

PRESERVING OUR HISTORY: ROTARY CLUB OF GREENSBORO
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

INTERVIEWEE: Victoria Guthrie

INTERVIEWER: Kathelene Smith

DATE: July 8, 2008

KS: July 8, 2008. My name is Kathelene Smith, and I'm at the home of Victoria Guthrie for the Greensboro Rotary Club oral history project. Good morning, Ms. Guthrie. Thank you so much for having me into your home.

VG: Well, I'm glad you're here. I'm looking forward to our time together.

KS: Thank you. Please tell me when and where you were born.

VG: Well, I was born in Bradford, Pennsylvania. Born in Bradford, Pennsylvania a number of years ago. [Laughs]

KS: OK. We'll take that.

VG: Actually, July 27. So, my birthday is coming up.

KS: Happy Birthday! Tell me about growing up. Did you grow up in Pennsylvania?

VG: I did. I grew up – Bradford is a small oil town, at one point called the highest-grade oil in the world. I don't know if you know Pennsylvania, but Oil City is down from us, and Oil City was a very big producer of oil. But Bradford had Pennzoil and all those kinds of things. So, it was an oil town – a lumber town. I went to a Catholic school all of my life – was raised by the St. Joseph's nuns.

KS: So, tell me about our family and home life growing up.

VG: Well, I'm one of four children. I have two brothers and a sister. My older brother had multiple sclerosis, he contracted it at fourteen. So, in a sense it was an interesting family, in that my mom and dad never got to see me at home even until about 1990, because we'd always have to go home because Michael was there, and he was completely bedridden. So, I had an older brother with multiple sclerosis. My sister lives down here now in Greensboro with us. My brother is the executive director of the Penn State Executive Education Group.

KS: So, what did your parents do?

- VG: My father was a hydraulic technician. My mother was a homemaker. We had that kind of upbringing. Bradford is just sort of a small class town with 20,000 population. So, it was just a little small town on the borders of Pennsylvania – Olean and St. Bonaventure were nearby.
- KS: Tell me about going to school with the nuns. So, what did you – was that through twelfth grade?
- VG: Uh-huh. All through. And you know, it's another thing. And I don't know education now having not been there. All of my kids had good educations here, but I'll tell you, being raised by nuns back then – which would have been like in the '50s and the '60s – the education was incredible. Now, math was never the nuns' forte, but science and English and those kinds of things were fantastic. And I often contend I probably had a college education in high school because of the way they did it. You had to have the Latin. You had to have these various things. It didn't matter which way you wanted to go. Even if you were going to go into business, you still did all the other academic subjects as well. So, it was a really strong, good education. Lots of good, strong upbringing you might say. Having had an older sister also, it was always funny because, you know, when you have an older sister, you're never like your sister. So, the nuns were very, very good at pointing fingers and say, "You bold, brass and brazen piece, you're nothing like your sister." [Laughs]
- KS: Isn't that interesting. Did you give the nuns trouble?
- VG: Me, never. [Laughs]
- KS: So, after you graduated high school, where did you go to college?
- VG: Well, I went to – up to Rochester, Rochester Business Institute. And then from there, I met my husband, and we got married. So, when I came back down here I went over to Guilford College to finish my undergrad. And then, I went to Wake Forest in their Babcock [Graduate School of Management] executive MBA program.
- KS: Oh, did you commute to Wake Forest, or did y'all live in Winston?
- VG: Nope, commuted. It was when they were doing their executive ed, so it was the version a lot of schools have it now. I think UNCG has it now, where it's sort of like a condensed two-year intensive executive-level MBA program. And so, it was really good. Wake Forest at that time was really good at looking at teams and building teams. So, our team was consisting of – I had a neonatologist, and I had a guy from BellSouth, and I had an entrepreneur. And the four of us were a team. And how Wake Forest used to encourage – I don't know if they – I hope they still do, because it was great – they would encourage the teams to go with their strengths. So, like for example, Al was really, really good with numbers. So, Al

usually would be the core person around the numbers. Everybody conceded that Al was sort of the focal point. Since I was with the Center for Creative Leadership, a lot of times when it came to the HR [human resources] kinds of things, they were looking at those, it would sort of end up with me sort of being the orchestrator and everybody else doing their thing. It worked really, really well. A great way to look at team building, very good program.

KS: Do you have any children?

VG: Uh-huh, I have two sons.

KS: Was this before you had children?

VG: No, no. This was when I had children. When I went back to school for that, the kids were probably eight and eleven maybe, around there. And the funniest story there was – my oldest son is Kevin Michael. My younger son is Eric Scott. And Eric Scott, by the way, was a year representative in the Rotary exchange to France. And then, after that experience, they wanted to go into Russia. So, since he had had such a great experience – year experience in France – they asked him if he would be willing to do the Moscow representation, just to sort of pave the way. So, he spent a year in Moscow with the Rotary exchange as well.

KS: How fascinating! It's such a great program.

VG: Yeah, it really is. But back to the story – as I'm doing my MBA, I'm going crazy over some financial paper. You know, I'm not a numbers person, and I'm going crazy, and I'm having to get all these charts and stuff going, and I'm just pulling my hair out. And my older son, Kevin Michael comes in and says, "Mom, why don't you chill, a B is as good as an A." [Laughs]

KS: It's funny when you have children in school, and you're in school, too.

VG: Very much so.

KS: So, when you graduated, what did you do next?

VG: Well, actually, I was already at the Center for Creative Leadership. And I was already doing design, and I was already teaching in some of the programs. So, when I went back for my MBA, my Master's, it was more or less to put some paper foundation under the work I was already doing. So, that kind of thing. I've been with the Center – when we moved down here. I joined the Center when we moved down here. So, actually since 1975. And so, I took early retirement in 19 – 2003, 2005. Whatever it was. I was with the Center about thirty years.

KS: We're going to go back and talk about your college days a little bit. What was the process like? What was Rochester like?

VG: Well, actually I went – when I was in Rochester I did two things. I went to school part-time, but I also was worked for the Xerox Corporation. So, I was in what they called the new product planning. New product planning meant back in the, again, the late '60s, well, actually in the early '70s – I saw things that didn't come into existence for the population until the last fifteen years. I mean, I saw fax machines, I saw the color copiers, I saw the big ideas around having what they called [indistinct], which would be secretarial-based printers, and computers, all that. I saw all of that back in the early '70s.

KS: And you did that while you were going to college?

VG: Yes. So, I worked and also went to school because I only did two of my years there. So, I didn't – it was more work in meeting my husband than going to school at that point.

KS: Well, that's a lot. [Laughs] So, were you involved in any campus organizations?

VG: I was. I can't even remember anymore. I was with – with one of the sororities, but I can't remember the name of the sorority now. And I did things like that, or in the Rockettes, which was a dance group. It was different kind of –

KS: You were a Rockette?

VG: Oh, yes. A Rochester Rockette. [Laughs] But did things like that.

KS: And then, you moved down. When you moved down to Guilford, did you join anything, too, or –

VG: No, because I was working.

KS: You were married.

VG: I was married, and I was working at that point. So, that was, again, just – it was nuts. I didn't have time to be joining a lot of activities at that point.

KS: So, you went into the Center for Creative Leadership. What caused you to go into that career?

VG: Yeah, I was interested – it's really neat – when we got down here, of course, I had a two-year-old, and I was going to stay home. In that time of people's life, you know, you stayed home with your kids pretty much. But I was going to stay home, but we were down here, and I didn't know anybody. And by nature, quite honestly, I'm pretty quiet. And the more I stay home, the more I will stay home. So, I knew that. So, Kevin, my husband, had joined the Jaycees. And the Jaycees had a program where they would go out to the Center – this place called the

Center for Creative Leadership – for a couple of nights over a period of time and take this leadership program. And my husband came back home and was telling me about this really, really neat place and how great it was, and he thought it was really neat. By fluke, I'm looking in the paper one day, and there's an ad for a job as a – I think it was a research assistant at the Center. I asked my husband is that where he went. He said, "Yeah." So, I dusted off my old Xerox performance appraisals, and go trotting out there, for this part-time research assistant job, and I got the job. So it was, basically, going to be just this part-time thing for a little bit until I got settled, and we got sort of balanced out because he was in school. So, we had lots of student loans and all that. And I went out there part-time, and then I never left. [Laughs]

KS: You started as a research assistant, and then what did you do eventually?

VG: Well, I did a lot of that kind of things. So, as a research assistant I did some work with that kind of – which was, basically, looking at some studies. I cannot remember at this point what the study was about. And then, John Red, who was the president, was looking for a new administrative assistant. John Red was part of Rotary also for many, many years in Pasadena. His office was looking for an administrative assistant. And so, I didn't know what to do. So, I just said out – they came to me, actually, and they asked me. I said, "Yeah, I'll talk about it." So then, I started working for John Red as an administrative assistant. And then, I got pregnant with Eric Scott. And back then, of course, when I told the Center I was pregnant, I had to resign from the Center. Because back then it was just beginning when you could keep your job, but it wasn't yet there. So, in a sense, technically I had to quit my job. But when I was ready to go back, they gave it back to me. So, I think back then it was new enough that the paperwork – they wanted to make sure they had the paperwork covered.

KS: How did that work for insurance purposes?

VG: How did that work? Well, they covered – well, maybe they covered my insurance. I can't even remember. I was covered by the Center's insurance. It may be I was on some kind of a leave. But the paper said they wouldn't be held for keeping my job. So, two things happened at that point. My sister had lost her husband. So, when I got pregnant, I said to John Red, "I've got some news. The bad news is I'm pregnant. The good news is I have someone who sort of looks like me, sort of sounds like me, and is probably a lot better than me who you might want to interview." So, John Red interviewed my sister, and she moved down here. That's how she got to Greensboro.

KS: So, that's been a while ago?

VG: Uh-huh.

KS: How nice, because you were instrumental in bringing your sister down, and getting her a job!

VG: So then, she – after I had Eric Scott – she and some friends decided that it would be better if I worked rather than stay at home. They, at that point, were designing a new program, and they needed someone to help with the designing of the exercise and creating the materials and stuff. And they asked me if I would be interested in coming up part-time to do that. So I said, “Yes.” So then, everything just fell back into place. I mean they never even put a change in date of hire. So, I mean they really did all right by me in a sense that way. So, I went back out to do that. And then, when I went back, I just found I got more and more interested in the programming and started working on some stuff. And a couple of us decided – and then, I started training for some reason. I guess I liked goal setting, and I started learning about the goal setting and things like that. And I started getting in the class, in emergencies. So, it went that way.

Then, somebody said, “Wouldn’t it be nice if there was an administrative assistant program to match the leadership development program?” The four of us sat down and started figuring out what it would be. And by that point, it felt like – in my head as I look back – that I had sat in enough meetings around programs, and the program designs, and what happened every week and stuff. I was learning. And so, a lot of the design came from when you could think about this, and you could think about that. And I started doing the design. And so, the four of us started, as a foursome, delivering a program called “Support Your Boss, Prepare Yourself.” And then, from “Support Your Boss, Prepare Yourself,” different folks fell out because they didn’t feel like training, or they didn’t really want to do it anymore. But little by little, I was doing more and more of it. I liked it – I was good at it. And then, it evolved into a full-time training job. So, everything has been happening – in some ways it’s all been luck and circumstances, and in some ways there was intention behind it, you know, I wasn’t just floating there. So, I became a CCL [Center for Creative Leadership] trainer. And the rest from the Center took me. I started doing more design, more delivery, more feedback sessions, or coaching, as they call it now. And that’s what I was doing.

KS: I want you to explain a little bit about the CCL, the theory behind it.

VG: The Center for Creative Leadership was created probably in 1970. It was the brainchild of H. Smith Richardson, Sr., who is a Greensboro native. His father had the Richardson Apothecary, I think it might have been called, downtown. I think the building is still there. And it was Smith, who was a pretty creative guy, from what the stories all say. And his father came back from New York City – where he was sort of a marketer and working with corn oils and fabrics and stuff – and came back to help his father boost the business. And when Smith went into the pharmacy, this is what the story says, when he went into the apothecary downtown, his father asked him what he should be selling. And Smith looked around and said, “You have too many products. What’s your best-selling

product?” And the father pulls down this tin of Richardson’s Croup and Pneumonia Salve. And Smith says, “That’s crap.” He said, “That’s not a very good name.” [Both Laugh] And he said, “What’s it do?” And the father said, “Well, some people like to take it and rub it on their chest and the warmth of it – well, if it’s rubbed on the chest it will open up the chest a little bit. And other people like to sort of melt a spoon of it over a candle and inhale the vapors.” And the story continues to go that Smith, listening to all that, looked into the back of the room, and there’s his Uncle Vick doing the accounting. And lo and behold, the birth of Vicks Vapor Rub.

KS: That happened in Greensboro?

VG: Uh-huh.

KS: I had no idea. My brother lived on it.

VG: And the Richardson Vicks factory, I think, is still out towards the old airport and Stage Coach Trail – in that area out that way. I think it might still be there. And so, that’s where the initial ideas came from. Smith ran that company – this was 1818, and then it just took off – this was around that time. And around 1818, there was a huge flu epidemic. And Smith, being the innovative, creative guy that he was, actually figured out that you did not have to send things through the mail addressed to a person. You could address it to an occupant, in a sense. So, he sent out little samples of this Vicks Vapor Rub to the “keeper of the family.” And so, hence, your first – you might say – junk mail, sense. But that started helping – and so, with the Vicks Vapor Rub and the flu epidemic, it really took off. The product itself – and he was a great marketer, great marketer.

So, those are the kinds of things that were starting this business. It was really going good in the ’30s when he really started feeling like, “What is this leadership stuff? How do you identify leaders?” He had a firm, solid belief that leadership can’t happen just because you are put into the role, but rather, leadership has to be developed all through a person’s career. And he did a lot of things in the early on about his [indistinct] processes and things he was doing. But he really had this passion about, maybe even, finding a way to find leaders. And at first, he created a foundation, and it’s called the Smith Richardson Foundation – it’s still in existence – and they funded little projects and stuff like that. And I’m not quite one hundred percent sure how the Center itself came to be. But basically, the Center is the end product of his wanting to figure out a way to really study this thing called “leadership.” And because you create instruments to find to pick it out, to define people. How do you develop them? So that’s, in essence, the nut of it. He decided to create the Center for Creative Leadership in like – I think it was 1970. If it wasn’t one day, it was 1969, the last day, it was the Smith Richardson Foundation. And on January 1, 1970, there was this new entity under the foundation called the Center for Creative Leadership. And he built a beautiful facility out on [Highway] 220. I don’t know if you’ve ever seen it, but it’s absolutely gorgeous.

KS: I've seen the new one.

VG: Well, the original one was the long piece that's sort of in the center. And then, all the other wings have been built on since the 1970s.

KS: I've never seen anything like it in my life. We went on a tour of it, actually, for one of my library science classes.

VG: Yeah, the library now is incredible.

KS: Basically, it's what everybody wants to strive for – the information dissemination is absolutely stunning and state-of-the-art. And the building was the most beautiful thing we'd all ever seen.

VG: They do a great job. And the one in Colorado is equally beautiful, let me tell you. So anyway, Smith had this idea, and he lived to see the building – the initial building – built and then passed away. But his concept was ideas into action – that's always been his belief – that you don't just talk about things, you make them happen. His visual – from what I remember of the story, this is just a little bit of it – one of his visual descriptions of what he saw at the initiative is the painting out there where you've got the captain of the ship standing behind the first mate, or whatever, and the first mate is the guy who's at the helm. And the captain has sort of just got his hand on his shoulder, and that's what he talked about what leadership really needs to be about – always growing new meaning, giving them your wisdom, giving them your knowledge. You know, those kinds of things.

So, that – his ideas into action is what the Center is all about. How do you take, you know, what's needed in the world and put it into understandable kinds of things for people to do? How do you take what you're hearing in the classroom, and look at what people might need as the world changes, put it back into research to confirm it, and then put it back into the world again? So, it's sort of that kind of a circle of looking at leadership, and their basic idea is to improve the practice of leadership worldwide. And it's, basically, a human behavioral side we [indistinct]. You know, you can do a fantastic job on the business side, the head side, if you will, but leadership is not just head, it's head, and heart. To me, the Center does the part where all the people relationships go – getting people to look at their strengths, how they handle people, and how they look at the world. And looking at how other people look at the world differently and those kinds of things.

KS: Well, can you explain how you get them – do they sign up themselves as individuals or are they sent over from companies?

VG: Actually, yes. The Center is not inexpensive. It is a not-for-profit entity, but it is not inexpensive. And that's partly because everything really turns all of these

funds back into research, if you will. And they keep the base to keep it growing and afford it, but at the same time, it turns things back into research. The research is then turned back into the classroom, and/or computations and you give it back to the people, which is how they can stay a not-for-profit in this day and age – whether they are or not. So, generally speaking, there's two kinds of programs – there's open enrollment where people from various companies come – generally, the company is paying for it. Or there's custom work, where a company will call and say, "We want to put twenty of our people through at one time," or, "We want to create a communication network so we want to put 150 – 200 people through over a period of time." And a program is designed specifically for that company, and the compensation is variable. So, there are two ways that it goes. Generally speaking, however, it is – the individual does not pay. I think, at this point – and I haven't looked at their pricing – the core leadership development is - probably around \$7-8,000.

KS: For how long?

VG: A week. And then, they stay usually at – here in Greensboro it would be – they try to split it among the hotels. But a lot of times it's like the Embassy Suites, or the suite kind of places, or the O'Henry in proximity – nice places, decent places you could spend a week at and not feel "yuck."

KS: Oh sure. Do they actually put out a publication or a journal, for example?

VG: Oh, yeah. Yes, we research articles.

KS: Periodicals?

VG: Well, you can go online and get into *Leaders in Action*. You can buy their newsletters and stuff – I've got a couple of copies over there that. The Center is twice now – it's probably ready for the third edition – two editions are already out called the *Handbook for Leadership Development*. And I've written chapters in both of those over time about feedback-intensive programs and learning from experience, and those kinds of things. And so, what they have done over time is they have taken all of our learning and put them into books that people can go out and pick up – coaching, they have a whole book on coaching – and people can use it to create their own stuff. They put it all back into the real world.

KS: And you have international representation? I remember all the flags.

VG: Yes, we have the Colorado Springs office. We have a San Diego office. We have Brussels, and we opened Singapore about two years ago. And each of those, I sort of helped open them. In fact, when I took my retirement, my early retirement from the Center, it was because I really enjoyed working in Singapore, and I wanted to continue helping with that campus as it got bigger.

KS: You actually went over there?

VG: Oh, yeah. We actually – Kevin and I lived over there for about two and a half years. And now, I go back and forth.

KS: So, how was that? How was your experience of living in Singapore?

VG: Well, Singapore is an easy place to live because it's very Western. And they probably have more shops and stores and name brands there than they have in Greensboro.

KS: Really?

VG: It's like a little New York.

KS: I had no idea.

VG: You find a Starbucks on every corner. You find your McDonalds and your Kentucky Fried and all of those. They've got your Lord & Taylor, and your Bombay and your this. They say their two favorite pastimes are eating and shopping.

KS: No wonder they get along so well with Americans. [Laughs]

VG: They're very American that way. So, it's easy – it's an easy place to live. There's an accent to some degree – you have to listen – you have to recognize that even though they might talk English as fast as you do, they might not process some of our words the same way. So, you still have to keep that in mind. When they're nodding their head sometimes, it's not because they understand what you're saying.

KS: Now, did y'all have to alter the basic program very much for other places? Or is leadership the same all over the world?

VG: It is. In fact, the Center has done some great research about that, looking at what are the constants. And there is a whole list of constants that are positive across the world, a whole list of constants that are negative across the world, and then there's that middle range where it's there, but it might be done a little differently – the issue is it's there. People give feedback, it's just how do they give it. People want respect, it's just how is respect looked at. So, it's all of those kinds of factors that play into it.

KS: And you have cultural issues, too, that play in.

VG: To some degree – yeah, they do. It depends – one of the hardest things is, it's funny, is trying to get people to talk to each other. And you can use the word

feedback, or however you want to do it, but that's going to play out differently. However, when you use the concept of feedback as a gift, it's a basic – people will hear it differently. Around the world they'll hear it not as a negative, or I can't do, but rather, how would I give the gift? You see? So, it might be, I can't go – as an American, I would be – we might sit there, and I come to you sooner or later and say "You've got to be really angry with me," or "You really pissed me off," or however you want to use that language. You wouldn't do that, probably, in most places. In Japan, for example, the way they give the boss, somebody higher up, feedback is they go get drunk with them, and then they can say anything they want. That's not necessarily the best way to do things in this more modern age where young people want the same kinds of growth and success and stuff as anybody. So, the difference is how do you do it – how do you give that information, not does it have to be dropped? Or does it have to be [indistinct] It has to be acknowledged that it's going to be different, because there are cultural factors – and then, the question is, how do people want respect? How do people want to be heard? How would you do it here? Then they talk about how they can do it differently.

KS: Did you spend time in Brussels, too?

VG: Yeah, to me, the agency – it's probably in some ways, in some of these countries, have probably more people going and talking more about these leadership concepts than North Americans. Because, like I say, in Singapore, there is always somebody going in and doing seminars and workshops that are incredible. But they seem to value education differently. You always feel like they're really taking it in, and you don't feel like they're jaded by – like Americans, sometimes they're jaded, sometimes they're cynical. Europeans can be jaded and/or cynical too. And they don't look at things – whether in Korea or in India – like, "Oh, that's the American way." Where in Europe, a lot of times you'll hear, "That's an American thing."

KS: So, they feel like any education is a value, no matter where it comes from.

VG: Absolutely. They learn from it.

KS: Isn't that interesting. So, that's different in Europe, too.

VG: It's interesting, because I do a lot of work on my own now even with [indistinct] companies. And it's still – there's still a heavy culture around top-down, around always looking at what's wrong, rather than finding out what they're doing right, as well – doing those kinds of things. So, even the 40-year-olds, even though they can sit there and say, "My dad was this way," still when they get in business, they do it the same way. So, it's still that kind of thing to some degree. You sit there and help them learn. It's not American to say, "You need to be talking to your people differently." The analogy for anybody is, "Have a donkey. You hit that

donkey aside of the head, and it ain't going to move. You dangle a carrot in front of the donkey, and it will go forever." And so, when I use that kind of an analogy, sometimes they will hear what I mean. I'm not saying manipulate. And I'm not saying, you know – sometimes you do have to be negative. But the more you can get a person to want to do it, the better the quality.

KS: So – encouragement.

VG: Yes.

KS: So, that's something you have been doing a lot since your early retirement. After you came back from Singapore, what did you do?

VG: Well, I still do some work for CCL. And I have my own work that I do. So, it's a combination.

KS: Are you a company?

VG: Kevin and I, as a couple, have a company called Kevic. Which Kevic was – Kevin's father in 1967, probably 1967-1970, whenever it was, gave us that name, because it's Kevin and Vickie – Kevin and Victoria. So, long before J. Lo [Jennifer Lopez] had that thing, we had it. So, Kevic is our parent company. And then, when I do my consulting work, I'll do it under Victoria Guthrie and Associates just to keep it separate from anything else we do.

KS: That is so interesting, so you've been working with that, too.

VG: I go back to Singapore the end of August, and I'll be in Singapore doing some government – for the Center – but it's government work that I've been doing for about eight years now. And I'll be there.

KS: For their government?

VG: Yes.

KS: So, they're just eating this up.

VG: Oh, yeah! Actually, the government work is called the Firefly – the one piece I do – is called the Firefly Program. And when the Center was working with the government to create this program, they sent – the Singapore government sent – 13 representatives to experience the full-blown original [indistinct]. Some went to Greensboro, some went to Colorado, some went to San Diego. When they all were finished, we brought them all back to Greensboro, to do – "What did you learn? What works? What do you think would work? What do you think won't work?" Those kinds of things. So, we had them all over here for dinner. And it was a beautiful June night, and we were out on the back deck, and we're cooking

- and everything like that. And all of a sudden up come the fireflies, which they had never seen. And they were going nuts.
- KS: Providential!
- VG: What could I say? And I'll still tell stories about it. It was such perfect timing. Not planned, but it was perfect timing.
- KS: And you still do that. I think that's wonderful. So, you've lived in Greensboro pretty much all your life.
- VG: We've been in Greensboro now since 1972, '72, '73 – no, '74 probably.
- KS: So, how has Greensboro, North Carolina, changed since you've lived there?
- VG: Oh, gosh. There've been a lot of changes. When we first came down, I think there might have been one Chinese restaurant over on Church Street – I think it's an insurance company now – but it was way over on Church Street. I think there might have been one. And the pizza – we were in Philadelphia school before we came down here – and the pizza down here sort of tasted like dried mushrooms. It was not very – it really – They didn't have liquor by the drink. It was really – it was –
- KS: Was it dry back then?
- VG: It was dry. You could carry your own bottle with you. But when we selected Greensboro, it was because Greensboro was the growing place – I mean, it was ahead of Raleigh, it was ahead of Charlotte. It was the place, and we really expected Greensboro to really soar. I don't know what happened over time. You get this lift work, and I don't really pay attention. At one point Greensboro looked like it was going to be the star. It was well ahead of Raleigh at that point, I'm pretty sure.
- KS: So, what do you see the progression being with Greensboro?
- VG: I think it's continued to move forward, but I also think in some ways it can be conservative – I think in some ways it's conservative. I think folks like Melvin really pushed hard for things sometimes, but as a population – I don't know if Winston is this way – but the population sometimes is very conservative, and very, very reserved on how fast they want to move. This is my word – I have not heard people say it – but it's sort of like, "We have it nice. Let's not rock the boat." Or, "Why do we want other people and change things?" There may have been some of that in a sense way back then.
- KS: There's such an amazing history here. When you were here, I know a lot of interesting things happened in the '70s, with the racial unrest.

- VG: And that was – I think Greensboro got a raw deal on that one. I think that cost Greensboro. I think – I think that was some kind of a fluke. It got thrown way out of proportion. I really felt bad for Greensboro because it was the wrong thing, and it happened at the wrong time, in a sense, with that Ku Klux Klan – and that was a bad experience in the '70s.
- KS: That was bad. So, as you see it, what are some of the issues facing Greensboro such as population growth, economic growth, leadership, race relations, the water shortage?
- VG: Water shortage is important. I've been removed enough in the last three or four years, anyway – I mean, I've been in and out of this country so much, it's harder to say. I do worry about some of the race things – in the sense of, from what I hear, there's a lot more problems around the Hispanics and the blacks, the gangs if you will. I've had someone tell me about the tragedy of the illegal immigrants, where on Friday nights sometimes the poor people – there's like an Hispanic mafia or something, and they go in there – and they're treated badly. And yet, they can't call the cops for help. And the cops know it, and it's like this Catch-22. The cops know this stuff happens, but they really can't do anything about it, because if they do anything about it, then the other side of the coin comes up with the immigrants one way or the other. So, it's very tragic. It's sad in the sense it's created enough fear. How do we help these people?
- KS: Well, you do travel so much, it might be interesting to make a comparison as far as other countries – other cities in other countries of comparable size. How do you relate to that, or can you even compare it?
- VG: It's hard – I don't stay in a lot of places long. I know in Singapore – which is a small city-state, if you will – it's a country, but it's like four million plus people. So, it's like New York, but at the same time, a lot of their immigrants and migrant workers come in from Thailand or from Malaysia, or a lot from the Philippines. And they created a system, whereby, when these people come in they must get a card, a white card they call it – not a green card, a white card. If I want to hire somebody to clean my house or something, I either pay the five hundred dollars – or whatever it is, Sing dollars – up front to the government and make sure that person has their white card, or I'm in trouble. If I hire somebody because I want somebody under the table, and I want to get it cheap – if I'm caught, that immigrant doesn't get in trouble, I get in trouble. And it's not – and it's really not that expensive because what they'll have done is that five hundred dollars I pay up front, in addition to the salary, basically will cover their health insurance and stuff. So, it's a process whereby people – I mean, I hired, I had enough housekeepers over there to know – and the first thing they do when they come in to talk to you is they show you their white card to prove they are legitimate entity. So you've got people coming back and forth over the border – and they might be day workers, or they might be staying to work on a building because they're

always constructing over there – but there's a process in place that covers the fact that, the day workers, if you will, the migrants for the work, they are not one hundred percent Singaporean citizens.

KS: Does that five hundred dollars go into some kind of governmental trust?

VG: Yes, there is – a lot of the government – all of the workers, including when I was over there, have to pay into some kind of – it's like a Social Security in a sense. But this goes into more like for the health insurance and stuff like that. So, there is stuff out there. I'm sure there's other countries with other things we should be looking at, even though they might not be as big as us, or something. How can we open the gates legitimately for the day kind of day workers that we need, but know they're also going to be covered – that they will be paying in something, you know, however you have to work it. And as long as you don't make it hugely expensive – How can I even [indistinct]. We're paying five hundred to a fund up front, something like – and five hundred Sing down here would be what, about a third less than US dollars. So, that's not much. When you think of five hundred dollars up front to hire this person, and then they become part of your work force, and you're responsible for them in that sense.

KS: Maybe it's American to not want to admit that somebody else has a better idea?
[Laugh]

VG: Maybe because they're smaller countries, or they were at one time considered a Third World countries. I don't know. I know there must be another way of looking at it. My hunch is one of the biggest reasons it won't work is because we're too big. Well, yes and no. If it is an agreed-upon thing, that people are willing to say – even with migrant workers, it would help migrant workers [indistinct] up front. Why can't they simply say, "For every worker they have to pay two hundred dollars up front." Just so they're in the pool. And then, they work. They've got a day pass.

KS: Now, since this year Greensboro is celebrating its 200th birthday, what do you see in the future for Greensboro?

VG: Well, I'm hoping for some really positive kinds of things. Downtown looks like it's blossoming. It will be interesting to see if Greensboro could make some leaps in some type of mass transportation – I mean if we could do that, that would put us on the map, because Charlotte does do some stuff. But you think about, if there were a way – and I was talking to a couple of developers who said, "We can't do it," and I said, "Yes we can!" If we ended up growing downtown, and that's really picking up, why can't we use the two malls as a sort of a central point or areas around those two malls, or at least experiment with transportation between High Point, and Friendly, and getting things going so people can shuffle between all of that area and not have to drive as much into Greensboro, but they could be – there's got to be ways we could play around with stuff like that.

- KS: I know that Houston has something circling downtown. They said it could be done, because they couldn't dig. You couldn't dig a subway. They wanted a monorail for a long time, and that didn't work. And they all have these problems with people getting hit. It's funny – it's hard to retrain your brain for public transportation, but I think we should insist upon it.
- VG: Oh, yeah. It just broke my heart when I saw them pave over the railroad. There's a railroad stop right up there, and they paved over it. I don't know how far that goes out because I never checked it, but wouldn't it have been nice to have that going back and forth between here – and let's say it goes as far as New Garden or something. But, still, that's still transportation people could be doing and not driving.
- KS: Right. We have the same thing, that dead railroad track. From all the mills –
- VG: It's a shame.
- KS: So, what do you think Greensboro should do to improve the quality of life for its citizens? Anything come to mind?
- VG: I think it's working hard on that from what I can see. I think it would be nice if we could get folks being more involved with some of the theater, and the music and stuff, some of those kinds of things. Maybe downtown will make that happen. I don't know – I don't know, again, if we are too conservative, or too much homebodies or not. I think the schools could be improved. It sounds like they're having a lot of problems with the high schools – so, I'm not sure. Page used to be one of the best schools in the city.
- KS: Page?
- VG: Page High School and Grimsley High School – they were the two best public high schools. And from what I hear, they're both running into problems with – and I don't think it's just them, I think it's everybody. What do we do about that? How do you do that? If it's something we need to be looking at for our young people, or what we're doing with our young people. And that's – I don't know. I'm too far removed from it at this point.
- KS: I was going to ask, do you have any connections to local colleges or universities? Of course, you went to Guilford. So, do you still do things with them?
- VG: I don't. Over the years – the one thing I was doing for years at Guilford was the Rotary Youth Leadership Program, so, I would be out there for that. So, probably – from the standpoint of really looking at young people and what they need – it's probably at least five years since I've really talked with them – with my Rotary kids – to see what's going on. Even at that point, though, you could sort of see a

shift a little bit in their values. They're more promiscuous, it seems. They're more – they're less – they don't have as much manners, or at least perfect manners. Maybe the other kids have had perfect manners, but there was a difference then – I hope it doesn't go too much – and I haven't been around them in the last five years to know what's happening.

KS: Are you involved in local or national politics?

VG: Nope.

KS: How have you been involved with philanthropic causes and volunteerism in the community of Greensboro?

VG: Mine has been going way back with multiple sclerosis because of my brother, and I did stuff with them for a while. Mostly, just because of the work I was doing, I think it was mostly either with the Greensboro Youth Rotary or Rotary Leadership Program. That really takes almost all year – plus it would be something that would take a week of my personal time to conduct it, all the building of it, and planning of it. The Rotary itself would take – like my husband was the camp director, they called it back then, for three years. The Rotary and he would do all of the administrative side from getting, at Guilford, and the rooms and all that stuff. But the Center, or me, would be responsible for the actual programmatic work. And that would take – that was pretty much my really big piece of what I would do. And I've done little things, but nothing I would say, really.

KS: So, you have been involved in all aspects of Rotary. When did you join Rotary?

VG: I was the first woman, and that would have been 1986 or '87.

KS: How did that occur? It's an honor.

VG: Back in 1980, when they came and asked me at the Center if I would be interested in developing a program, I said yes. At that point, women weren't part of Rotary. But the Rotary was one of the few clubs I sort of valued personally, because they were efficient in their meetings, they were doing some good stuff – I just liked the way they ran things. So, when I said yes, I started working with them back in 1980 – with Stuart Fountain, and Carole Bruce, and different folks. Glenn Lesley, Roger, who is the head of Guilford College – I'm drawing a blank. But anyway, I worked with these guys to create this program. And so, here I was in '82, '83, '84, '85, and knew that Rotary was considering having a woman – inviting women to the club and blah, blah, blah. And then, John Red – who I mentioned I had worked for – John Red asked if I was interested in joining Rotary. And so, he proposed me into the Rotary as the first woman. And so, I think it was like September '87, it might have been, they indoctrinated me as the first female Rotarian in Greensboro, probably in North Carolina – possibly further than that,

I'm not sure because they didn't open it up to women until probably about that time.

KS: You must have been so proud!

VG: I was. But at any rate, I was indoctrinated in – I guess it was probably September '87. I'm not sure. And then, Kevin was already a Rotarian, so the guys used to tease him a lot and called him the Rotary – Rotary used to call their women Rotary Ann. They had Rotarians, and the spouses were Rotary Anns, because they were all women. So then, they opened it up. So, poor Kevin would be called the Rotary Andy – so he was my Rotary Andy. [Laughs]

KS: How have you seen Greensboro's nonprofits change through the years?

VG: It seems like it's gotten richer. I mean I think they're – it feels like there's more people being willing to put energy in – I really like when Jim Melvin formed – I can't remember the name that actually – the Bryan Foundation. I think some of the things that are in that park downtown are gorgeous – the fountains, they put the dancing waters and everything.

KS: They're going to put the carousel in, too.

VG: I think the baseball stadium was fantastic. I mean that's all part of the not-for-profit, people doing those kinds of things. I support that. It seems like there's passion around making sure we're doing the right things for people.

KS: And for quality of life.

VG: Yes.

KS: Is there something we haven't covered in the interview that you would like to mention?

VG: I don't know. I don't think so.

KS: Do you have any hobbies?

VG: Oh, well, yeah. Actually I'm reading, and I sometimes paint or draw, but not very often. I have to get in the mood for it.

KS: Were you trained?

VG: No, no. I just like doing it. [Laughs] But the big thing, I think – and I'm really so proud – is the Rotary Youth Leadership Program, the only one in the world like it. Technically, this should be – the first one was run in '81 or '82. So, it's twenty-something years old. And still going strong. It started back in '81.

KS: And then, it spread to other –

VG: No, only in Greensboro Rotary. It only runs about fifty-four kids at a time, because we learned over time that to even get to sixty, it changed the dynamic. And, for some reason, fifty-four young people and then the six counselors, who normally are ex-campers or participants, is the right number. If you start bringing it up to sixty and then adding counselors, it somehow or another loses that community.

KS: Have you trained them at the Center?

VG: No, it's at Guilford. Everything is done at Guilford. They house at Guilford. The richness of it is, basically, that for a lot – now, they're Greensboro kids, they're Winston-Salem kids, but the bigger city kids, so what? It's on a college campus, big deal? But you start pulling some of these kids from the smaller communities, and they get a chance to spend a week on a college campus, sit in the classrooms – and the sense of the way the program is structured that that they're meeting other kids. One of the missions of that program was to give the interdenominational message. Every night it would be a different faith. To open kids' eyes even to that has been really a powerful thing. When these kids – all the years I ran that, I only heard positive things about it. One year – probably in the last three or four, maybe last five years – there was one denomination that came out, and some of the boys – I think the female who was doing the talk – some of the boys were very rude about her faith. And that was the first time I ever heard anything like that in all these years. Which is what I'm saying, maybe the kids are changing, or maybe there is a difference. They didn't seem open enough to hear somebody else's view. But generally, the interdenominational message is probably one of the most powerful things for kids to see, that there is more than one way to celebrate a faith. That was always a real good thing.

KS: That sounds like a wonderful program.

VG: Actually, probably it happens, I think – I think the timing now is like the 13th to the 18th. You ought to see if you just can't go out there, or talk to Anne Fragola, maybe, and ask Anne for the schedule and go out and observe it.

KS: I should e-mail her. I have her e-mail.

VG: And that might be interesting just to sort of hear about that. Because that should be in the archives, too, a piece of it. Because it's been a really big piece of Greensboro Rotary. And even though other Rotarians contribute – you know, there's a fee to it – it's Greensboro Rotary all these years who've underwrote it. And so, I mean, not only – and the Center's been good enough because one or two of us would sit there and do that part – but a number of people passed through as directors now. But when we first started, Joey Fountain was the one who did the

first week because it was part of his brainchild. Glen Lesley had something to do with it, but then Kevin took it for three years solid until it really got moving along, and then it passed on to the next director. I think every year or two years there's a new Rotary director. So, even to do that, to keep people involved that much, and keep it alive that long, is really something. That's a benefit or a positive of the Greensboro Rotary.

KS: That's amazing.

VG: Oh, yes. So, I think that's what you might want to get to know a little more about. I don't know how you would do it. But that should be part of the archive.

KS: I think I should do that, yes. Well, I so appreciate your letting me come out today and speak to you. You are so interesting!

VG: It's been my pleasure, actually. Thank you so much. I wish I could have given you more of my perceptions of the town, but I have been away from it so much now.

KS: Roughing it in Singapore. [Both laugh] Thank you so much.

VG: Bye-bye.

[Recorder turned off]

[End of interview]