

## Book Review – “The Wayfarers” by Virginia Wade Ames

By Gale Curcio

When Virginia Wade (Ginny) Ames received the news that The Campagna Center was celebrating their 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, she felt compelled to write to Mary Rood, chief development officer, about her remembrances of Elizabeth Anne Campagna – and of the Campagna Center (then the YWCA).

One of those stories was about the time that Elizabeth Anne was sued by a young sculptor. She had given him permission to show some of his sculpture in the living room of the building and one of those pieces fell to the floor and was broken.

During the course of her testimony to the judge, she was asked to answer a question, yes or no.

With Elizabeth Anne’s forthright and exacting honesty, she said to the judge, “Your honor, I swore to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, and Sir, the truth lies halfway between yes and no.”

Virginia also remembers taking over as chair of the Christmas Walk in 1971 after the designated chair quit her role at the last minute.

Elizabeth Anne called her and said, “We are without a chairman, Virginia, we need *you!* Will you take on the Christmas Walk?”

Virginia said yes and took on the unfinished job. She was responsible for all the events, but the one she recalls in particular was the traditional making of the bourbon punch. The person who was supposed to be in charge of that was unable to do it. She passed on the list of ingredients to Virginia, but no proportions.

Needless to say, the punch was quite strong and everybody had a great time.

Alexandria was just one of the many places that Virginia lived and travelled to in her lifetime – Cincinnati, St. Louis, Texas, California and Missouri being among some of those places.

She recounted these memories to her daughter, Mary, during a cross-country tour that they took in 2014. We are fortunate to have these recollections in a book written by Virginia, titled “The Wayfarers.”

It is a fun, introspective book that takes the readers through many areas and just as many eras.

Virginia’s stories about living in Alexandria during the 1960’s and 70’s are like a history lesson. She and her husband were pioneers when they built their home on Orleans Place. They were the first to build on a plot of undeveloped acreage along Seminary Road previously owned by the Andrews family.

While the house was being built, they stayed in “The Cottage,” a ‘cozy little WWI-era prefab that had supposedly been moved from Fort Belvoir to the Andrew estate. “The Cottage” is no longer there but the large old frame house that stood next to it now houses INOVA Alexandria’s administrator and his family.

Mary had her own memories of growing up there, and said, “You know, Mamsie, I used to look out my bedroom window at that big house and wonder what the family was like that lived in such a big house.”

The house was owned by the Andrews family, and even more history is recalled in Mrs. Andrews’ (formerly Marietta Minnigerode) book titled “Confessions of a Poor Relative.”

Marietta was well connected and many prominent people passed through that house. Among them was President Wilson's wife.

It took a long time for the Ames to build their house, which they called "Vaucluse," but Virginia and her family spent many happy years there.

She enjoyed being surrounded by history and shares the stories about the [Theological] Seminary being taken over by the Union army during the Civil War. There are even some rare photos, taken by Matthew Brady, of Union soldiers marching on the Seminary quadrangle.

Virginia's tales about the rest of her trip – and her life – are just as filled with anecdotes, history and a glimpse into another time and place and is well worth reading.