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Interview with Virginia Koch

Virginia Koch

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**LOUISE PETTUS ARCHIVES AND SPECIAL COLLECTIONS
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

**Interview #131
KOCH, Virginia**

KOCH, Virginia

Elementary Education major from 1970-1974, went on to work for the Peace Corps and numerous other positions outside her major

At Winthrop: 1970-1974

Interviewed: January 13, 2015

Interviewer: Michelle Dubert-Bellrichard

Index by: Michelle Dubert-Bellrichard

Length: 1 hour, 8 minutes

Abstract: In her January 13, 2015 interview with Michelle Dubert-Bellrichard, Virginia Koch shared the memories of her Winthrop experience from 1970-1974. Koch explains why she attended Winthrop, her experiences with Rat Week, and why she struggled to find a job in her major. Included are the details of why she left South Carolina, and the numerous positions she held thereafter. Koch also shares her perspectives on major transitions at Winthrop and in the South. This interview was conducted for inclusion into the Louise Pettus Archives and Special Collections Oral History Program.

Keywords: Elementary Education, Coeducation, Race Relations, Rat Week, Changes in the South, Adult Education, U.S. Government, Peace Corps, Director of Education, Director of Recruitment

Interview Session (January 13, 2015): Digital File

Time Keywords

00:00:00 *Start of Interview*/Interviewer's Introduction

00:00:20 *Question:* Where are you from and why Winthrop? *Answer:* Born and raised in Columbia, SC. An older sister attended Winthrop – class of 1966. Older sister brought Virginia to her classes.

00:01:30 *Question:* What did your sister study? *Answer:* Business major at Winthrop. VK not interested in business, wanted to teach, because her mother was an elementary education teacher. This profession appealed to her because of the independence.

00:02:35 *Question:* Any mentors? *Answer:* Mostly her mother. Went to a large high school,

- good teachers in Columbia. Her mother was one of the first teachers to start a kindergarten program. Started teaching kindergarten when VK went to kindergarten. Mother was then a first grade teacher for 30 years. North Trenholm Baptist Church Kindergarten.
- 00:04:15 *Question:* When were you here at Winthrop? *Answer:* 1970-1974.
- 00:04:35 *Question:* Process of applying to Winthrop? *Answer:* VK had to take the College Board and having good grades. VK doesn't remember her high school offering her any preparation for the College Board. VK recalls being nervous about taking the College Board and shares the story of taking her test. VK did not receive any scholarship, but her parents were very supportive of her. VK wanted to move away and live away from home.
- 00:07:15 *Question:* Tuition costs? *Answer:* VK did not have to pay tuition, but she estimates tuition cost around \$300-\$400 a semester. That was a lot of money back then, and VK's parents were paying for all of her siblings' education.
- 00:08:25 *Question:* How did you feel being away from home? *Answer:* There was an adjustment. Slight homesickness, but the new setting and busy semester helped VK adjust. VK talks about Rat Week. VK remembers what freshmen had to wear during Rat Week.
- 00:10:45 *Question:* Did you carry on Rat Week. *Answer:* VK participated in it as a freshmen, but she couldn't into the spirit of it. Upperclassmen would make students stand in the toilet with oatmeal. VK did not participate in Rat Week as an upperclassmen.
- 0:12:35 *Question:* Any traditions you didn't participate in? *Answer:* Can only remember Rat Week.
- 00:13:05 *Question:* Were male day students being hazed? *Answer:* VK remembers 2 male, day students from her time at Winthrop.
- 00:13:40 *Question:* What do you remember about those two students? *Answer:* VK's roommate knew one of the men. VK says the other male student was often surrounded by girls.
- 00:14:40 *Question:* Roommate? *Answer:* VK says her roommate didn't take her college experience very seriously. Her roommate was a music major, pianist, but she often didn't go to class. VK recalls a time bringing mail back to her roommate – grades were in the mail (not in an envelope), and her roommate's G.P.A. was 0.00. Roommate returned a second semester, but after her first year, VK then started rooming with someone from her hometown. The second roommate was more studious. No conflicts between VK and her first roommate. VK speculates her first

- roommate was lazy and interested in boys.
- 00:18:35 **[no question]** Girls were boy crazy before coeducation. The girl students understood that even though there were boys on campus before coeducation, it was still mostly an all-girls school.
- 00:19:15 *Question:* If Winthrop was coed before you attended, would you have second guessed attending? *Answer:* Probably not. VK liked the size of the college and what it had to offer. VK did like the idea of going to an all-girls school, however.
- 00:20:10 **[no question]** Classes in VK's major were very large. VK did not feel a personal connection with any of the professors. The professors seemed, "far away." The professors didn't know VK. There were other smaller classes in her major, but VK doesn't remember any of her professors.
- 00:21:35 *Question:* Did you enjoy/want to change major? *Answer:* Never wanted to change. VK says she did enjoy her classes – remembers psychology classes. The coursework was challenging. VK enjoyed the subject of psychology.
- 00:23:20 *Question:* Practice teaching? *Answer:* Taught in a 4th grade classroom. VK remembers her supervisor when practice teaching. VK liked her teaching style and classroom control. Taught in Hartsville. VK lived in Hartsville.
- 00:24:55 *Question:* What did you learn from Practice Teaching? *Answer:* VK's supervisor made an impression on her. VK modeled herself after this teacher.
- 00:25:50 *Question:* Can you describe the style of teaching? *Answer:* Classes were planned, there was long-term planning. Activities were more structured, but VK's supervisor wasn't rigid.
- 00:27:05 *Question:* Rules and regulations? *Answer:* VK says rules and regulations don't bother her much. Recalls a dress code. Student's wore a lot of skirts. VK wasn't going out on a lot of dates.
- 00:28:30 *Question:* Were male, day students held to the same standards? *Answer:* VK imagines so. There was no uniform. VK talks about the 1970s and "hippie generation." VK recalls sunbathing. Winthrop was not a rebellious campus. Gloria Steinem came to campus. Women were given more opportunities, even though Rock Hill was a conservative Southern town. VK was caught in the time of the old and the new.
- 00:31:45 *Question:* How did coeducation change Winthrop? *Answer:* "It was a sign of the times." It was good for Winthrop. Gave classes another dimension.

- 00:32:40 *Question:* Any protests? *Answer:* VK not aware. VK Speculates that alums were against coeducation. VK says, “it was a training ground for the real world.”
- 00:34:10 *Question:* Up to date in the news? *Answer:* Not focused on the media. VK was moving on with her life.
- 00:35:05 *Question:* How did traditions change with coeducation? *Answer:* Not sure. VK mentions athletics changing. VK talks about Junior Follies – she was a participant. Not in any clubs. Junior Follies was a musical production. VK talks about the dress rehearsal for the Junior Follies – participants faces were painted with lead paint.
- 00:37:55 *Question:* Why Junior Follies? *Answer:* VK’s sister took part in the Junior Follies. VK went to her sister’s Junior Follies.
- 00:38:30 *Question:* Any other assemblies? *Answer:* Some musical groups came, but they weren’t the most popular musicians, but students still enjoyed the concert. Movie nights for students. VK didn’t really leave campus, unless she went to friends houses. Didn’t date much – no steady boyfriend. A lot of girls were dating, though.
- 00:40:19 *Question:* Dating? *Answer:* Boys could come up to the rooms for the first time when VK was a student. That was a big deal. VK thinks this change happened before her Senior year.
- 00:42:22 **[no question]** VK remembers streakers on campus. VK did not witness any of this, just heard stories. VK says that was a sign of the 1970s. Things were starting to change – more liberal thinking, more open thinking.
- 00:43:35 *Question:* How else was Winthrop becoming more liberal? *Answer:* VK can’t really recall. At the time, VK was more conservative. VK talks about a close friend of hers who was black. VK says that there weren’t a lot of black students on campus, even though Winthrop had integrated in 1964. VK says, “You’re in the South.”
- 00:45:00 *Question:* Can you say more about the slow change? *Answer:* VK says in her graduating high school class of 400, there was only one black student. VK talks about them being trailblazers and speculates that they may have felt isolated. Parents not so receptive to these changes. VK says more about people’s feelings about changing race relations. VK and her friend taught in summer camp. Her friend was invited to VK’s wedding, and VK’s mother was initially not happy, but learned to accept it. “People grow over time.” VK talks about doing family history and learning that her relatives had slaves.
- 00:48:25 *Question:* Why is the south slow to change? *Answer:* There’s a lot of tradition in this part of the country. When people move from the north to the south, more change happens. People didn’t have a lot of experiences outside of the south.

- 00:50:00 *Question:* First year teaching? *Answer:* Out of school, worked in Sumter for a year. Most of the children were Air Force children. Met her husband on base. Tells about her quick romance with her husband. Married in June when school was let out. Moved to Madison, WI. VK couldn't find a teaching job in Madison, WI – market over saturated. VK's husband encouraged VK to find a job. VK went to an employment agency. VK didn't want to learn how to type, because she was determined to not be a secretary. VK found a dental assistant job in Madison, WI. That was an eye opening experience – got on-the-job training. Enjoyed interacting with adults.
- 00:53:50 *Question:* Why did you move to Madison, WI? *Answer:* Husband got a sales job. VK says for the next 20 years, her husband's job was considered the primary job. At first this didn't bother VK, but as she became more successful in her work, it became more of a bother.
- 00:54:45 *Question:* How often did you move? *Answer:* First twelve years, VK moved eight times.
- 00:55:15 *Question:* Did you go back to school? *Answer:* Got a master's in adult and continuing education. Wanted to get it in business, but VK would have had to take too many undergraduate courses. Her Master's worked out well for her. VK and her husband moved back to Columbia for a short while. There VK worked at Midlands Technical College as Director of Seminars and Workshops. Moved to Neighborville, IL and became Director of Continuing Education at North Central College. Moved into business and Director of Education at Mercy Hospital in Chicago, IL. Director of Organizational Development at MileagePlus United Airlines. Director of Education for Joint Commission on Accreditation for Health Care Organizations. VK was laid off from some positions – had nothing to do with her performance. Laid off from Mercy Hospital and MileagePlus United Airlines. VK was there during 9/11 – lay-offs shortly after that. Joint Commission had lay-offs too. VK always got a better job. VK learned to not take the first job offered to you. Became Director of Recruitment for the Peace Corps in Chicago. VK was director of the largest office of the Peace Corps. That position was limited to five years. Deputy Director for Nationwide Testing for the U.S. Government. Retired in 2013.
- 00:59:35 *Question:* Which job did you love the most? *Answer:* Director of Recruitment for the Peace Corps. Had a staff of twenty. There were fifteen recruiters out of the twenty staff members. The recruiters served all over the world, and they all had different backgrounds. VK was able to build a good culture. There was a lot of diversity recruiting. "It really expanded my thinking." There were people from different countries working for VK. Exposure to people of all backgrounds: different ethnicities, heritages, and sexual orientations. VK was hiring continuously.

- 01:01:45 *Question:* Did Winthrop help you in that position? *Answer:* Every experience you have helps shape you in some way. Winthrop was a good experience at the time. Winthrop exposed VK to a lot of experiences.
- 01:03:30 *Question:* How has Winthrop's image changed? *Answer:* VK was interested to see how the campus had physically changed. Some of the campus looked exactly the same. VK hasn't been back to campus in forty years until the Alumni Reunion in November of 2014. VK not sure what happened to former President Comstock. VK says she hopes, "Winthrop is keeping up with the times."
- 01:06:20 *Question:* What did it mean to be a Winthrop student during your time on campus? *Answer:* In South Carolina, Winthrop is a respected school. VK found out that when she moved away, having a four-year degree, seemed to be an entryway. It gave VK a lot of confidence to help start her career.
- 01:07:55 *Question:* Any final comments? *Answer:* No final comments.
- 01:08:16 *End of interview*