Virginia Graham

'Picture me in love with life'

By SHIRLEE IDEN

"Paint me, I pray, the way I really want to be. Draw me in constant motion, picture me in love with life, and color me alive."

That's Virginia Graham talking, on Virginia Graham.

A woman who has been everywhere, done just about everything worth doing and who knows everyone who's anyone. Last week she came to Southfield to talk about her most recent book.

"If I made it So Can You" is Virginia Graham's autobiography, a tale told into a tape recorder about her life, her loves and the many obstacles fate has thrown into her path.

Growing up in Chicago, she said she never wanted to be an actress and never even fantacized about it. Little Virginia Komiss wanted to be a G-man.

"I was always interested in finding out the truth, in locating where it was. That's one reason I eventually went into journalism," she said.

If you mention her writing style, she laughs and says, "Yes, my distinct style of talking into a tape recorder. After all, why should I have to grope for a typewriter key or slow down my thoughts because my hand is slower than my mouth.

"One of the nicest compliments I have gotten was 'You talk to me as though I were the only one you were talking to.'"

HER LOVE AFFAIR with the written word is described as one of many, but the most profound of her life. But surely, the spoken word must rate pretty high with Virginia Graham as well.

"I'm totally an audio person," she explained. "I can learn an entire script of a play in record time if I just have a reader to say those lines to me."

And she just loves radio.

"You don't have to worry about having your hair done or how you look," she said.

But most of all, she understands that her strength as a media person is in her spontaneity.

"It has to be off the cuff for me or it stinks," she said.

For Ms. Graham, the radio personality, the television talk show person and the busy actress looking back means being grateful.

"If I die tomorrow, they can say here's a woman who lived and did everything," she said. "I have an adoring husband, children and grandchildren and have reached the top of my profession."

She added that every guest she ever interviewed on any show she did made a dent, an impression, and each one was memorable.

But when she reaches into memory, there is a time for her that stands out.

"I was on the air, radio and television for 27 years sporadically, but the nine years I was on 'Girl Talk' were my happiest," she said.

"EVERYTHING went right. I was a total professional and there was dignity and respect. Many doors were open to me."

Those were the years from 1961 to 1970 and Ms. Graham sums it all up with: "I was the antidote to housewifery."

Her quality of being grateful for what life has brought her is not simply because life has brought her success in her career, but that life has allowed her to face adversity, to fight back and to win.

"I'm a cured cancer patient," she said. "I thought everyone in the world knew that. I lost a breast to cancer.

"The biggest emotional mutilation in the world is mastectomy, but today they're doing marvelous things with rehabilitation."

Doing charitable work she says, is one of the main facets of her career.

"My principal charity is the American Cancer Society and that's my very small thank you note for living. Having had cancer kept me from a lot of work in show business because many sponsors don't want any identification with cancer."

Ms. Graham, however, doesn't shrink from being on the record as a cured cancer patient and doesn't stop with just being counted.

"In one year, I raised $86 million for cancer and altogether I've raised more than $200 million," she said. "But then, I lost my son-in-law to cancer last year."

"I DID the first big promotion for Multiple Sclerosis and have worked for almost every charity you can name. I was one of the 14 women who founded the organization for Cerebral Palsy and when I worked on Tay-Sachs, people didn't even know what it was."

Working, living and friends are all things Virginia Graham is grateful for. "I can't believe the friends I have in all age categories."

But when she totes up scores and rates priorities, she'll look straight at you and say:

"There's no applause, bow or bouquet that equals a grandchild reaching out his arms and calling you 'Nana.'"

These days, her husband Harry isn't feeling too well, and sometimes there are problems, but there's the book to push and this week she opened in "Butterflies are Free" in Raleigh, N.C., a play she did a few years back.

She's basically a radio and television person, she'll tell you, but there's great joy in doing a play and in meeting people who want her autograph on a copy of her book.

"I like being in Michigan; there are more Town Halls and more intellectual curiosity here than any state I know," she said.

"And that Renaissance Center of yours. Well. I bought two pairs of shoes there. I've been all over the world and never saw such convenience and glamor as at the Renaissance."

"YOU'D THINK they'd have me do a commercial about it," she said.

That's Virginia Graham. Color her in constant motion. Color her alive.

VIRGINIA GRAHAM

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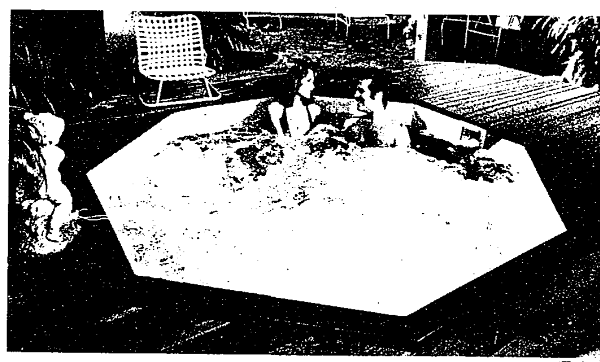

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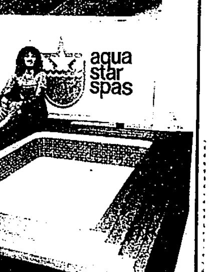

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9½" Flavor Saver Pie Plate (9½" × 1½")	1.99	2.29
2-Qt. Oblong Baking Dish (11½" × 7½" × 1½")	3.49	3.99
3-Qt. Oblong Baking Dish (13" × 9" × 1½")	3.99	4.79
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