

Virginia Lee Heckle Mikkelsen

I have been thinking that many of you who have helped us did not know Virginia or only knew one part of who she was. Although impossible, I want to at least try to communicate a sense of Virginia.



Virginia was born May 3rd, 1953 to Art and Lee Heckle in St. Louis. Her father, Art, was away in the army in Korea at the time. He was worried about not being able to get back and see his new baby. After the war, Art and Lee had two more girls - Vickie and Cindy. After a few years, when Virginia was 6, they moved from St. Louis to Des Moines, Iowa. 6 years later, Chris, Virginia's brother was born.

Virginia went to Catholic primary school and an all girls Catholic high school (St. Joseph's Academy). In junior high school, she was class president. At this time she got in an interesting struggle because she followed her conscience about an issue - and was at odds with the rest of her class. (Virginia was not easily swayed by external pressures - she followed her internal compass.) She always said that she got a good education from Catholic school. She also said that she was a recovering Catholic because of it, too. As a teenager, she was a big Paul Revere and the Raiders fan (especially Mark Lindsay).



After she graduated, she went up to Ames where I met her. I commented that all the good ones were taken. She was dating someone in my dormitory house - I was in the room next to his. Virginia, her boy friend and I started to

see a lot of each other as friends. Years later, Art and Lee both commented that letters from Virginia started to mention some guy named Tim. After we were married she admitted to me that she had gotten my schedule and started showing up after my classes because she felt something special, too.

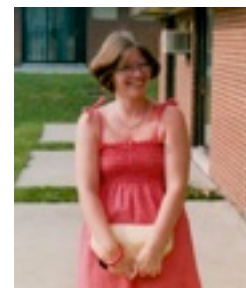
Our first date was on April 15th, 1972. We went to see an old movie in Des Moines. We came back up to Ames, and I kissed her - I can still remember the exact place - a stop sign behind C.Y. Stephens auditorium. After this we went to a restaurant and just looked into each others eyes. Virginia moved back to Des Moines after her freshman year because she didn't know what she wanted to do quite yet. She went to work for an insurance company. We dated for a year or two. I put a lot of miles on the car and time on the phone. We had started out as best friends and quickly fell in love - true love. I can't imagine anything better.



Early in 1974, she told me that she had bought a wedding dress (I hadn't asked yet, though we both knew it was going to happen.) I asked her that spring on the anniversary of our first date. We got married on November 23rd, 1974 - right after my finals. We went to Omaha for a few days for our honeymoon. We could not afford a fancy honeymoon, but it was nice.



We moved into married student housing and I finished my last two quarters and got my degree in computer science. Virginia worked in Ames for the city and at the hospital in various jobs until I was out of school.



In 1976, we went out to Oregon for 6 months as part of a work study program during my masters. Virginia had gone out with the idea that she would be able to relax and have sort of a vacation. She got a clue the first day when she went out to sun-bathe. It started to rain. She came in. It cleared up. She went out. It started to rain. This went on for a while and then she noticed that all the other people just stayed out in the rain. We found that Virginia needed the sun.



Fortunately, after graduation in 1977, I got a great job offer from HP in Fort Collins (which is sunny). We made a lot of great friends and enjoyed our new employed life-style (going out with our friends, skiing, hiking, dancing, skating). We loved to go to movies. Virginia really liked "The Way We Were" and we both liked old movies (like "Philadelphia Story" and "The Thin Man"). She read voraciously - ranging from classics to contemporary. She enjoyed Thomas Hardy through to Tom Robbins, John Grisham, Tony Hillerman, Anne Tyler, Anne Rice and Orson Scott Card.

Virginia started going to school a little and got back into working. She ended up working as the office manager for a group of anesthesiologists. We moved out of our apartment and into our first house in 1978. Virginia did a great job at getting us into great houses. She also had a flair for interior design - which she got from her mom. She always seemed to be ahead of the next fashion or design trend. In the last 10 years, almost every year, she would go down to Santa Fe with her girl friends on a major shopping expedition - and come back laden with southwestern pots and art and accessories. This was another aspect of Virginia - she loved to shop and was very good at it. She was an aggressive, careful shopper and always got great value - she took a lot of pride in this.



Virginia was pregnant early in 1979. We moved into a bigger house in July - getting ready for the big event. And on December 27th 1979, Amanda was born. Mandy's head wouldn't fit and had to be delivered by C-section. But,

Mandy was fine - and gorgeous. We were both incredibly proud and happy.



Ben was born on March 28th, 1984. Virginia was sick with morning sickness a good part of pregnancy. Just like Mandy, his head was too big to fit. But, since we were ready for it, the C-section went very smoothly. Ben was another great looking baby.



Our life changed drastically with children and the responsibility that they brought, but we still had a lot of fun with the two of us, with the four of us and with our friends. We went on various vacations (including Disney-world), trips (like Europe) and cruises (to the Caribbean).



We had always had lots of parties. Sometimes there was a theme (bad movie, event, holiday), sometimes not. Virginia would always get a little nervous right before the party, but things would always go great. We had a great life. Virginia would comment at times that things were too good - she almost seemed to be expecting something. Virginia had gone back to school to get her degree in 1990. With the kids school and my going back as well, the entire family was in school.

In early 1994, Virginia was almost done with her sociology degree. But, she was starting to feel tired and having headaches. On May 13th, after her finals, she collapsed with a hemorrhage from a lemon-sized high-grade brain tumor. The doctor did not paint a positive outlook - only a year or two with probable mental dysfunction and left side paralysis. She briefly regained consciousness and I asked if she wanted the time. Virginia said "Yes, I want the one to two years." As bad as all this was, Virginia did come out of the operation quickly and regained use of all but her left arm. She had all of her memories and mental skills. We

went in to this knowing the range of outcomes and kept a hopeful and positive approach. Virginia underwent radiation which seemed to help. By the end of the year, she was doing well. The remaining tumor had shrunk and she was driving and fully functional. We had our 20th wedding anniversary at Rick and Joyce Turley's (our friends) house.



At the start of 1995, things took a turn for the worse and the tumor grew again. We were able to slow the growth, but over the course of the year, things got worse. Through all of this, she was the same person. She kept doing things with the kids. She kept in close contact with her friends. Even in July, she went out with Susan Ison (another friend) to see the wild-flowers at Pawnee Buttes.



Around August, Virginia was sleeping most of the time. (However, even when you thought she was sleeping, she would often chime in with a usually humorous comment.) Early in September, our friends, Cindy and John Hoxmeier, had arranged for Virginia's few remaining graduation requirements to be waived. We told her that she had gotten her degree and she responded, in her normal humor, with "no way". Virginia died on September 14th. She had not been in pain and retained her sense of humor and sense of self until the end.

In early 1994, she wrote the following about her values: *"I value my health and my family's health, both emotional and physical. I value a happy family life, those relationships are valued and cherished above all others. I value giving my children a good life, with good memories and a solid foundation for them to use to build their own lives. I value my friendships and my husband above all friends. In myself, I value, intelligence, loyalty, honesty, kindness, assertiveness, fairness, trust, reliability."* She followed these values all through her life.



She was my love, a great mother, a great friend and a caring, intelligent, wonderful and funny person. Virginia should have had more time, but she still had a great life - if only in 42 years. She will leave an immense emptiness in our lives but not in our hearts.

Tim Mikkelsen
October 15th, 1995