A brief biography of Virginia Glenn (written by Nancy Morgan - March, 2016)

Virginia Glenn

Born: May 3, 1931, Ottumwa, Iowa

Died: July 4, 1970, New York City, New York

Virginia Glenn and I were best friends for the last 11 years of her life. We met in 1959 through a mutual friend in Philadelphia where I then lived. She was living in New York City. She had friends in all the major East Coast cities and was keeping up a voluminous correspondence with dozens of people, many of whom were, or became, prominent. One of them, Alan Watts, wrote a tribute article about Virginia upon her sudden death at age 39, in 1970. The evening I met her, we sat up talking 'til the wee hours. She told me that as a teen-ager she read a 1940s book by W. Somerset Maugham called The Razor's Edge. This had set her upon her spiritual path, her quest for the meaning of life, she said. A contributing factor was likely her Type I diabetes, a congenital illness, which indicated a shortened life expectancy at that time.

After our first meeting we kept in touch by letter and phone, and I began frequently spending weekends in New York City, a short train ride away. In 1960, at Virginia's urging, I left my dead-end job, gave up my dark, one room apartment and moved into a hotel-apartment on Times Square that Virginia had arranged for me with two girls. One of the first friends she introduced me to was Dr. Stanley Krippner, a research psychologist, employed at Maimonides Medical Center in Brooklyn. Not long after, Stanley went through his bleeding ulcer crisis and was hospitalized for a few days. More than 50 years later he and I are still friends. Very quickly I was included in her large circle of friends and acquaintances and began attending fascinating lectures and classes at the famous New School in Manhattan. I signed up with Kelly Girls, Inc., temporary office help, to support myself. Virginia's adventures took us outside New York City sometimes. We visited the Millbrook Estate, home of Harvard professor, Richard Alpert, soon to be reincarnated as Baba Ram Dass, after his journey to India where he met his guru. We also traveled to Boston where we sat in on a class at Harvard University to hear a guest lecture by Viktor E. Frankl, author of the recently published book From Death Camp to Existentialism.

Both Stanley Krippner and Alan Watts have written of their friendships with Virginia. I would like to add my voice since I knew her on a more daily basis as we met, talked, lunched

and participated in so many activities together during the six or eight months I lived in New York. When I first knew Virginia she was still working as a waitress at Schraffts Restaurants, where she was a valued employee. She continued there until she became too disabled to continue. During my time with her she experienced the good fortune to find a new home with Miss Alice York, from whom she rented a room in her charming apartment at 23 West 12th Street in Greenwich Village. The two became fast friends; she lived there the remainder of her life.

Most evenings I attended classes at the New School for Social Research, where Virginia worked as an admission ticket-taker, entitling her to free attendance. She became so well-recognized there by students and faculty that she was dubbed "the Elsa Maxwell of the New School" (Elsa Maxwell was a well-known social hostess, frequently mentioned in the newspapers of the time). Another title she earned was that of "Midwife of the Human Potential Movement." The New School classes were taught by leading edge: teachers, therapists, researchers and writers, in newly developing disciplines. She thus had the chance to introduce many of these people to each other. Virginia was not awed by anyone's reputation, no matter how famous. Without the slightest hesitation, she walked up to the presenter, introduced herself and engaged that person in conversation. Then she asked the person if he/she were familiar with the work of so and so, pulling from her famous tote bag articles by or about that person. In this way she introduced hundreds of people, whose meetings proved fruitful, both professionally and personally. I consider her work as that of a "cross-pollinator," like a honey bee. Both at New School and in more informal interactions with people, I observed her amazing facility for forming immediate friendships, by eliciting the unique qualities of each person, by a kind of informal "interviewing" process, which I learned and used later in my own research and writing work.

Among her prominent friends were Stan Krippner, Richard Alpert and Tim Leary, Karl Linn, Ida Rolf, Robert and Jeanne Masters, Stan Groff and Alan Watts. Among her ordinary friends were Ann Peacock, Anne O'Toole and Little Anna (from Thailand), Russ Garvin, Howard Plummer and myself.

In 1962 I relocated to San Francisco, but our friendship continued by frequent letters, phone calls and some visits. By 1969 those of us close to her knew she had reached the final

chapter of her life. I flew to New York City to spend three weeks with her. I got the sad news of her passing in July 1970. I was unable to return for the memorial gathering to celebrate the life of this remarkable woman, but Howard Plummer sent me a tape recording of the event.

Alan Watts called her a Bodhisattva, and I think she was; a unique soul who came to Earth to accomplish a particular task in a short life. Stan Krippner quotes her as saying she "wanted to" return here, "even if only as a blade of grass." In the years following Virginia's death, I went through several crises: the sudden death of my father; my divorce from my husband; the "murder" of my dog by another dog as we walked in my neighborhood.

After all that, I remembered that our mutual friend, Stan Krippner, had set up the Virginia Glenn Memorial Collection at Kent State University, a few miles from my childhood home. (The University had become infamous for the shooting death of four young students by National Guard Soldiers during the Vietnam War.)

I visited there and spent time reading through the Virginia Glenn Collection, her letters to me, mine to her, and letters to and from others she knew. It was great fun. I felt the desire to write a biography of Virginia, based on those letters, plus interviews with people who had known her and a trip to her hometown in Iowa to talk to her family members.

But "life is what happens while you're making other plans," and what happened to me was Fibromyalgia. It took years to get a diagnosis, search for treatment, and when I became unable to keep working, more years to get a Social Security Disability Award (SSDI). So travel became very difficult. I still feel regret about being unable to take on that project. I think other people would have found the story of her life fascinating reading.