

The phrase that best describes Virginia is that she was a force to be reckoned with. Those around her knew where they stood, because she didn't mind telling you. Her focus was both powerful and long lasting. Her kindness to most animals is legendary, and she didn't like squirrels.

Virginia was many forces in my life. When we rode together in the early 60's, she was a fellow student as we learned from our horses. When we cleared land into pasture on the first farm, she was both foreman and fellow worker. When she tossed us kids into the back of that baby blue Skylark convertible, riding down Franklin Street she was the prettiest lady in town. When I was a teenager and she scolded me, she was the most unfair person in the world. When she called me to talk about brother Andy's death when I was 20, I could feel the grief, anguish, and love. Mind you, these calls came first thing in her mornings and in the middle of the night for me in Berkeley.

Virginia could use language that would make a sailor blush. We've all pitied the objects of her wrath, because Virginia made sure you understood exactly what she didn't like. As I remember the times when she'd light into someone, I found a common theme. She wanted to be treated fairly, and that goes double for those around her. Animals deserved to be treated with respect and love. If you didn't uphold those tenets, you'd hear from Virginia, and you wouldn't be likely to forget her message.

Virginia was ahead of her time, because she would do what she wanted when she wanted to. That meant frying an egg on the sidewalk to celebrate a hot day in Glen Lennox, and taking up horseback riding when she was 40. She was straightforward, didn't mince words, and rarely suffered fools. Watching her, I learned to ask for what I wanted and how to plan to get it.

You've heard about some of Virginia's accomplishments with horses. As a child in elementary school, she had a pet crow. I'll bet that wasn't her first pet. Growing up was always with pets, mostly dogs and cats. With farm sized property, she branched out to include rheas, peacocks, and others. From the early 1960's forward, horses were her main focus. She covered all facets, and spent the most time in breeding. Her influence lives on in the offspring of her breeding stock.

When Milton and Virginia moved to the farm in 2005, Susan and I helped them pack. In preparing for this event, I went through some of her papers looking for inspiration. Understand that Virginia was somewhat of a pack rat, and she kept every accolade, report card, and student picture of each of her children. Virginia could be difficult and not always the picture of a nurturing mom. Know this from one who has seen much of what she chose to keep, Virginia loved and was very proud of each of her children.

Virginia had Alzheimer's Disease, and it was rough for both her and those around her. Her pain was made easier to bear through the loving care from her caregivers in the home and the wonderful staffs at UNC Hospitals and White Oak Manor in Burlington. As the disease started to shut down brain functions, she was less able to express herself. In her last 5 days, her body was shutting down, while at the same time her spirit fought hard. With her eyes Virginia communicated recognition and love of her family. Her will to live showed Virginia to be a force to be reckoned with.

I know many of you here today have Virginia stories that you want to share. Please come to my house following this service, and we'll honor the memory of this amazing woman.