

Maureen and Mike

Mansfield Library

UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA

Archives and Special Collections

Mansfield Library, University of Montana

Missoula MT 59812-9936

Email: library.archives@umontana.edu

Telephone: (406) 243-2053

This transcript represents the nearly verbatim record of an unrehearsed interview. Please bear in mind that you are reading the spoken word rather than the written word.

Oral History Number: 270-043

Interviewee: Violet Elizabeth "Vi" Thomson

Interviewer: Annie Pontrelli

Date of Interview: August 2, 1991

Project: University of Montana Centennial Oral History Project

Annie Pontrelli: This is Annie Pontrelli interviewing Vi Thomson on August 2nd, 1991. Vi, why don't we start out the interview by your stating what years you were attending the university and we'll just go from there.

Violet Thomson: Well, I was there in '36, '37, and '38 and I graduated in '38. I was a drama student—an English major in those days, because the fine arts didn't have a degree all by themselves. It was all in the English department, which was rather interesting because I got left off a lot of publications that have come out in later years because I wasn't in the drama department as such. Well, that's what I graduated as. Just a little oddity that happens as the university grows and departments change.

AP: Can you tell me a little bit about what your observations were while you attended the university?

VT: Well, I was not a traditional student you remember. I had graduated from high school in 1927, see, ten years before. I was married and I had two children. My husband developed pernicious anemia and was becoming ill and it didn't look too promising for a very healthy life for him. So, he and I decided I probably should go back to the university and get a teacher's degree in case I had to support myself and my two children, you know, if he became an invalid. So, I farmed my two children out and left my husband in Helena still working, and I came over to the university and finished in three and a half years because I was under pressure, you see, by going to summer school to get that degree. Of course, oddly enough, the fact that I did get a degree, that I was able to take up a teaching profession or something else, relieved a lot of strain from my husband and his health improved, just because he didn't have to have that worry all on his own. He didn't die until about nine years ago, so we had a long life together. As it happened, I never did teach, but boy, did I ever use that degree! The minute I got out of the university, I went into Campfire work. You had to have a degree before you could become an executive director. Of course, that was all kind of an accident too, but that's how life is you know. You fall into things. So, in this lifetime, after the university, I've had two positions: one as executive director of Campfire for 14 years and then here in public relations and a salesman for television for the last 35 years. It's been a rather interesting situation that came out of the university.

AP: What do you recall about some of the courses that you took?

VT: Well, of course, in those days we were awfully "cliquey". The School of Forestry was a school all by itself and it didn't mingle very much with anybody else. Those people who were in drama, we were the cliquiest bunch of all. We just thought we were absolutely the tops above everybody else. We were the talent. We had the old student union you know. In my second year, because I guess I showed a little bit of leadership abilities, Donel Harrington was the drama instructor and

only about ten years older than I was (he hadn't been out of school very long either) and I became his (unpaid) assistant director. We had offices way in the top (he on one side and I was on the other side) of the student union, right in the front (probably little holes that aren't even used now). One thing I do remember about anybody that was in the drama department at that time, on that stage we learned to speak so that people could hear us in the back of the stage, so it was a wonderful opportunity to project. Everyone who graduated from drama in those days and were in plays has learned to be public speakers that could be heard. I have had so many people that are a little bit deaf say, "I know every word you say. How come I can always understand you and I can't understand other people?" It was the training that we got at the old student union. It was fun.

AP: What were some of the other courses you took?

VT: Well, of course we all took all of the English and I had a minor in home ec. I took French under Professor Hoffman, who was a Belgian who spoke with a bad French accent, so of course we all learned to speak French from him. He had a bad accent, but we were taking reading French, so we really didn't think that we'd ever speak very much of it. I'm sure that no one would ever have understood us. We did learn to read French very, very well and he was a very interesting professor. Of course, home ec was fun in those days. Miss Platt and that whole group of wonderful women that were dedicated to cooking, and sewing, and housekeeping, and homemaking, you know. I can remember all of the funny things that we did there and the way we learned to tailor and sew and everything. They really didn't seem to go together well: drama, French, and [home economics]. I had to take two years of language, in those days that was a requirement, because I was trying to make it in such a short time, it just seemed sensible to take it in the language, which of course I've forgotten now. It didn't even do me a great deal of good when I was in France! (laughs) But, you know there's discipline to it, and it was interesting, and he was a wonderful professor.

Then, I took a lot of education which was very, very dry, very, very dull. I remember I always sat in the front row, so that I wouldn't go to sleep. Everybody else tried to that was really interested in it, "we've got to sit in the front row, because everybody that's in the back is going to sleep." (laughs) It's a terrible thing to say isn't it? But, I don't think education courses are much more fun even now.

I had planned that I would teach English and drama when I got out, and it just happened in my senior year Mr. Moseby started a radio station here—one of the very first ones, well the first one. He wanted to start some programs and of course, had no money, so he started using talent from the university. For a couple of years I did a program with his station manager called "This and That." I didn't get paid for it. It was just part of my work in the drama department. That's kind of how I got my first little foothold into radio and T.V., through the university and through a drama class I did these programs. They were fun too. We were down on Front Street. Then, after I had been in Campfire for 14 years, knowing Moseby from the time that I had worked there when I was in college, and meeting him on the street one day, he asked me if I wouldn't like to come work for television. I thought he was joking and said, "Sure!" On Monday morning my phone rings and somebody says, "I thought you were reporting for work today."

I said, "Who is this and what do you want?" It was somebody from the television and I got down there in nothing flat and have been there ever since. I didn't even know what a rate card was because I did not take that in college. Now they have a wonderful department and I have gone back out to give lectures and just visited with kids that are taking television and telling them some of the funny things when everything was live and if you said a "damn" or something of that sort. They tried to beep it out, but they probably didn't get to it and it got on the air. Now, everything is taped, so you can make all the mistakes you want and do it over again.

Donald Harrington was an unusual man. He was a bachelor, as I said, he wasn't much older than the students, but he was dedicated. He was really dedicated to drama and public speaking and that kind of thing. I was very, very lucky that I was able to work into being assistant director and had an office and helped direct plays, and was in plays. As I said, we used to think we were the only people on that campus. Very few of us joined sororities, perhaps because we just had our own. We were able to build up...You did certain things and you got so many points, and you became a "master" after we got a certain number of points, and then you became a "royal master" after a lot of points. I was able to do that in a year and a half, and that was really a big honor. That was from directing, costuming, makeup, the whole gamut of theater. We put on our plays there in the student union, and we got big, big crowds there. Of course, you see, this was before television was very prominent in this area. There was very little television in that area—none at all really. So, the plays were well attended and everybody loved them, and we were so important. (laughs)

AP: Do you remember how much tickets went for?

VT: Oh, two or three dollars, if that. I could remember funny things that happened in the plays too. But, you know we had some very fine people come out of that. I was in a play with Carroll O'Connor. Nancy, of course, his wife, was in drama and she met him at the university of course, when he was there. She wasn't in college at that particular time, but they met. In those days, after they got together and were married, we all thought that Nancy would become the great actress because she was a born actress and a very good comedienne. We really knew Carroll, but he had only been there that one quarter and we really didn't pay that much attention. See how it turned out, he became the great actor, and she was the one behind him pushing and pulling, but she a lot of talent, just a lot.

AP: What were some of the funny stories or incidents?

VT: Well, I can remember one night I had directed a one act play which depended entirely on lights. I even remember the name of it after all of these years: X=0. It was a war story where one man kills another man, X=0, you know, war is so senseless in the first place, and accomplishes nothing really. But, anyway, it depended on spotlights, it depended on low lighting, it depended all on electricity and we had a thunderstorm and the lights went out. There we were. We didn't want panic in the theater either, because it was a terrible storm. Back stage we had a lot of flashlights, and we finished that play with people running around putting a flashlight on a character here, and another flashlight on another character. It was a nightmare for me, but we finished the play and got the people out of the theater into the dark after the play was over with no panic. But, I never forgot that night. (laughs)

We had lots of fun things. We did a lot of one act plays in those days, they don't do one acts much anymore. We'd put on a program of three one acts and then three students would direct each play. It was a wonderful experience and not really the big burden of a three act play or a two act play. I think we've lost something not doing those one act plays. Besides that, there are some wonderful one act plays, just wonderful one act plays. But, we didn't do the experimental stuff that they do now. Sex was still taboo, very little swearing. When I look back, we thought that we were pretty advanced and pretty "tough" as the word would go, but we were awfully naive and innocent, you know. It was an era where we just didn't know very many facts of life.

AP: Do you remember what the campus itself was like?

VT: Well, it was much smaller of course, much, much smaller. And the oval, we could drive our cars around the oval in those days. We did a lot of things in the oval, it was really used. The buildings were around the oval and those were the ones that were used. We didn't have all that—the out buildings that they have now—the big, big buildings. It wasn't that difficult to get from class to class either. Main Hall was very important. We did drama upstairs in the Main Hall. We were in and out of the president's office and everybody else's office like you would in any other department now. Closer knit, big family, but closer knit. You knew almost everybody on campus. It was a different time, an easier time, a friendlier time probably.

AP: Why was it an easier time?

VT: Well, there wasn't the pressures probably that the kids have now. For one thing, almost everyone knew that they could get a job when they were through. There wasn't that, "Where am I going to get a job; will I be able to get a job?" sort of thing. As I said, we were the English department. We had [H.G.] Merriam and the other professors in that department, and we were one big family. They all helped students and they all knew us by name, and we were all invited to teas in their home and maybe suppers.

Especially in the home ec department, we were given a lot of training in small dinners and afternoon tea—how to act and how to perform. A lot of our students did come in from the ranches and farms, and really didn't know social graces. I can remember being at Miss Platt's apartment, and we were served little cucumber sandwiches, little tiny dainty things you know. We all just sat on the edge of our chair looking out of the corner of our eyes, looking to see how everyone else did it. (laughs) I look back on it and think about how naive we were, because we weren't used to things like that. It served me a good turn, because later in life I was at the governor's home for afternoon tea, and you know how to act at that kind of thing and you were thankful the university gave you that background. There was a lot of that "culture" background that we got, I suppose they still get it, but it was a little more obvious in those days I think.

AP: You've mentioned a couple personalities or a couple teachers who stood out in your mind for whatever reason. Who were some of the other folks that made an impact on you?

VT: You mean professors?

AP: Professors, or fellow students, or just people who made your university experience important to you.

VT: There were so many people that I look back on, one man became a judge. One boy, and I've forgotten his name, but he went down to South Carolina and became the head of a drama department down there. One of the girls in our drama department married the head of the athletic department. You lose track of people. Remember, it's been a long time since 1938 when I graduated! I do remember coming back for my 50th [reunion] which was very exciting in our gold gowns and our gold hats. They certainly make a nice production of it, and I'm looking forward to my 60th now, which isn't very far away, so that will be fun too.

Kids came from all over the state and almost every town was represented at the university. It didn't cost so much to go to the university either, you know. I can't remember the amount of money, but it was quite a bit for the time, but it wasn't anything like it is now. Almost anybody could afford to go if they had any money at all. If you could live at home, it was that much [less]. A lot of us lived out in the community.

AP: Is that what you did?

VT: Yes, I lived in a house on Sixth. Oddly enough, I lived in a house where their daughter has become one of my very best friends, Katherine Johnson. Her folks lived on Sixth Avenue and I lived at their home for a long time. You got breakfast there, it was bed and breakfast (as it were), but you had to eat out. I lived off campus the whole time and it was cheaper than living in a dorm really. Then, at that time, because I was married, I wasn't really welcome in a dorm. The standards were very strict. A married woman would not be in a dorm. I never tried to live in a dorm, but I don't think I could of if I had wanted to. I think a married student couldn't live on campus, and there were a lot of married students too, but not like it is now. Didn't I read somewhere that over a fourth of the population at the university are older students? It's pretty high anyway, it's pretty high. It wasn't that high in those days, it was just the thing to do if you possibly could. You came out of high school and you immediately went to college.

But, we had wonderful professors and there was a lot of individual caring—"How are you getting along? Can I help you? Do you understand what we're doing?" and that kind of thing.

I had another experience in college that I didn't like very well and that was an eye-opening experience. When we first came we had to have a health exam, everybody had to have a health exam. I don't know if they do now. I suppose they do to some extent. I found out that I had had tuberculosis as a child and had never known it. The family had said that I had had whooping cough (my mother had died at about that time and I went to live with an aunt and I'd had whooping cough and came out west to live with this aunt and got over it) and I found out it was tuberculosis. So, the university immediately, when my arm became puffed up after the test, sent me to Galen to see where I was and to see what it was doing. The university paid for it, they paid to send you over there. Of course, it was in remission, I hadn't had it since I was a child, but it was a frightening experience. They did do things like that.

I spent Thanksgiving in Galen and I remember the steambugs—lots of bugs. The minute you'd

turn on a light the floor was alive with steambugs which I had never seen before. So, I was there, and then they sent me out of Galen to catch the bus on a cold day, the day after Thanksgiving, and I caught the worst cold I've ever had in my life waiting for that bus. I remember that. I came back to university and I didn't have it [tuberculosis], so that was that. Things that they did you know in those days, if a child was sick at any time. Well, what else do you want to know?

AP: You had mentioned that there were a number of activities on the oval, when the oval was used a lot more. What were some of those activities?

VT: Well, they had rallies, all kinds of rallies for anything that happened to come up, you know, "Be kind to dog week" or something. (laughs) Especially the drama students, of course, always got in on that. Then of course, we always had radical students that **loved** to expound. Then I met Mike Mansfield, he was there at that time too, for a short time. I met Mike then several times after college here and there and then didn't see him for years until I went to Japan with the university when we had the football game, you remember a few years ago. Doesn't everybody run over to Japan for a football game? I love that. Mike Mansfield was invited to a reception and came right up to me and called me by name. That man's memory on names! You know, you're just almost speechless when he does something like that. So, I've known him over all of these years and he was there [university] for a short time. None of us ever thought that he'd ever be anything in particular. He was just kind of a shy person. But, speaking of the Oval, he gave a speech on the Oval one time, I don't even remember what it was about or anything. We got together and giggled and laughed and shouted and yelled and nobody knew what we were doing. We didn't know ourselves.

The drama people, we always had a yearly picnic too. We always went up to the Montana Power Park which was up the Rattlesnake. They used to own quite a bit of land up there. Now they're trying to make a corridor out of it so that people can access it but, they had a beautiful picnic ground up there. I can remember our drama people, there would be maybe 50 of us. We'd have a big picnic every year. I can remember the boys had beer, and we were wild. It was so innocent (laughs), but the kids drank beer, and probably swore, and talked noble thoughts of things they were going to do and how the world was going to be better—just like all young people. You look back on it and it was fun, and we thought we were terribly important. (laughs)

AP: What were some of the other traditions and happenings?

VT: Well, we had Singing on the Steps. We lit the 'M' up, there was always that thing. Of course, there were the football games and basketball. There were lots of things that went on between Bozeman and Missoula in those days. The fact is, we had to have the Bozeman/Missoula game usually in Butte, because there was so much vandalism. I can remember, and I remember this, Bozeman kids came over (and how they ever did it) and they got a calf up in Main Hall up in the tower and left it there. It was a big calf, almost a cow, and if you think they didn't have a time getting that out of the tower... that was great excitement you know. Then of course, they would go up and tear the 'M' up and paint it colors. You had to watch out all the time. But, we did the same thing when we went to Bozeman. It really almost got out of hand, year after year the rivalry between the two schools.

Kind of the thing that was funny in my own family. My husband graduated in Bozeman, and I graduated in Missoula. After we were married, we would go to Butte to a football game, and it didn't matter who won, we wouldn't speak to each other all the way home! It was so serious! (laughs) We just wouldn't have anything to do with one another. If he won, I was just furious at him. Of course, they called themselves the "Golden Bobcats" back in those days in basketball, and I just thought they were awful then. Then if we won, why you'd be kind of happy. Isn't it kind of funny how you take things personally when you're that age? (laughs)

AP: Any other traditions or anything else you can think of?

VT: Well, of course I remember Singing on the Steps because that was so nostalgic you know and still is, I think.

AP: Now was that every week or was that during certain times?

VT: No, that would be at certain times. Homecoming was a big affair of course, and there was always Singing on the Steps. Even in those days they lit the 'M' up on certain occasions. That was a big thing. The drama department stayed out of a lot of things that went on. The Forester's Ball was going on though, that still was there, that must have been going on forever. That was the big thing to do.

AP: What are some of your memories of it?

VT: Rowdiness and loud. (laughs) My husband came over, and we went a couple of times to it. I missed one year, I don't know why, but it was loud. I don't think they allowed beer in the hall, but everybody had their bottle someplace, you know. It always got awfully rowdy, it really did. They had to clamp down on it around that time, and try to clean it up. I don't know how it is now. I've been out there a couple of times since, when I was reporting for the television station. I went out there and did a little interview with some of the kids and it was different. They were all so gentlemanly and so nice, I kept thinking, "Foresters, are you forestry students? You're dressed up and you've got a tie on?" because they didn't do that in the old days. They were rugged! Boy, you know, "We're the foresters!"

Every school seemed to have a little tradition of being the way they should be, you know. The French were very prissy and perfect and everything. The drama people, of course, were very dramatic. The forestry school was always rowdy and tough. The home economics were just too busy to be bothered with anybody else.

AP: Some of these things you've already answered Vi, but one of the questions I have down here is what changes have you observed over the years?

VT: Well, it's come from being kind of a hometown school to a bigger college, of course, more traditional like. I think it's harder probably to get in, harder to get good grades, and it's certainly more expensive. It's tough for families now to send a youngster to school.

I think a lot of kids went to school—when I was going—for status purposes—to be a college

graduate. A lot of girls weren't going to go to work anyway, even back in that day, until the war came. A lot of them weren't going to go to work, but they wanted to have a college degree. It was something to do. I think the fraternities and sororities were very snobbish in those days. I think they kept themselves a little bit more aloof. I noticed the youngsters now—it's not as important. It's the education that's the important thing now really. And it was to a lot of the students even then, especially the kids who were working their way through, and a lot of kids worked their way through. There were a lot of kids working all over town and at the university, carrying long hours and working too. It was tough for a lot of the kids that I knew, but they were going to get an education. Of course, most everybody that was in school when I was there retired long ago. I don't know why I haven't, but I'm still working part time and enjoying it. Most of them that I can remember have retired.

It was a great time. We had a lovely time at our 50th anniversary. Nick Mariana who was a well-known figure in those days and who was one of the people who had seen a UFO, you know, and had pictures of it. Oh, you wouldn't know, this was before your time. He had left the university and went to Great Falls and got pictures of a flying object and was known and made fun of. Some people believed absolutely that he did see one, you know, and he had the pictures to prove it, but it was always controversial, and still is, of course. Nick Mariana, who was very prominent on campus doing a lot of things is now, of all things for Nick, because he was a little toughy. He and his wife are running a religious radio station out in Portland, Oregon. It shows that you can be what we used to call kind of a little tough character and now be a leading citizen of a big community. He was well known in those days and a lot of fun.

At the reunion a lot of people had made it big. Most of them are retired of course and scattered all over the world. No matter where you go, you find people from the university.

AP: Do you keep in touch with a lot of those people?

VT: Not very many. I don't know, I've become so involved in Missoula and the state of Montana. I've been on the State Chamber of Commerce, I'm on the Governor's Advisory Council on Aging, right now I'm working hard in AARP. My interests have gone into all of these other organizations. I'm sure that anybody that knew me in college would have never dreamt that I would be on the State Chamber of Commerce conducting affairs of state or caring about the aging programs and health reform and all of the things that I'm terribly involved in now. Here I am the president of the Senior Citizen's Center. At that time, nobody got old, you know, or if you were 50 you were over the hill, that was for sure. (laughs) But, at the present time, I'm 82 and still going.

AP What were some of the activities and organizations on campus during your years there?

VT: Well, I think they were the same as they are now. There was the Drama club and the Masquer's, of course, and the forestry school—

[End of Side A]

[Side B]

VT: —I don't hear much of them anymore. I think maybe that's moved mostly to Bozeman hasn't it? I really haven't kept track of it at all. That was very prominent in those days—that home ec department. There was sewing, and cooking, and homemaking, and all of those things—a big department.

There were lots of clubs, you know. There were English clubs, and French clubs, and math clubs and you name it, they had a club. I would suspect that traditionally it's pretty much the same. Whatever your interest is there is a group that's revolving around that. Of course, the sororities and fraternities were very active in those days, very active. Then we had the groups. The Spurs—they were very, very active. They are not as active anymore I don't believe, are they? Or do you have Spurs anymore even?

AP: I think, at least when I was attending school, they had the Spurs.

VT: Well, they did everything, you know, and the Bear Paws. They were very, very active and it was quite an honor to belong to those particular groups and so forth. It's interesting to me, I belong to Soroptimists, which is a business women's service club, and we usher at the basketball and football games. Well, that would have been unheard of when I was in college because the Spurs and the Bear Paws did all of that. They did all of the ushering and all of the civic kinds of things that other clubs come in and do at the university [now]. I think it's great to include town people in activities at the university, because it keeps them interested. But, they didn't have a Century Club for instance or something of that sort. The sports people were very, very active too and had their own clubs and activities. Basketball was a bigger thing in those days than football. If you were a basketball player, you were the big campus hero, you know. Now it's more football I think than basketball. Maybe not, I don't know. There were lots of activities and lots of things going on. Maybe too many sometimes for the good of your studies.

AP: Were there some rules or regulations or things that students had to abide by in those days that aren't in business anymore?

VT: Well, I think that they are a lot different now. Of course, the girl dorms and the boy dorms were absolutely segregated, you know. Curfew was really...You were in at a certain time or else you had warnings or were kicked out of college, you know. You had to keep your rules. I imagine the same is true now supposedly. No drinking on campus. I don't know about that now, but in those days there was supposed to not be. They watched it carefully, but kids will be kids. I'm sure there was always beer brought in no matter what you did, in a Coke bottle if nothing else.

I can't remember any restrictive rules particularly. There were things like dress codes to some extent, or heels and things, nothing I can remember really that was too restrictive. I'm sure that we followed closely a lot more rules than they do now. Of course, we didn't have the big dorms then. We had some of the dorms, but none of those big high rises that they have now, they weren't built in those days. There were places where you studied. The library was a very popular place for meeting and the Student Union of course was really popular—a big, big thing in those days. That was a wonderful building. It's the old Student Union building across from the theater

there. What do they call it now?

AP: It's the Fine Arts building.

VT: You see the bookstore was in that building downstairs, the big, big stage, and then there was the big recreational hall upstairs and everything. It was quite a community center for the university.

AP: What did you like best about the university?

VT: Oh, I suppose it was friendships and I liked a lot of my professors. Of course, I was a little bit older, and I think I appreciated them maybe more than the other kids. Everyone knows how wonderful Merriam was, you know. He had a wonderful philosophy on life. And Freeman did too. Of course, we loved old Hoffman, he was just so much fun.

AP: Now who was Hoffman?

VT: He was the French teacher—the Belgian that was a French teacher. Donel Harrington was a great influence, particularly in my life, because he was the head of the drama department. For some reason I thought that drama was great and I enjoyed it so much, you know. They were wonderful professors. I imagine it's the same today—you made a lot of friendships, you had a lot of casual acquaintances too, but you know, it was a close knit family. I remember at that particular time, we didn't have very much to do with the town people, and the town people didn't have a great deal to do with us either, as far as I remember. Of course, maybe it was different on the presidential level or something of that sort, but I don't remember too much about the town people except that they'd come to plays and football games and basketball games. They were probably there and we didn't notice them. I think the university was rather a separate thing. I remember later being on committees where we're bringing the university and the town closer together. Trying to be one and have the students realize that Missoula was here for them and for the Missoulia people to realize how much the university does for Missoula. I think this is well accepted now. The university is a big part of this community. We'd be a pretty sad town without it.

AP: What did you like least about the university?

VT: Well, I can't remember anything that I would say "least". You know, as you look back of course, you have a rosy glow on most everything. (laughs) I suppose if I had to study for exams, I'd probably like that the least, especially if we were doing plays or something at the same time, because I'm sure my priorities were mixed. A play would come first before my French lesson for instance, you know, that kind of thing. I think the thing that I probably liked least was my final exams, you know, where the professors called you in and interviewed you. My mind always seemed to go completely blank. When I'd see three or four professors when I was ready to graduate you know and they would ask me something that I was positive that I had never heard of, because of the way that it was worded. That may be the least [liked] thing but that wasn't too bad, and I graduated and I was glad to be out.

AP: Was that standard practice, as far as finals, having to do oral interviews?

VT: Yes, we did a lot of oral interviews. The professors of your department would call you in and they had a lot of questions about your general knowledge and concept of what you'd been doing and so forth. It wasn't necessarily something that you would study either; it was your perception of what maybe you felt affected you or affected your environment or other conditions. So, you were thinking and you were scared spitless anyway, you know?

AP: So many of these questions you've already answered. What do you feel your greatest accomplishments were during your years here?

VT: Well, my greatest accomplishment was that I graduated. Heavens! Naturally that was the biggest one. I got out of there! (laughs) Oh, I suppose the satisfaction of knowing that you'd gone to school and that you'd done these things. There's a lot of satisfaction to it. It proves that you've got a stick-to-itiveness. You know, I think that's what a lot of people say, "Are you a college graduate?" They don't give a darn what you graduated in, they don't care a bit! Were you able to finish? Were you able to stick to it, so you'll be able to stick to a job? If you were able to do that, why you could stick to a job and you can learn on the job. I think that's important too. When I was executive director of Campfire, it didn't matter what I graduated in. "Are you a graduate?" You have to be a graduate.

AP: What were some of the challenges you met during your years here?

VT: Well, of course my challenges were different from other people because I had the stress of a husband and two children. I was away from home and I was over here in a town that I had never lived in before. I had left my friends and I had left a fairly orderly life. Jim and I had built a home, and we had to sell that house. I didn't know how my children were getting along, though I had relatives there that were taking care of them. My husband wasn't well, so I had the stress of worrying about his health and the children, plus the fact that I was in a new environment and had to settle into college in a regime. I had to go back and forth a good deal, and in those days it wasn't that easy to go back and forth to Helena you know. But, I had to do that, so I had a double responsibility a little bit, because you just don't say, "I'm off to college!" I couldn't be carefree like the average student. There were other students that were in the same boat though and we had a common bond that we had other obligations besides just getting out of school. So, I would say that was probably my stress—a little bit different. And then you want to do well, naturally, you know. You'd like to be a little bit better than average if you could. I had firmly resolved that I was going to teach drama, I was going to go to a high school and be a drama teacher and public speaker, because I took a lot of public speaking too at that time. So, this was what I was going to do and of course I never spent a day teaching, not one. (laughs) My intentions were good. I had a degree and I had a teacher's certificate.

AP: If you had the chance to go back in time, what would you do differently or what memory or experience would you want to relive?

VT: Oh, I don't know what I'd do differently. I still would go to school and I would have gone to college before I got married I think, but I don't regret ever getting married when I was young. I

was only out of high school and I went to Intermountain College over in Helena for a couple of semesters, met my husband and we got married. That's the thing that you have to do. I think if I were consulting a younger person, I'd say get your schooling first so you don't have that other worry. (Of course nowadays they just live together and call it good and go their separate ways. Maybe that's better in some ways than getting completely tied down too, as far as that goes.) I would still get my degree. I don't know whether I'd have such an emphasis in drama as I did in those days. Still, public speaking, it's always been very fine for me because I've done lots and lots of public speaking. I'm so glad I had it all.

I would require every child before they ever get out of school to have a course in public speaking. I think there is nothing worse than a person that gets up and doesn't know how to speak, doesn't know how to enunciate their words. Many people are frightened to death to get up in front of people. It should just be a requirement to be able to express yourself. A big thing that's wrong with this world is the lack of communication. I say one thing and you think I mean something entirely different. We just don't communicate on that one to one level. You don't understand what I'm saying and I don't understand what you're saying. It's too bad that we have this lack of communication.

AP: Actually, you've kind of answered this, but one of the questions that I wanted to ask, is what would you pass on as advice or words of wisdom to present day students?

VT: Well, I'm sure that I'm like all adults. I would pass on: study and stay with it! But, you know you're talking to deaf ears a good deal, young people are going to be young people. They're going to fall in love. Little girls are going to get boy crazy. If you could just keep their noses to that book and get their education and not worry about those [boy] things. But, human nature gets in the way all of the time. Get a degree and have a vocation, it's so important for everybody to have something. Maybe not one vocation, but maybe two or three if you possibly can, because you never know when you've got to fall back on something else. Sometimes you've got to do something that you'd never planned on doing, just like my being in television all of these years and doing everything in television. Now they have all of these wonderful classes at the university and a whole department. You can graduate in that you know! Well, they didn't touch it with a ten foot pole in those days. But, you see, I could have always fallen back on home economics, I did have that. Never in French, heaven forbid. That was my other minor! History—know your history! Know the background, know where we've been so that you know where we are going. Most of your advice—you've got to learn it yourself. I could talk to you until I'm blue in the face, then you go your own sweet way when you go on out. You know that, you're going to do what you're going to do.

AP: What period of time would you say was the most memorable and why?

VT: Well, I think in my lifetime, when I was in Campfire, I loved working with youngsters and high school youngsters. I ran the camps up in Seeley Lake. About 14 years I ran that camp up there and that was a wonderful experience. Summers up on the lake, wonderful kids, singing around the campfire, handcrafts, overnight hiking and that kind of thing. I look back on that and I think about how much fun we had and how great it was! We were safe, there were no fears, you know. You're biggest fear was falling out of an upper bunk or something of the sort (laughs). The

youngsters were wonderful. I like working with high school kids; I still like working with that age group because they have not been defeated. They can do everything and anything, as long as you don't try to say, "We tried that and it didn't work." Maybe it will work with this group. They think it will work and often it does work even though it's never worked before. It's an age where optimism is right there: they can do it and they can conquer it. It's a wonderful group to work with.

AP: Some of this you have already mentioned too, but how did the University of Montana affect or shape the person you are today?

VT: Well, getting the degree. I lived in Helena and I had lived there all my life and gone to grade school and high school and had not really traveled much outside of Montana. I don't know. You get to the university, and suddenly there's a big, wide world out there you know. I think that being in the university made me want to see more of the world and, as opportunity arose, I've been everywhere now. I've been to China, Japan, Australia, Spain, Morocco. I've been all over the world and I doubt if I hadn't gone to college that I would have had the nerve to go to these other countries. It's been a wonderful experience. I look back and think how lucky I've been that I've been able to go everywhere and had all the fun we've had in all of these different countries. I went with a university group to Russia. They sponsored a trip to Russia, and it was wonderful!

AP: Now when was that?

VT: Oh, that was about eight years ago I would say. We went all through Russia and it was wonderful. We talked to the people and saw the sights. I say talk to the people—we talked to our tourist guide, the people were afraid to talk to us. A maid in (unintelligible) spoke broken English and came up to me. She was making the bed and came up to me—this was close to the Afghanistan border—and she said, "Why are you Americans wanting to make war all the time?" I tried to explain to her that we didn't, but see she had been so brainwashed that we were. I think she was even a little afraid of us, even of a woman, that we might kill her especially if there was any gain. We were the "ugly Americans". Then I asked her why they were making war and she said, oh, they were not making war. They were 200 miles away from where the troops were going into Afghanistan at that time and taking over and she didn't even know that they were in a war 200 miles away!

It's interesting when you can get other people's points of view. It's fun to go to another country that speaks English like New Zealand and Australia. Of course, I'll admit, part of the people in Australia I couldn't understand a word that they said even though it was English. (laughs) A lot of them you could of course. It's fun getting their views and how they look at us, you know. In the first place, we're all very wealthy. They think we just have tons and tons of money. In some places I'm sure they try to cheat you because you have so much money. I can remember in Turkey one time, a man tried to sell me a ring for 200 dollars that was probably worth two dollars. Americans have money! Interesting, interesting country. I'm sure I wouldn't have done all that traveling if it hadn't been for the university and the professors that had been places and talked about them. You want to see for yourself.

AP: Any other observations, insights, stories, memories that you'd like to share?

VT: Oh dear, I suppose if I could sit down and think I could think of things that we did, but it was a wonderful time of life, it really was. It was a more innocent time of life. I could have walked from one end of that campus to the other any night at any time of the night and felt perfectly safe. It would have never entered my mind to have been afraid. I bet they don't do that now. There were crazy people, but you didn't hear of the horrible things you hear of now. If there was something bad that happened on campus, we never heard of it and I'm sure there were things that happened, it's human nature. But, it was study and fun and laughter and friends and hard work and it was very satisfying and I'd advise everybody to go.

[End of Interview]