

**UNION CHURCH ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
INTERVIEW OF
VIRGINIA PILAND
RECORDED BY HARRY RICE
OCTOBER 17, 2002**

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H: The Union Church Oral History Project and I'm talking to Virginia Piland on Saturday morning, October the 17th, 2002, at her home at 108 Harrison Court in Berea. Virginia, I wonder if you could begin ... of course, we're obviously talking about Union Church ... your history with Union Church, but you might begin by—in a more general way—identifying yourself in terms of where you were born and grew up.

V: OK. I was not born in Berea, but I came here when my mother came here when I was two years old, well no a little older than that. She came here because of a divorce so she came here with four children. And, this was her home, and she came back to be with her mother. So the five of us—my grandmother, four children and my mother—lived in a little, tiny house and grew up here. But my mother always saw to it that we attended Union Church. It was very important to her that that was the church that we should go to, even as tiny children. And some of my first memories relate to Union Church and, of course, the college. She came here so that she could go back to college. She knew that she had to get a college degree in order to raise four children.

H: What was your grandmother's name?

V: OK. My grandmother's name was Thalitha Powell, Thalitha Davis Powell. Thalitha's spelled T-h-a-l-i-t-h-a. My mother's name is Thalitha Ethel Powell Ferrell and then she married McClure—Thalitha Ethel Powell Ferrell McClure.

H: And was your grandmother a long-time resident of Berea?

V: My ancestors came from this area from early 1800's. My mother wrote about all of this in an 800-page manuscript. She didn't get it indexed, and I'm in the process of indexing that. But show her that I've put off for a long time, but I know I have to do it. But my ancestors are from Jackson County primarily.

H: And so your mother then came home to go to college.

V: Graduated in 1934.

H: And you eventually went to Berea College.

V: Graduated in 1943.

H: So between the age 2 and your graduation from college, what was Union Church like during those years for you?

V: Well, for me, I went to kindergarten with Mrs. Durham, two years when I was four and five. And then, of course, since I went to church there, Sunday School there, I had her as a Sunday School teacher until I was about ten. And this experience with Mrs. Durham was the most fantastic experience that any child could have. I really believe that. And I have a lot to tell you about that experience. Then, during my ... my childhood was spent in Union Church, but then in my teenage years and college years, I really had very little to do with Union Church because I was in the dormitory at the college, the Academy and the college. And so I did activities with the college instead of with Union Church, although we sometimes were required to go to Union Church. We weren't required to go to Union Church every Sunday as many people have said, but when I was in college we did not have to go to church every Sunday. We were encouraged and maybe we felt we had to, but there was no check, no requirement for it.

H: Were there religious activities of some kind required, even if it wasn't at Union Church?

V: Yes, the college required that we have a Sunday School on campus, a small group or ... and it wasn't required, but most of us went to Christian Education at Union Church in the evening, but we didn't go to church ... my friends, no. The chemistry teacher was our Sunday School teacher.

H: Who was that?

V: I don't remember his name. The professors had that responsibility. They had to take a Sunday School class periodically, I guess.

H: Were there either Sunday or mid-week chapel, worship services?

V: Oh, yes, every day. We had ... when I was in high school every day. I don't think we did that in college—I'm not real sure of that. But at 11:00, we went to the chapel—Phelps Stokes—and there was some kind of program for us. It wasn't always religious; frequently religious, on religion. And that was required. But attendance wasn't taken, but there was no place else to go. (telephone interruption)

There was always ... in the classroom, on weekends ... there was always emphasis on religion at the college, but ... and we were required to do things, but there was no way to check it. You know, now they have to pass in their little card or whatever.

Maybe we were more honest. (Laugh) No, there was nothing else to do.

H: Let's start with kindergarten, Mrs. Durham.

V: I made some notes because I thought I would be apt to forget some things if I didn't have them. In the first place I didn't remember until recently that I had gone to kindergarten at age four AND five because I thought five was the age you went to kindergarten. My sister told me that we went at age four, and then I have this picture which shows that I was age four when I first went there. One of the things that I remember about this was that one of my first experiences at kindergarten was that my mother had to take me to kindergarten and then she would drop me off there and she would go over to her class on campus. And she told me one day that, pointing to the chapel, that that is where I go to my class and you go to your class over here at Union Church. And I had to go a little bit before Mrs. Durham arrived. I knew that, and things went fine for a day or so. I was told to sit in this chair and wait for Mrs. Durham, which I did. I don't know whether I was told, but I thought that I was the only person in this great, big building. So I sat there, and one day a man came in—I was coughing or sniffing or something. He came in because he heard me. And he said, "Oh, you have a cold"—whatever he said was trying to make me comfortable with it. But what it did is frighten me because I was told ... I thought that I was the only person in that building. And so, I would not talk and I'd been told to stay in that chair ... I was an obedient child, I really was. So, after he left I thought I must go see my mother. So I got up and crossed all the streets which were three streets to get there, but don't think that was anything. There was nothing but an old horse pulling a wagon or something. I got over to Phelps Stokes, went to the back door which was open, slightly open, and looked in and that hall was an enormous hall that I looked down, and a door was open – slightly ajar, so I walked in. And I went up to the door and peeked through and saw my mother sitting in the middle of the second row. And I opened the door which squeaked. The professor was talking. I opened the door which squeaked so he stopped and looked and everybody stopped and looked, and I opened the door and climbed over everybody's knees to get to my mother and got there and sat down in her lap. And then the professor went on with his talk. No one said a word; it didn't interrupt that class. It was just a little event that no one really was recognizing at the time. She took me back, of course. But that's very clear in my memory that I was adventuresome enough to do that, daring because I knew I was not suppose to do any of those things. So that was one of the early things about ...

H: So kindergarten, the daily kindergarten was at Union Church?

V: Yes, it was. And Mrs. Durham did that ... I think, her youngest son was a year older than I. And I believe she started that when her youngest son was four years old. So we were ... she hadn't been doing that long. She was marvelous; she really was. And the things that she told us were so entertaining to me. I lived with my mother and my grandmother. My grandmother ... you'd think a grandmother would entertain her grandchildren, but I don't recall this from my grandmother. But Mrs. Durham had stories to tell us; she had pictures to show us; she played the piano and was interested in music; we sang songs; we played games. It was absolutely a wonderful experience for me to enter into. She found all kinds of ways to keep us ... Well, let me start this over. When I was in kindergarten, I knew more about the world than I would have gotten in school for a good long time. And that was through the missionary work because Helen Disney was a missionary in China at the time. And the kindergarten children in China sent things to us and we made little toys or something, I don't know what it is we made—it may have been sewing a star with corn on a cardboard—that we sent to her. But the thing that she ... and we knew where China was. That was part of our knowledge of this world. The whole ... some of the pictures on the Sunday School cards had the picture of the world and Jesus and children from all around the world in costumes, so that was something that really expanded my world completely and made me aware that there is much out there besides this little life here in Berea which is pretty big for a kindergarten child, I think. And I would not ... I did not get that in school, not until about the third or fourth grade when we started studying geography. But one of the things that the children in China sent us was a little doll. And I thought since we had made these things for those kindergarten ch ... you know, the little cards that we had sent. I thought that the children there had made these things. So I have this little doll that was Helen Disney's children made and, you know, of course, it wasn't made by a child. But here it is, and it has been on my Christmas tree—not every year, but most of the years that I put ... I have a lot of little angels that ..., and that's one of them that I have.

H: This was something that came from Helen Disney's children in kindergarten in China.

V: In the mission.

H: Did anyone else save any of those?

V: Probably not. You know, of course, they started saving them, but ... My mother was responsible for saving this for me. You know, I didn't save it all that time.

H: Do you remember a story or stories that Ms. Durham told you?

V: Well, she told us ... you know, we had the song “Jesus Loves the Little Children All Around the World.” And we still sing that. That was very important because I saw these costumes, you know, and I remember clearly a map of ... a globe and I don’t know what was on it because you can’t get the whole world on one side ... but here was a map of the world and children were around that. And there were details that I have from kindergarten experiences that I don’t have from anyplace else. You know, it was the right time to present some ideas to me because I was just fascinated with everything she did.

She had us do dramatic things. We played out little games. At Christmas time, one year, the college was having their big Christmas program, and they had planned to have—in Phelps Stokes Chapel—they had planned to have the star at one end and it was going to be pulled over here to the other end—a lantern. And three of us—Bobby Fielder, Martha Cornelius, and I—were to be up on stage, kneeling at a manger. I was the one to start singing when this lantern started coming across. Everyone was depending on me.

H: Were you in kindergarten still?

V: Kindergarten. I was probably five because a four year old ..., I don’t know. But that lantern shook, it wasn’t coming across, it shook. So I started ... what was the song ... “O Little Town ...” No, “Away in the Manger”. “Away in the Manger” And they kept saying, “You’re not supposed to start.” “Am too. Away in the Manger.” And I go on and I knew I was right so I kept on and on and finally I got to the end of it. And then the star started coming so they started over and we sang it twice. But, you know, the responsibility that she had placed on a child—five years old—and I knew that that was a very special thing for me to do. Of course, I flubbed it, but that’s all right. She ... And it made me interested ... kindergarten children sang in church sometime. It made me interested in the performing arts. And when I was in college I did a lot of work in dramatics and I did go to McClain School of Drama after I got out of college, but that was short lived and I did not pursue that. But it started out in kindergarten.

There were some other things. We also had a lot of missionaries who came through here through the years. But I remember some from kindergarten because Jimmy Washburn was ... his father was a missionary in Africa, and he was my age so he was in kindergarten one time. I remember him ... I don’t remember whether it was kindergarten or first and second grade. It gave us an opportunity to know where Africa is. All of these

things which I think was such a rich learning environment for children. And he ... Jimmy, the son ... told us that in Africa the natives ate grasshoppers. So Martha Cornelius and I thought if they ate grasshoppers ... I must have been a little older, I probably was at least eight ... if they ate grasshoppers, we should catch grasshoppers and boil them and cook them and eat them. And we did catch a lot of grasshoppers. We put them in a tin can and we boiled them over rocks out in the meadow somewhere. We didn't eat them because the soup was an awful green. And we didn't want to taste that awful green taste.

H: Besides the ones that you have named already, are there other names of children that were in kindergarten with you?

V: Paul Ovlice, Bobby Fielder, Earl Hays, Jimmy Ziegler, the Keener twins—Carolyn and Curtis, Martha Cornelius, Helen Spence, Ora somebody, Virginia ... and Russell ... I can't remember his last name, and Mark Schumacher. There were about 20 there.

H: Is that a pretty average number?

V: I have no idea.

H: That is the number of children you were used to being part of in the kindergarten class.

V: But many of those went on to Knapp Hall with me so I knew them through the years. Most of those children did not go to the public school; they went to Knapp Hall.

H: Is this on the lawn at the church?

V: This is on the lawn at the church and this is the holly tree that is there now. Well, I don't know whether it's the same holly tree because that holly tree doesn't look big enough to be that old. But there was holly tree there. I remember it clearly because the leaves pricked me. I was always doing things with leaves.

H: So that's the Foundation Chapel over in the background on the right.

V: And the tavern here and this was kind of an administration building for the Academy. There were classes in there. I don't know what it was called. It was somewhere in the Boone Tavern parking lot.

H: I get the idea that the kindergarten was partly a Christian Education activity as well as general. Is that right?

V: Oh, it was. Very definitely. It was Christian Education more than general. We sang Christian songs all the time. That was part of it. I don't know, maybe there was a little service everyday, I don't know that. I don't remember that. But it was in the church,

so in my mind, kindergarten and Sunday School are the same thing.

H: There was five days a week of kindergarten. Was it on Saturday?

V: No Saturday.

H: Were you with Ms. Durham on Sunday, too?

V: Yes. We lived here in town, but my mother stopped her education one year so that she could teach out at Scaffold Cane. In order to do that, we didn't have a car or any kind of transportation, we moved out to a little house out close to the two-room schoolhouse out at Scaffold Cane so my mother could teach there. We were there for three years. And even those years, we always came to Union Church, always. And walked two miles.

H: At what point, in terms of your childhood or in terms of the kindergarten maybe, was the issue or the question of joining the church brought up. Did it start at kindergarten?

V: Of course. I can't say that, I don't think so. I don't remember being baptized but I do remember being received into the church. And I know I had to be baptized. And I think that we were using ... what's the process of being put in water?

H: Immersed?

V: If we were immersed, you'd think I would remember it. I do think that's what it was, but I don't remember that experience. I do remember that after we were baptized, and it wasn't at the same time, we were received into the church. And we stood up front, as they do now, and people came around and shook our hands. And my brother and I were there together. My older sister and younger sister were not there.

H: Do you remember about what year that might have been or how old you were?

V: I probably was seven, eight, or nine.

H: And what year or years would that possibly be?

V: I was born in 1922 so that would be '29, '30, '31.

H: Well, do you remember other people ... the ministers ... when did you become aware of who the minister of the church was?

V: Well, Mr. Huntington was a minister after ... was the second minister. We knew him because he had two daughters and a son. His older daughter was the age of my older sister and his younger daughter was the age of my younger sister. So, we knew the Huntingtons through the association. And this is part of the association at Knapp Hall, too. I can't always separate one from the other. All of these things are just one picture, panoramic picture of what was going on. And Mr. Huntington loved the

children ... I know he did. Well, I remember one instance. He was present. I don't remember specifics. We did have a picnic or an outing out at Cow Bell Hollow.

H: A church picnic?

V: Yes, it was a church outing. And we had ... there was food, and after the food there were ice cream bars. I don't know if they had ice cream bars, but as I remember it we had ice cream bars. And I was ... I hadn't had my ice cream bar. And the reason for that is I was out in the woods. I had found some wild irises and I was looking at these irises. I was a child who did a lot of things on my own. And so I was not with the regular group, and I'd never seen anything like a wild iris before. And I was looking at those irises and playing in them. And so when the ice cream bars were passed out, I wasn't there. Then when I came back to the group and found out what had happened, I went up to get my ice cream bar. And Mr. Huntington came up at the same time. He had been busy with other things. And he came up to get his ice cream bar. There was only one ice cream bar. The person passing out the ice cream bars thought I was telling a lie. And Mr. Huntington knew me well enough to know that that's quite probably true. She's always doing something like that. Anyway, she wanted to give this to Mr. Huntington, and I wanted that so badly I said, "I was not here." So, he said let me have it. And I've always remembered that because I felt guilty about taking it but I also felt cheated if I didn't get it. So it was a no-win situation for me. And I taught school—seventh graders—and occasionally I would give them this dilemma and have them write about it. What should have been done at that situation.

H: His name was Seth Huntington. And the minister, I think, before him was Rev. Ziegler. Do you remember him at all?

V: I don't remember him. I remember his son Jimmy.

H: Rev. Huntington was there between 1930 and 1941; so part of those years you were in college. Do you remember anything else, any stories about the Rev. Huntington, any experiences with him?

V: I don't think so. I wish my sister Ruth were here because she's two years younger than I and she and the younger Huntington girl and Mary Katherine Fielder were very good friends. And those three were quite a little group to deal with. So they had a lot of experiences together.

H: Was there anybody else that actually worked for the church that you remember? You had the kindergarten ... I suppose, in a way, Ms. Durham worked for the church. It was her kindergarten. And you had Rev. Zeigler. Was there somebody who was always the choir director or the organist?

V: Yes, Mr. Rigby.

H: Rigby?

V: R-i-g-b-y. He ... well, I don't know ... I assume he was the choir director. He was certainly the head of the music department at the college. I don't know ... somehow I knew him because I took violin lessons and I would see him. I'm not sure that Rigby was the choir director. But one thing we always had Handel's "Messiah" at Christmas time. This was a wonderful thing for a child. We had music in our home. We took music lessons—piano; we had an organ. My mother got a guitar for my brother because she wanted him to do something. My mother had to work very hard to keep us at home, out of trouble, because she was not in the home. I think she did a good job of it. She certainly did with me; I was really tied to the home. But we had music in the home, but when you hear the "Messiah" for the first time, you remember some of it. It's yours forever. So years later, some years later, when I was about eleven or twelve years old, I had to go to a hospital in Virginia. It was not a hospital but it was called a hospital. It was a place where they thought children who were going to get TB should be. I was going to get TB. And so I was sent there. And, you know, we weren't in bed. We were ... you know, we lived there and had right food and right exercise. It was an Episcopalian sponsored place and so we had a lot of religion. I was looking in a bookcase one day and here was the "Messiah". And so I opened it up and I was sitting on the floor, I opened it up and I sat there on the floor and sang the part of the "Hallelujah Chorus". You know, if you hear it three or four times, it is a part of you.

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V: ... there is because my mother graduated from college and she had put all of her energies into getting through school and then she graduated in 1934 and after that she just couldn't push herself any more—she had some kind of breakdown, I don't know what kind of breakdown—but this was at a time when TB was the awful word in this community and of course, they said my mother had TB. I don't know why I say, "Of course." But they said my mother had TB. My grandmother had died by this time, and my mother went to a TB sanatorium in Louisville and that left four children without a mother or father. Dr. Payne gave us all TB shots. My older sister who was the picture of health was all right.

H: This was still when you were children?

V: Uhuh. I was ten. My older sister was all right. My brother had a positive which meant that somewhere along the line he had had something that made it positive. My younger sister was negative and I was negative. Well, I really was a very frail child. I was not any sicker than anyone else, but I was a frail looking child and Dr. Payne thought, "Oh, she must not have done it right," so she gave it to me a second time. It was still negative, and she gave it to me a third time. And that time she was going to be sure she got that serum in because she punched, punched, punched, punched. It was negative. But they still were concerned because I really was ... you know, I looked so frail, I guess, that they worried about me. My mother... So I was sent there and the other three children—one went to live with an aunt, Willie stayed at home—she was fifteen—and Ruth was with a family here in Berea until my mother came home. By that time, the doctors knew that she didn't have TB, but the damage was done because every child in the city thought that, you know ..., their parents had said, "Don't play with those little girls." So, it was a sad chapter, but it didn't last long. It really didn't last long. I hadn't meant to tell that.

H: So, you finished all your primary, secondary schooling was in ... all that in Knapp Hall? How was the school system set up at that time?

V: Well, we went to Knapp Hall until my mother went to the sanatorium. And then we were not welcome at Knapp Hall, you know, and so that meant I had ... so we went to the public school for two years. And then I ... my mother remarried and because I had been in this school in Virginia, I had heard about another school, not ... because I had been in this hospital in Virginia, I heard about another school over the hills, the Blue Ridge Mountains, and so I told my mother that ... you know, she was trying to figure out what to do, and I said, "Why don't I go to school there?" and I did for a year.

H: What school was that?

V: That was Blue Ridge Industrial School. I couldn't be admitted to the college because I was too ... I couldn't be admitted as a dormitory student here because I was too young. You had to be fifteen, or maybe fourteen. So I went away one year and then I came back and was in Foundation School a year and the Academy a year and so I graduated from high school in three years and then I went on to college here. Berea is my home, the school is my home, the church is my home. Doesn't mean I had ... It's my home.

H: Do you remember any other personalities you interacted with who were both in the church (Union Church) and in the Academy or college? One name that I would wonder about, for instance, is Louis Smith. Did you have any memories of Louis Smith?

V: No, I had memories of Jerry Hughes. Jerry Hughes was teaching in the Foundation School, and I had come home for the summer from this school in Virginia. And I wanted to take a class up on campus and so I took composition—English Composition. And he was the teacher. He made writing so interesting and he made trying to say something the way that you really wanted to say it so interesting. The class had less than ten people and one of the students there was Joyce Kilmer’s nephew Trees. And so that was exciting, you know, to have a famous person in that class. And Jerry Hughes just laughed and played with us. And he entertained us and we knew that we were entertaining him also. It was a wonderful rapport that teacher and students had.

H: This was about fifteen or sixteen?

V: No, it was fourteen. Well, let’s see ... I was fifteen. He had us keep a journal ... I still have that journal ... no, I don’t ... anyway, he had us keep journal and he would read this journal and comment on it. So it was, you know, on the things he would interact with this, and it was so much fun to be in that class and to learn to write. I have written some things. And really it was because of Jerry Hughes that I became so interested, so willing, to work at writing. He made that a joy.

H: Did you get to have him for class later in college?

V: No, I didn’t. He thinks I did, but I didn’t. I had that class and, you know, I’d learned so much in that class that I thought I had an A. There’s no way I couldn’t have anything else. Well, my report came and it was a B plus, and I could not believe that I had learned so much and just received a B plus. I just thought that was impossible. But I wasn’t challenging. I was a retiring, meek person. I didn’t do anything about it; I didn’t question him until sometime later, you know, the summer was over and the school was over. But when I came back in the fall, I met him on the sidewalk. He wasn’t Dr. then. I said, “Mr. Hughes, why did you give me a B plus on my class?” He paused and he said, “Why did I GIVE you a B plus?” And I said, “Yes.” (Laugh) He looked off and said, “Well, I think it’s the responsibility of the teacher not to give a grade. I think it is the student who works to GET the grade.” I couldn’t believe that, you know, that that was the way it was. And, of course, it’s a B plus. But years later, when I came back to Berea and he was married to Phyllis, ... every time I’d come back, I’d see him ... and he was married to Phyllis and

when I gave the Gilgamish hanging to the library ... he was there. No, I gave the Gilgamish tapestry to the library, and the library asked me to give them a little talk—background—on it to the workers there. So I did. And Phyllis was going to introduce me, and she didn't know me. So she asked him. And he said, "Well, I don't remember much, but I do know that she always made an A." (Laugh) So he gave me the A after all.

H: Oh, I was wondering if you had confronted him about that.

V: No, I didn't.

H: So, you proceeded on through college not so close, not every day or every week, going to Union Church, is that correct?

V: Probably every Sunday night I went over to Christian Endeavor. That was fun. That was down in the basement. It was a big auditorium size because we had folding doors and those were pushed back. So the whole area was exposed.

H: What was that like? What happened? This was mostly college age or all college age?

V: No, it could be high school and college. Well, most of the people who went to Union Church were college associated in some way. But there were little groups that ... you know, my group of friends would go over and your group of friends would go over. And, I don't remember that we had ... I don't remember the services. It was a Christian ...

H: Did it tend to be a large group activity, rather than small groups divided up?

V: Yes, it was a large group. And it was full, all those chairs. It was full.

H: Was Christian Endeavor, as you remember it, more of a college related organization or was it Union Church organization?

V: I think it was Union Church. No, I think it was Union Church. I'm quite sure it was.

H: Of course, you finished Berea in ...

V: 1943.

H: There was another minister who came on after Seth Huntington. Henry Pittman?

V: I don't know Pittman. I don't know Henry Pittman.

H: So, when you finished Berea, what happened?

V: I finished Berea. I went to Chicago. It was kind of for security and anchoring myself that I applied to MacLain School of Drama. You know, I didn't want to go there and not have

anything to hold on to. So, I had enrolled there and I worked at Marshall Fields in the personnel department. I thought that was the most fantastic job in the world to be at Marshall Fields in the personnel department. The glamour of that job soon wore off. I don't remember the sequence of all this, but later I got into personnel testing—psychological testing—which was really quite a thing because it just happened that way.

H: Is that because of work you did or did you go on to school further?

V: I majored in Psychology and I did go into school further. I went to the University of Chicago. I was going to get a masters in Psychology and I had completed all of the academic work, but I had to write the thesis. And every idea that I presented was not approved because it was too difficult, too big a thing. And that I was to reserve and do it when I got my Ph.D. Well, I had no money and I had no really job. It was kind of a situation where I thought I'd better make a change. And so ... I don't remember the sequence of all these things. Anyway, I didn't finish there at ... I didn't get a degree from the University of Chicago, but I did later get a degree. I got into teaching and I got a degree in Masters of Science in ... I don't remember that, isn't that funny that you can't remember the degree, but it's such an unusual name. Educational? ... Anyway, it has to do with being able to use all the kinds of equipment like this. It was ...

H: Audio visual?

V: No, it was instructional media ... that's what it is. Master of Science in Instructional Media which is really kind of interesting. By this time my younger daughter was in college. My younger daughter had a difficult time in school, and she was home for the summer and she took a course in Geology. She needed a Science course and I said, "Take Geology; it's easy" because I had found it easy up here, and it was entertaining. And so she took this and her teacher was not the teacher I had. He made them really work, and she was struggling. And I was learning how to run a movie projector or something. I was getting 3 credits for knowing how to push the right buttons. See, this is the reason I felt that degree was not even worth as much as the paper it was printed on. Because what I did was of little importance compared with what she had to go through. So I've never really been proud of that degree. But I must also say that degrees have never impressed me very much. You know, I did not go back and finish the one at University of Chicago. I started another one and had ... I don't know how many graduate credits I have ... 200. I was getting that one in counseling. I thought I'd be a counselor. But I didn't get to finish that because we moved, and then I wasn't concerned

about the degree because the school I was teaching in counted hours on the pay scale. It's how many graduate hours you had, so I had plenty of those. We're getting away from our topic, I'm sorry.

H: One possible question could be in the years you were away from Berea and Union Church, were you ever aware of decisions you made as far as going to church someplace, choosing a church to go to, how your experience at Union Church stayed with you over the years you were away from Berea.

V: Well, I'm sure it influenced me but I don't remember consciously ... that I was consciously aware of those decisions. Our children went to Sunday School, and I went to church. And we did that ... once to a Presbyterian Church, once to a Christian Church. It was a church that was kind of there. I wasn't overly interested in what kind of church it was. It was important to me that my daughters went to Sunday School and church.

H: And when did you ... at what point ... was it before you got back to Berea that you got into your major later work—sewing?

V: That happened in 1974. My mother died. My mother was not a quilter; my grandmother was not a quilter. I never saw anyone quilt in my life before I started doing it myself. Maybe there was a quilting frame someplace, but I don't recall it. I mean in someone else's home. But when my mother died, I knew that my mother had been interested in the names of quilt patterns. And she ... in her effects, there was a quilt top that she had pieced. I know she told me that she would never quilt, and so I thought when she said that she meant she would never do anything about quilting. But we did find this quilt top that she had pieced, and we knew it was hers because we could identify the fabrics in it, you know, from our clothes. So, it was complete. It was "trip around the world." My two sisters said I should take it, and that's because I knew how to thread a needle. (Laugh) So I did. And, of course, I had it and felt that I had to finish it. So, I put it on a quilting ... she had a quilting frame ... but it was my grand... I don't know, anyway, I put it on this quilting frame which had come from her, and had no one to help me. And I did ... you know, I just thought all you had to do was sit there and sew. Well, there's more to it than that because you can make it easier and I was doing it the most difficult way in the world. But I finished it and then it had to be bound, and I realized that that was my mother's first attempt at a quilt, because she had no other. I realized this was my first attempt at a quilt, and I cornered my younger daughter and said, "Will you do this?" (Laugh) And she was willing, but it was so difficult because it was, you know, on

point which means that the edges are little points all around. And she finished it. It took her, I don't know, two or three years but she did finish it. And the thing about that quilt is that it's the first attempt for three quilters—three generations—and so I've told her, you know, be sure that you take care of that. One time my husband said, "Their dog is probably sleeping on it." You can't take care of everything. And when I ... I found quilting a very relaxing endeavor. I taught school, and I gave a lot of energy to school. I did a lot of things that required my time, and I also felt that I was giving my children a lot of time (didn't give them enough but I thought I was.) And my husband has to have some time, too. So, I thought, that if I'm going to do anything, I've got to figure out a time, a space—space and time—that I can do these things without denying these other people. So, what I decided to do is I would get up at 4:00 in the morning and work from 4 to 6. And, then I had to get ready for school and I would come home from school at about 3:30, I think, and work two hours there and then on Saturday I would work five hours. This is how I made Gilgamish. I worked twenty hours a week on it. Is that right? Five times 2 is ten; Saturday and Sunday, that's twenty. Yeah, that's right.

H: When did you start on Gilgamish?

V: Oh, dear, this was 19... that was finished in ... '84? I don't know, I don't know.

H: Before you moved back to Berea?

V: Oh, yes; oh, yes; oh, yes.

H: Was that a commission?

V: No, no.

H: It just happened, in terms of how it came ... you had the idea before ...

V: I'll tell you how it happened. I found a children's book of Gilgamish, and it was the most fascinating story and the pictures were fascinating and I thought, "Oh, how could I have not known about this." It took me years to realize I had known about it ... that I had it in ancient history. You know, Elizabeth Peck told me that. I didn't remember; I didn't recall all that. But I saw these pictures and I thought that it would be ... just make a fantastic wall hanging. And so I started working on it and I liked the linear format and it was something that I could do one stage at a time. I didn't have to draft it all out because I didn't know enough. I went to the University of Chicago on Saturdays to take a course on Gilgamish at the Oriental Institute so that I would have the story right. (I have some mistakes in there.) And then I came ... and Jane Stephenson was interested in quilts ... and so I brought this down one time and showed it to her. By that time I had

known that I was going to give it to Berea because, you know, it was too big for anyone's wall. As a matter of fact, I had known I was going to give it to Berea and I knew exactly where I wanted it to be. I wanted it to be in the library on a certain wall.

H: The library was already built?

V: Yes, the library ... you know, they changed ... how long have you been here? Anyway, they changed and put that ... where it is now is a new wall. They didn't put it where ... I didn't ask them to put it where I wanted it. You know, I thought that I don't have that right. But they knew that they were going to be making some changes, and they designed that wall for it to be there. And of course, that's perfect. But I spent ... you know, you give your time to whatever you want to. Everyone does. You make choices and that's what I chose. And I really enjoy it because I sit there and I can think through a lot of problems. I can make lesson plans. I can do all kinds of things; and most of the time I'm not interrupted.

H: You work ... course I'm aware of some of your work because of it being displayed at church and those particular items—the triptick—the three faiths triptick. Obviously it's a religious theme. Have you dealt with religious themes in other works? When you had your choice, did you deal with more religious themes?

V: Well, very early on in quilting I decided that I didn't want to make those pretty flowers for the bedspread. I appreciate those; a lot of work goes in, but it was not something that I wanted to do. You know, if you make one ... I made a quilt for each child and so ... and I enjoyed this. It's not the quilting I enjoyed. It's MY time; it's my time that I treasured. You can't just sit with your time. You know, people think, "What's wrong with her." So this gave me something to do, and then I could work through anything I wanted to. And I decided that I would make a five-religions of the world. I did the Christian first and then the Islamic one and then the Jewish one. And I realized that those were the three mono-theistic religions and it would make a better grouping than putting in two others. And I was getting tired of the job anyway. We rationalize.

H: Well, have there been other ... you just did the three; you never did the other two?

V: I wouldn't do that; I won't do that. Let's see. I have a Madonna and Child, which I call a bookmark because it's a long thing. It's in the hall; I'll show you when we go out. The reason I call it a bookmark is I have a bookmark and I copied the bookmark. I had to rearrange these things but it's a Madonna and

Child in the center. And it's interesting from a quilter's point of view because I have ... some of it is three dimensional. I have a fabric that will stick out so that this fabric that goes around is interesting. And that goes back to kindergarten. I remember on one of the kindergarten things was a picture of Madonna and Child. And I can't remember the artist and I've tried to look it up, but I can't find it. But I looked at that and thought it was the most beautiful picture that I'd ever seen. So, after that, every time I saw a Madonna and Child, I liked it. And I have a collection of a lot of little things Madonna and Child which stems from kindergarten, very definitely.

H: Are there any other connections in your work that you've made between images from kindergarten and imagery you've portrayed in your work?

V: No, but I do know that I had good teachers from kindergarten and Knapp Hall and I learned from them. I didn't plan to be a teacher; as a matter of fact, I planned not to be a teacher. I didn't want to be a teacher. And we were living in Florida and I had two children—both not of school age—and this was at a time when there was a great shortage of teachers, and the school needed a fourth grade teacher. And the principal heard from this person to this person that Virginia Piland has a college education. So he called me and told me the situation—the teacher was pregnant and would not be able to come back after Christmas. And would I be interested (end of tape)

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