, and the furnace room in between, which Spanish-Americans stoked at night, or all day, for you. You could hear them come in, and they'd stay in there for a long time, because it was too cold out, but, anyhow, that's the furnace room. ... We had two choices of furniture. We could go to the supply department and get the furniture. We took something that was an orange plaid, because we were from Princeton, [laughter] and it became tiresome after the first month, but, there we were, with this orange plaid. ... We went into the kitchen, which was a little thing, ... and we couldn't find the stove. ...

Finally, George said, "Well, this must be stove," and here was a great, big, brand-new wood burning stove. So, George went out into the furnace room to get firewood, and he built up a fire, and I made some cornbread, cause I was always able to do cornbread, and he went out and got some more firewood. Well, pretty soon, we put the cornbread in, and, in a minute, it was burned crisp. We pulled it out, and it was runny inside, and black on the bottom, and black on the top. The pan was ruined. So, we tried carrots on top of the stove and the same thing. The whole thing had gone yellow from too much fire. So, I went to a neighbor, and I said, "What do you do for cooking?" and, she said, "Well, you requisition a three-burner hot plate." So, we requisition a three-burner hot plate and got a two-burner one. So, you put on, and you change it. ...

KP: So, you, basically, were cooking with a hot plate?

VR: Well, until I talked to somebody else, and she said, "Well, a lot of people had these big broil ovens that you can get in Santa Fe." So, that went on the list, and the first thing we bought was this broiler oven, about so big, and there were some compartments. You could bake in it and you could do your vegetables and meat at the same time. It was wonderful, it was electric. We used that, totally, and brought it home, and I've kept it in the attic for the last fifty-some years. I cannot part with it. [laughter] I don't ever want to have to use it again, but, that's how we cooked.

BT: So, it was cold. It gets cold there. You must have gotten there wintertime.

VR: No, we got there in June.

GR: Could I remind you that the other half of that house was the north side of the house, and, intelligently, they put the thermostat on the north side of the house, except, that the prevailing winter winds were from the south-west, and the other half of the house was occupied by two British people who liked to have their thermostat set at about fifty-eight. Under those conditions, our side was usually forty, or less.

VR: Anyhow, but, the climate, for the most part, was just wonderful, dry, of course, clear. You could see the mountains from our kitchen window. It was just lovely. I spent a lot of time, especially after George went overseas, ... with, by then, a baby, and the baby carriage, and walking from guard post to guard post, for miles, and just loving the countryside. Anyhow, I worked until our son was born, and he was born in, ... well, it was called the infirmary, but, it was really a shack with an OB who really wasn't. [laughter] ... I was there for thirteen days at a dollar a day. [laughter]

KP: What was the month and year that your son was born?

VR: He was born in July.

KP: July.

GR: June.

VR: ... June 25th

KP: Of 1945?

VR: '45, yes, and I was home a day and half, and two MPs came, early in the morning, and George walked right out with them, and he went off. Now, I had seen, in the records, that there was something going on in Tinian, which is a little island, and I said, "Have good time on Tinian." He said, "What did you say?" [laughter] He said, ... "Don't you ever, ever breathe that." ...

GR: You're not suppose know.

VR: You're not suppose to know this. So, and off he went. I can never believe that he actually walked out. I mean, ... if he had dragged his feet, I would have been happier. But, we had some good friends, and one of them came over, later in the morning, and she said, "How are you doing?" I said, "I'm fine." She said, "Well I think George will have a wonderful [time] on Tinian." [laughter] I said, "Marian, you can't say Tinian." "Oh," she said, "why not? ... Gil tells me everything." [laughter]

KP: So, your husband actually did not tell you anything

VR: He had actually not told me.

KP: So, this was a shock, that ...

VP: That she knew it.

KP: Yes.

GR: ... I told her, I was allowed to say, "I [am] gonna have to leave the country on business." [laughter] I would say that, and I wrote my parents that.

KP: Which is pretty vague. [laughter]

VR: Anyhow. ...

KP: When did you first learn about the atomic bomb? I mean, you were at the center of it, but, when did you actually know? Did you know when the bomb exploded in New Mexico?

VR: I did know that, because you were home then.

GR: ... I had to wait to see whether the test was successful. If the test had not been successful, I wouldn't have gone. If the test was successful, I went the next morning.

VR: ... See, I had just come home from the infirmary, and so, this was the only night we had together before he went, as it turned out. ... So, off he went the next day, but, in August, I was hanging up these pristine diapers, ... and the neighbor across the way called out, and she said, "Isn't it wonderful?" And, I said, "What?" She said, "The bomb," and, I said, "What bomb?" [laughter] ... "The atomic bomb, it works, it works." I said, "I never heard anything like that." She said, "Well, it's been called nuclear around here, but, it's really now going to be the atomic bomb." That was the first [time]. I still didn't know what it was, but, ... that's the first I heard.

KP: So, you had not seen the actual explosion in New Mexico?

VR: No.

KP: You were not aware ...

VR: Oh, I knew that they had tested something, yes.

KP: But, you had no clue, really.

VR: No, I didn't.

KP: Yes.

VR: ... My only defense, at this point, ... is that I was not only very young, [laughter] I was very immature. ... This was a whole new life that I was just beginning to understand a little bit.

KP: It seems like the strict security measures taken at Los Alamos worked, in your case at least.

VR: Oh, yes. It wasn't in front of my face.

KP: You might have been able to figure it out, if you really tried to figure it out.

VR: When you talked about social life, and I said we played hearts, well, ... there were lots of gatherings. ... People gathered a lot, but, you couldn't talk about work, and you couldn't talk about the theater, or music, because it was in New York, or California. It was too far away. You didn't want to talk about the war, because this was a different kind of a war. These people were not really putting their lives on the line. ... So, you didn't talk about the war. You did talk about your housing, [laughter] primarily, it seemed to me.

BT: Just practical, everyday things?

VR: ... And, complaints, and the men, at these gatherings, didn't talk about their work, like, I found out, they certainly did when we got back here.

KP: While your topics for conversation were limited, you were still a very interesting group. You had people thrown together that probably, normally, would not have been thrown together,

from all of these different universities and countries, and then, the spouses are added to the mix. You husband mentioned the two British people who were not used to heat. [laughter] Do you have any reflections on the types of people you met?

VR: Well, this was, ... besides the scenery, the most exciting part for me, because they were wonderful people and many, many young people.

GR: German refugees.

VR: German refugees, but, after we came back I knew, by contact, ... many of these scientists whom we'd meet at meetings and had contact [with] for many, many years, up until just about recently, when so many of them are dying off. But, this was a wonderful thing for me, not knowing any science and not knowing any scientists before, to have this wealth of people, and their backgrounds. It was interesting. ... We became very good friends with some people from Harvard, and met all these people who had famous names, like Teller. George used to play the violin when Teller was banging on the piano. He was very good, actually, with his one leg. He played the violin with someone who then went to Oberlin. ... There was lots of good contacts that way. ...

VR: Oppy was a good friend.

VR: Yes, we mentioned Oppy earlier.

KP: You talked a bit about Oppenheimer, but, it was off the tape. You listed on your survey a number of people you got to know, at least in some fashion. I guess, maybe, Oppenheimer would be a good person, because he has been a subject of a number of accounts. Where did you first meet him?

VR: Well, he was certainly very available, all over the place. I mean, he had this hat that he always wore, and you could spot him. ... I never was in the tech area as such, which is where his office was and where he worked. So, I never saw him there, but, they had gatherings at home. ... The lodge, that had been for the school, dining hall and all, was now made into a dining hall for us, too, and, although we didn't go as nearly as often as we would if we were there now, because, we thought, we were suppose to cook our meals and stuff. [laughter] The time change is very interesting in this. They would be there, there would be gatherings, and we would be invited, and they would be invited, but, it wasn't a close social contact, whatsoever, for me. Work wise, it was closer for George. They had a baby about the same time we did, and that was sort of interesting, and we did see them when they came back, occasionally, here on campus, or at the Institute. ... George says he was very, very good and generous with him, as he was not always with people. One little side issue is that he became very controversial, but, this doesn't have anything to do with this. ... The interesting thing is, the person who had been chairman of the Physics department here, and who was on the AEC committee in Washington when they were checking Robert Oppenheimer and he was having the trial, wrote a minority report, this was Henry DeWolfe Smyth, saying that he felt that Oppenheimer was not a traitor, in anyway. ... This took a lot of courage.

KP: Probably, he has received so much attention because he lost his security clearance. Historians have really castigated the whole process.

GR: Right after that, we invited him to dinner.

VR: [laughter] Along with ...

GR: Patrick Blackett, who was persona non grata in England, at the same time.

KP: Oh?

GR: We knew him very well in London.

KP: The next person who has attracted a lot of attention is General Groves, who also has been a very controversial figure. Where historians have rehabilitated Oppenheimer, or at least view him as unfairly libeled, Groves has been criticized. I am curious as to what types of involvement you had with him and when did you first meet him?

VR: Well, General Groves was not very much respected by the scientists. Now, partly, this is the scientists' fault, because they were not in the military, and ... they really did look down on the military, I think. I think that Oppenheimer was very clever and wise in being able to get along with him, and I think they built up a relationship of mutual respect. I don't think things could have worked like they did, if they hadn't, but, I think this was Oppenheimer going the extra inch to make it work. This is just my interpretation.

KP: Did you ever have direct experience with him?

VR: No, I didn't, and I'm not going to tell you the one that I ...

KP: Oh, you did? [laughter]

VR: No, but, he did allow me to come up to the hill. I mean, it had to go through him. He was in charge.

KP: He was the one who permitted you to come on board.

VR: Yes, and I did see him, one day, getting into a big tank. I don't know why the tank was there, but, for some reason, and it was difficult, climbing up it. ... I must say, we stood there and thought, "This is sort of funny." But, ... I did not ever meet him beyond that.

KP: I have read that a lot of the scientists did not like being in uniform and the military security. They found a lot of the military protocol and discipline to be an anathema. Did you notice differences of this nature?

VR: Well, I think it's interesting that this was a new community, and a very young community, and it very quickly became stratified, horizontally and vertically. There were the scientists who thought they were top of the heap, and they really were, but, it was the Army.

GR: They weren't in uniform

VR: They weren't in uniform. None of them were in uniform.

GR: No. I was the only scientist in uniform and I had volunteered.

VR: So, there were three naval officers, including George, when we were there, but, there were a lot of Army, because it was an Army base.

GR: Yes.

VR: And, there were a lot of SEDs. ... They were in the Army, and they were the young men who had been either scientists, had taken science courses, or math courses, and so, when they were inducted into the service, a lot of them were sent right out there, ... SEDs. Then, there were the WACs, who were about, average, ten or twelve older than any of these SEDs who were out there. They were military, ... and then, there were all the support group of the Spanish-Americans, which is what we called them at that time, who came and went, but, it very quickly became this way, and [it is] surprising to me.

KP: How quickly could you have this hierarchy develop?

VR: Very quickly.

BT: By the time you got there though, it had been established and running for awhile, right?

GR: About six or seven months.

BT: Okay, only six or seven months.

GR: The first real act, occupation, was in November of '43.

BT: How many people were really involved in this community?

VR: Six hundred is what I would say.

BT: About six hundred?

VR: About the time we were there ...

BT: You could almost know most people by looking at them?

VR: No. ... I'm just trying to think, ... there were about ten babies a day, I mean, a week. Wasn't that a week? I do have that statistic. At some point, there were lots of babies.

BT: Ten babies a week.

VR: Well, that was ...

BT: Well, they were young.

VR: Yes. I think we started out with, when we were there, around six hundred people. I do have a nice book that I'd like you to look at, before you go.

KP: Oh, okay, that would be very nice.

VR: Of pictures, and it does show you how long ago it was, just by looking at the cars even, but, I think the thing that surprises me most, and it did when I was made this tape for the historical society, the difference in the social attitudes now, particularly of women.

KP: Well, you mentioned cooking. Now, most of us would just go to the mess hall and we think this was great and we might cook only once a week.

VR: Yes. ... It was ridiculous looking back, but, that's what we did.

KP: What other conventions did you see, in terms of entertaining, or roles, that struck you?

VR: Well, certainly, ... most of the women, many of the women, were working. Not all of them, those with children were not working. ... I don't think that I knew any woman with a child who was working. ... Those women were actually working on trying to set up a school system and a child care situation, and that was a lot of hard work, it turned out, and I was not even very much aware of it, at the time. So, there were those of us who were working and, ... in one end of the mesa, close to the tech area, and then, there were others that were further out, and that's where they were trying to build the school and all. So, things were beginning to shift, by the time we left, certainly. By the time they left, a lot of scientists had gone, and ... the support people were coming in and [were] able to live on the base. ... This was changing things quite a bit, too.

BT: When you had the baby, did you continue to work?

VR: No

BT: Was there any pressure on you to leave, since you were not working?

VR: No. No indication of that [at] all.

BT: That was very good of them, in a way, I mean.

VR: I never even thought of it. They probably couldn't have gotten me any place ... traveling?

BT: Train traffic, yes, that is right.

VR: I might not have been able to get a pass. ... Some people thought he'd be back very quickly. They thought the war would be over very soon. He is a little different about this sorta of thing. When he goes off, [he says], "I'm sure to be back in two years."

GR: Well, we were told that it would take two years to train and replace me.

BT: Whoa, two years.

VR: So, [laughter] ... if anybody had bothered to think about me, and I don't think anybody did, they would of thought he'd be back in time to get me off the base. ...

KP: When did your husband come back?

VR: He came back in November. ... Yes, just before Thanksgiving.

GR: All my group came back at the end of August or the beginning of September, but, because of my blast damage analysis, I had to stay and go to Tokyo, Hiroshima, and Nagasaki. That took a long time, because transportation was tight, got back in November.

VR: Just before Thanksgiving.

KP: So, he was not gone for two years.

VR: It wasn't the two years, no.

KP: It probably was very hard.

VR: I felt sorry for myself, I have to admit, sorry because everybody ... had a husband there, except, maybe, occasionally, they would go off for something or other, but, they were there. Not like in communities, where a lot of men were off in the service. So, and I had the baby, so that I couldn't work to get out. ... It never occurred to me to work. Isn't that interesting?

BT: Well, unless there had been daycare, I do not know what you would have done with the baby.

VR: Yes, yes, and I had no car, too, and we had no telephone. ... [laughter]

BT: I am just amazed, because I had a hard enough time with a husband at home, and a nurse the first week, and a mother to call on the phone, and a mother in-law to call on the phone, dealing with a new baby. I do not know what I would of done.

VR: I had a book. ...

BT: I had books, too. [laughter]

KP: Which books did you use? Do you remember?

VR: Well, it was before Spock.

KP: Oh, okay.

BT: What did you do with them?

VR: I read something in the book, and it said, "If you don't take care of this, the baby may die." [laughter] Well, I plopped [him] in the carriage, and I went over to the infirmary, and I said, [laughter] "The book says the baby may die. What do I do now?" It turned out it was diarrhea, and I never even heard the word before. ... Well, he was a healthy little baby, actually. [laughter] He survived himself.

BT: You must have had support from your neighbors, or the people around you that had babies?

VR: Yes, I can't remember support so much with the baby, but, certain friends were awfully good, and had me to dinner, and that sort of thing, to get me out, but, I don't remember going to Santa Fe at all, during that time.

KP: Yes, it sounded like a very isolated world.

VR: Yes, it was a little bit.

BT: What did you do all day? Did you have a radio?

VR: Well, we had a radio. I don't remember listening to that a great deal, but, I did read. ... I don't even know now where I got the books from. I did read.

BT: Well, you said the library only had a few books.

VR: Well, I wasn't ever in the scientific library, and there wasn't another one until ... later, when people began leaving and leaving their books in the room. There was a room set up in the lodge, and, after he came back, I worked there for a little bit, just volunteer kind of thing. But, I don't know where I got my books, must have been from friends.

KP: When did you leave Los Alamos?

VR: Was it February? ...

GR: February, '46.

BT: He remembers.

KP: [laughter] Obviously, you were looking forward to that. So, you came back in February on 1946? Have you ever been back to New Mexico?

VR: Well, we went back once, twenty-five years, or so, ago, because we were in Colorado, at the high altitude lab, and we wanted to see some friends that were at Los Alamos. So, we drove down, stay[ed] a couple of nights, and then, drove home. ... Then, three years ago, we went, and stayed in Santa Fe, and did the trail up to Los Alamos, stayed at Los Alamos overnight. We were to see a lot of the old files, and our old dog tags, and IDs, and all that, at the curator. ... Archivist, and so, that was interesting, and [there are] lots of places you still can't go, but, so, we had a tour around. ... It's grown a lot, it's not the same.

KP: Does your home still stand?

VR: We looked and looked and looked for it. We knew just where it should have been, and then, it wasn't. [laughter] They probably bulldozed those things down.

BT: Thirty years ago, they were still there, I heard. All Fred said is that all the buildings had numbers on them. Is that true? Did they have numbers?

VR: Yes, they did.

BT: Okay.

GR: S839. ...

KP: Since you have been back, Santa Fe has become one of the top ten trendiest places to live. Are you both surprised or not surprised at how trendy Santa Fe has become?

VR: Well, I think only because it seemed so far away from sorts of things we both were interested in, the music, and the theater, and all that. New York seemed far, far away. We did get the *New York Times*, though it made it almost worse. [laughter] I thought this was one way to keep up. It was not a way to keep up, it was a way to keep wanting. [laughter] But, I think, Santa Fe is really overgrown now, to me. I mean, we could hardly find our way into the city when we went there. The plaza, and the Palace, and all of that are the same, but, if you wanted to live there now, you'd want to live out in the hills a little bit.

KP: But, there are still the cultural amenities.

VR: Well, they have the opera there now, they have a lot of music festivals, they have new museums. It's burgeoning. ... I don't know, I would have to try.

KP: It sounds like when you were there, at the time, you really thought it was a backwater place, compared to Santa Fe today.

VR: ... It was artistic then, in many ways. There were lots of little art shops, and, of course, there was diversity in all the different peoples that were there. I don't think anyone in Santa Fe, at that time, thought it was a backwater.

KP: I think a lot of the easterners getting off the train probably thought that.

VR: Well, those who had to get off at Lamy. [laughter]

KP: When you came east, when did you decide to re-enter the work force?

VR: Well, I am one of the few leftover lucky ones, I think. When I retired from PDS, Princeton Day School, I went through this business twenty years growing up, twenty years raising a family, literally, and twenty-five years working, so that I stayed home and raised some boys, and for quite awhile, until the youngest was in first grade.

KP: You went to work? How did that job come about?

VR: Well, PDS was a boy's school in town, which is not very far.

GR: PCD.

VR: PCD, and Miss Fine's was the girl's school. Girl's school went through twelfth grade, boy's school went through ninth grade, and then, the boys were supposed to go off to boarding school. ... We had a couple boys at PCD, and then, the third boy went to PCD, and, at [that] time, Dean Mathey gave a lot of land out on the Great Road for [a] joint school, and so, the schools combined. ... Our son was starting in, what grade would that have been? ... Seventh grade, and I thought, if I have to transport this child all the way out there, I might as well try to get a job, and, besides, if they're going to join two schools together, they're certainly going to need another librarian. I mean, how can they do it without another librarian? So, I applied, and got the job. So, I was out there, but, then, he was there for two years, and he was always in the top grade of the boys, so that he was always class president, football captain, for two years, and I was afraid this was going to go on for five years, by the time he got to tenth, and eleventh, and twelfth grade, he still was going to be. So, then, he went away to school. So, I was just driving myself out and back for a number of years, but, there I was. [laughter]

KP: You mentioned earlier that you really enjoyed being a librarian.

VR: It was wonderful fun, ... lots of support for ... the book collection. Kids that were really interested, I think, for the most part, parents that were interested that their kids were doing things, and faculty. It was a very nice environment.

KP: You mention earlier the friends you still maintain from Highland Park were the daughters of faculty members. It seems like you enjoyed this world a lot, the faculty interchange?

VR: Well, it's pretty nice, you know.

KP: Yes. [laughter]

VR: I haven't found the drawbacks, but, there must be some. I, actually, now, am meeting a lot of people who aren't involved in the university, because my husband is retired, and so, ... both of us [are] moving out a little bit, and there are differences.

GR: ... You're in the library council and you're in the museum.

VR: Oh, yes.

GR: So, you have a lot of non-faculty contacts.

VR: Yes, now, it's true. You should see the museum exhibit if you have time.

KP: Which museum are you at?

VR: ... The Princeton University Art Museum.

KP: Okay.

VR: They have a great, big, new exhibit of loans from alumni to commemorate the 250th anniversary.

KP: How long does it run 'till?

VR: Until early June, or after reunions.

BT: Can you reflect on the differences between the faculties at Rutgers and Princeton? You knew one as a child and one as an adult.

VR: ... I don't think I could [make] comparisons of the Rutgers I knew then and the Princeton that I know now, maybe isn't so different, but, I'm not sure that the Rutgers that is now ... I think there is a big difference.

BT: I would think there would be some similarities.

VR: No, I think Princeton, up until World War II, ... had sort of scholar professors from a wealthy background, or pretty close to wealthy background. This may not have been so true at Rutgers, but, certainly after World War II, this changed, and the people here now are not from wealthy backgrounds. ... So, that whole ambiance has changed a little bit.

KP: Robert Clothier was from Princeton.

VR: Yes.

KP: His family was rather wealthy. Somebody once said he should play a university president in a movie. He had an aura about him.

VR: ... I think he was a very fine president, and he and President Dodds, who was president here at the same time, were pretty close to being contemporaries. ... I always liked Dr. Clothier. ...

BT: When did you come to live in Princeton? Was it after the war?

VR: Yes, about March, actually, we came here. ... He [had] been an assistant professor, which is pretty good for those who'd been away. ... [laughter] Cause, a lot of them had to go back and finish up and [a] lot of them had to go back and just be instructors, because they had been gone. ... But, most of them went back. ...

KP: What changes have you seen in Princeton during your time here?

VR: In Princeton?

KP: In Princeton.

VR: Well, the real change is growth and traffic going across from 206, US 1, and all that, and the building all around and about. That, I think, is the biggest change, and the one that's least welcome. Campus change, ... of course, co-ed education has been the biggest change, for the good. [laughter] I think almost everybody, except a few of the old guard can't still quite accept it, but, I think they've made a big difference. ...

-----END TAPE TWO, SIDE ONE-----

VR: But, you don't go to more concerts. There's more theater, but, you don't go to more [concerts].

KP: So, you see certain continuities.

VR: Yes, a lot of continuities. I think another great change, however, ... Palmer Square, which was land that was given by an alumnus, and was made into shops and all, that was sold by the university maybe twenty years ago, now, but, that has made a great difference, because they keep changing the ground rules in the rentals, and so forth, so you get, now, nothing but, big names coming in. ... There's no place in town to buy a dress, for instance. ... The downtown has changed.

KP: I am trying to remember where I heard about the controversy over Palmer Square. It had become, not rundown, but, tawdry. When it was sold, it became more attractive, but, also, much more expensive.

VR: Yes. I can't remember the tawdry part. [laughter] ...

KP: That is what I heard someone say. Now, it looks immaculate.

VR: Yes, but they brought in Ann Taylor, and they brought in Benetton, for awhile, and they brought in ... Jaeger's, you know. ... What they've brought in is very up-market, but, they're also supported by the management firm ... [in] New York, or whatever.

KP: Yes.

VR: But, it is different, because we did know the shopkeepers. ... Our kids went to school with their children and everybody it was a very good mix, I think, of what town and (gown?) can be.

GR: Our kids needed shoes, for example, go down and see Ralph Hulitt, and they'd go down, they'd get some shoes, and then, in due course, we'd get a bill.

BT: Oh, those are the good old days. [laughter] I get the impression that, in a lot of ways, Princeton is a small town, or used to be.

VR: Well, ... it still is, because, ... so far, it's confined to the downtown. There's a shopping center out here, but, ... it's where everybody goes to food shop, and to do this, that, and the other, but, ... Princeton downtown is still where it is, and the library's still down there, the public library. ... I don't take the time to walk around ... much, but, it's possible to do that and feel that you're in a small place.

BT: Do you think the university has changed at all? My only impressions come from what my mother told me about what went on here in the late-1930s. [laughter] I can remember her stories about the drunken parties at the fraternity houses after the football games and how people fell off the back of the stadium all the time. She made Princeton sound like the Roaring '20s, which it probably was, but, I am now talking about 1936 or 1937.

VR: Well, that was before we were here, but, I think ... the Fitzgerald reputation has ... gone a long way, probably further than it should have. No, ... I think there, undoubtedly, is ... weekend drinking. The university is trying every which way to educate, and to control, and change this, and they're working at it diligently, but, a lot of youngsters now are not going into the clubs. They're going into colleges, which is sort of like the British system, and so, they don't need the clubs, and so, the social life is quite different, and they do it out of choice, I think. There's several possibilities, three, maybe, that I know of. There's still ... life on Prospect Avenue, and it's still a vital part, but, it's not the only part. ... I think the university has grown through the administration. There's so many rules and regulations coming out of Washington. For one thing, they've had to hire a lot of extra administration people. ... It does make a difference.

There used to be a little office where you'd ... sign up for your health care, or your whatever. Now, they've got a big building and rooms galore and papers galore. ...

GR: Too many deans.

VR: I mean, unbelievable.

KP: I have noticed how much simpler the administrative system was in the 1930s and 1940s. For example, Rutgers was a small place before the war, and, after the war, it grew, but, not too many administrators and deans were added. Now, within even my relatively short time within the university system, an unbelievable number of deans have been added to the faculty.

VR: Yes. ... This has happened here, too, and, maybe all over, but, it may be, partly, because of the government regulations. ... I don't know why so many. ...

BT: It certainly happened at Middlesex County College. A chairman there once said that in twenty years, they had gone from having too few administrators to having so much paperwork that you could not keep up with it. He had seen things just explode in a relatively short time. I think that it was a universal occurrence. When you came to Princeton, you met people on the faculty and staff, but, when your children went to school, you also met people in the community.

VR: Well, I think the one thing that surprised me a little bit coming here was, I thought we would be able to cross department lines, ... and, it hasn't worked very well that way. I used to have parties where I'd have people from history, or religion, or whatever, and ... it was almost like boys and girls. ... I could never believe it. Now, I meet people on my own from different departments, [laughter] but, ...

KP: It is still very department oriented.

VR: It's still very departmentally driven, and, as the department gets bigger if you entertain everybody that you were entertained by, there wouldn't be any time left over anyhow. I mean, ... that's slowing down for us, some, but, I'm sure it's not slowing down ... parties must still be going on. [laughter]

BT: That certainly is not true in some other departments, I do not think.

VR: Well, I do hear it's different with the young people now. Their great interest is not cooking up a feast every weekend, or something, but, going out and meeting friends someplace for dinner.

BT: More couples are working now.

KP: That does set our pattern, most often, because my wife works at the Bronx Zoo.

VR: Oh, does she?

KP: Yes.

VR: That's a commute.

KP: Yes, exactly. We sometimes have people over for dinner, but, we often eat out because we are both exhausted. I keep the same schedule as she.

VR: But, that's an exciting place to work.

KP: Oh, yes, that part is very true.

VR: Yes.

KP: We may end up moving to Riverdale in the Bronx.

VR: And then, you'd commute?

KP: Yes. [laughter] It will be my turn. Was there anything that we forgot to ask you about Los Alamos? Your comments about the WACs and how they were resented are most helpful.

VR: ... That was not a success, I think.

KP: Yes.

VR: That did not work well. I think everything else, well, they did what they meant to do, and they did it rather quickly, I guess.

KP: You were married at the time, with a child. What were your observations about single people? I figured it would either be wonderful, or a source of great torment, to meet someone under those conditions.

VR: Well, you just struck something pretty interesting, I think. ... I had a roommate at college, that last year, and her name was Elise Cunningham, and, one day, she wrote to me, when we were at Los Alamos. ... She had taken a secretarial course at school. She was an English major, but, she had taken a secretarial course to get a job, and she had one, and, she said, one day, she was going out, her mother said, "Elise, you haven't put on your rubbers, and you don't have your umbrella, and I think you should do that." Now, this bothered Elise just enough for her to write this in a letter, and I said, "Elise, if you want, I'll send you applications for a job out at Los Alamos." Well, she was out in Los Alamos in two months, I think.

BT: Wow. [laughter]

VR: ... A single woman, and she had a secretarial job in some corner, I don't even know exactly now where she worked, but, I can tell you that she had dates from the minute she crossed the line. [laughter] And, in fact, she became engaged to an SED, and he had not done his Ph.D., so, when

they came back, they got married, they came back here to New Jersey, ... and he went to Columbia and got his Ph.D., and then, at some point, I said to George, "You know, it would be awfully nice if Elise could come and live in Princeton, now that he has his Ph.D." George says, "That's not how." [laughter] ... But, he interviewed him and, in fact, Val did come to Princeton, ... and that is Val Fitch.

KP: Oh, how interesting.

VR: And, who, some few years ago, won the Nobel Prize in Physics. But, their romance started in ...

BT: Started in Los Alamos.

VR: Yep.

KP: Partly because she was tired of living at home.

VR: Well, she just wanted a change, and independence, ... and I was having a baby, at that point, and George was going overseas. We knew that much, and I thought it would be nice. She could come out, and she could move in, and ... none of that happened. [laughter] After Val came, I hardly ever saw her, and, one day, after we were back here, she said "I feel so badly about that, because ... I now know," she'd had her child by then, ... "it would have been nice." ... I said, "Yes, it would have been." [laughter] But, ... I didn't know how many single women were there. There must have been some, but, I think a lot were wives, maybe, that didn't have children.

KP: I would imagine that women who were there, even at junior levels, as you mentioned with the example of your friend, would have no problem finding dates.

VR: No.

KP: That would be one way that the hierarchy would be a little more flexible.

VR: Yes.

KP: The fact that WACs could be dated.

VR: Well, you see, the WACs were too old for SEDs.

KP: Oh, okay.

VR: ... That was the problem, and, Elise was not too old for the SEDs. They were about the same age.

KP: So, age really mattered.

VR: I think it really did, and I don't think anybody took that into account, didn't think it was important, at that stage. They didn't want to have a romantic ...

GR: There was a war. [laughter]

BT: They were not real concerned about the dating situation.

VR: Yes, but, so, it worked quite well for some, some few, anyhow.

KP: What a great story to end with, unless there is something else.

BT: It would be interesting to hear her tape, too.

VR: No, she died, ... we were away. ...

GR: Twenty-five years ago.

VR: Yes, that long?

GR: Yes, twenty-three.

VR: Very young.

KP: Well, it is good, then, that we have this story. It is a good story to remember her by. Thank you very much.

VR: Well, it was interesting.

-----END OF INTERVIEW-----

Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 7/28/99

Reviewed by Sandra Stewart Holyoak 7/30/99

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