

TV hostess keeps zest in spite of misfortunes

By Richard Lech
staff writer

Life has had its share of trials for Virginia Graham.

She has survived four potentially terminal illnesses — including cancer — a nervous breakdown, the death of her husband, the death of her son-in-law, fires that destroyed "every place" she ever lived and six robberies.

But she has kept on going with her sense of humor intact and her zest for life undiminished, she said.

"I want to tell you that even though these things have happened to me I'm still going strong," said Graham, who was the opening speaker last week as Livonia Town Hall started its 21st season.

Apron sale benefits heart association

From now through Nov. 30, Weight Watchers offers butcher style aprons to benefit the American Heart Association (AHA).

The aprons are \$5 (postage and handling included) and are being sold during Weight Watchers "Fast and Fancy Favorites" recipe contest. All profits from the apron sale will go to the AHA.

Each natural color apron is silk-screened with a Weight Watchers graphic designed by local artist Theresa Deeter.

To order an apron, send a check or money order made payable to Pulla Shirts, in care of Weight Watchers, P.O. Box 125, Lathrup Village, 48276. Allow two weeks for delivery.

THE FORMER TV talk show host, author and present soap opera performer was making her third appearance before the Town Hall. She told the audience at the Mai Kai Theater that at 72 years of age she is still as active as ever.

The former "Girl Talk" hostess is playing a gossip columnist on the ABC-TV soap opera "All My Children" and working on a new syndicated television show called "Growing Young."

"I think I'm in the most beautiful time in my life," she said. "I always say, 'God, thank you for letting me live through this, and enough already.'"

She also continues to be active in charitable causes such as the American Cancer Society, battered and abused children and others.

"The 11th Commandment is, 'Thou shalt feel thy neighbor's pain,'" she said.

Although her talk focused on the tragedies of her life, it was liberally sprinkled with humor.

She recalled that when undergoing cancer surgery while in her early 30s, she made sure she went to the beauty parlor first to have her hair touched up. She was asked why she would want to do that.

"Because they never saw me dark at the roots standing up, so why should they see me that way laying down," she said.

THE THOUGHT that he might lose her to cancer was a terrible strain for her husband, Harry, and it led to a nervous breakdown for him from which he never recovered. He eventually died in the Actors Home.

"Here was a man who loved me so much, but couldn't take the loss of me,"

'I think I'm in the most beautiful time in my life. I always say, "God, thank you for letting me live through this, and enough already."'

— Virginia Graham,
Livonia Town Hall
speaker

Graham said.

After beating cancer, she later went on to host the syndicated talk show, "Girl Talk," for seven years. On the show, she interviewed such well-known women as Lucille Ball, Joan Crawford and Arlene Dahl. Her show also helped introduce such personalities as Barbara Walters, Toffi Fields and Phyllis Diller, she said.

Her new show, "Growing Young," which she hopes will be in syndication within the next six months, also will try to turn unknowns into celebrities, she said. The show will feature person-on-the-street interviews and a "60 Minutes" style face-off between Graham and George Skinner, a former CBS News anchorman who will be featured on the show.

She also discussed her current involvement with "All My Children."

"I'm so terrible," she said of the character she is playing. "It comes so easy. I'm a gossip columnist."

Working on soap operas is hard work — and not as exciting as a viewer might think, she said.

"It is so boring," she said. "You get there at 7 in the morning, and are there until 7 at night. For six hours you just sit around."

GRAHAM, who stayed at the Mayflower Hotel during her visit, praised the hotel as "in my way of thinking, a five-star hotel." She was picked up at the airport in a Rolls Royce and was greeted with a red carpet and the Plymouth Fire and Drum Corps in full regalia.

"Maybe if I'm lucky again in six years I'll come back to you," she told the Town Hall audience.

Town Hall season tickets, at the reduced rate of \$20 for the final three lectures, will be available until the next lecture, scheduled for Wednesday, Nov. 14. The speaker then will be Col. John Cottell, the former British intelligence agent whose real-life exploits were immortalized in spy fiction by John LeCarre.

The money raised from the Town Hall series goes to American Field Service (AFS) International/Intercultural Programs in Livonia. The local chapter sends Livonia high school students abroad and brings foreign students to Livonia to study.

Livonia students who went abroad this year are Bentley High student Dena Choucair, who went to Spain; Bentley student Robert Gruscho, Brazil; Bentley student Anthony Niedwiecki, Venezuela; and Stevenson student Emil Jandourek, Sri Lanka.



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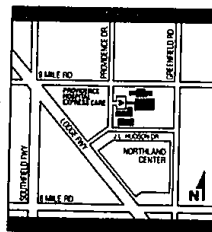
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