

Always Virginia
by
Virginia Fritscher



Virginia Day Fritscher, 16th Birthday, July 12, 1935

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Always Virginia

**A Memoir and Diary of a Girl's Life in
Kampsville and Jacksonville, Illinois,
and Routt High School
in the 1920s and 1930s**

**by
Virginia Day Fritscher**

Edited by Jack Fritscher



Palm Drive Publishing
Sebastopol CA

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Dedication

For my mother, Virginia,
my grandmother, Mary Pearl,
and my namesake uncle, John B. Day
who all gave voice to this memoir

— Jack Fritscher, editor

With gratitude
to Mark Hemry
who made this book possible



Virginia Day Fritscher, 1951

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Mother and Son, Virginia Day Fritscher and Jack Fritscher,
off to Ireland, 1993. Photo by Mark Hemry

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FOREWORD

ALWAYS VIRGINIA

A GIRL'S LIFE: KAMPSVILLE, JACKSONVILLE, AND ROUTT HIGH SCHOOL IN THE 1920s AND 1930s

by Jack Fritscher

100th Birthday Edition
1919-2019

In 1919, my mother Virginia Day was born into 9,000 years of continuous local civilization in Kampsville near the Koster archeological site in Calhoun County. Her slice-of-life diary is itself an anthropological artifact from the 1920s and 1930s. As a girl in the town of 300 folks, she collected arrowheads, hunted mushrooms and ginseng, teased teachers, bought candy at Benninger's and clothes at Draper's Dry Goods, delivered mail, and at age 14 paid a pilot 75-cents to fly her over Kampsville and Jacksonville. She was best friends with the Kamp twins, Edna and Edwina, at the Kamp Store owned by their father, Joseph Kamp, son of the founder of Kampsville who opened the store in 1902. In 1991, the Kamp store became the Visitor's Center and Museum of the Center for American Archeology, and the old post office where her cousin was postmistress and her father postman became an archeological laboratory. Her granduncle John Day was a Calhoun County judge.

Her parents met in summer 1910 when her Irish mother, Mary Lawler, born in St. Louis in 1888, took a riverboat 70 miles north to Hamburg to visit her cousins in Kampsville where, in one version of their meeting, she spied a redheaded man crossing a field and said, "That's the man I'm going to marry." In an amusing 1972 interview included in this family memoir of two female generations, she adds her voice to her daughter's about courting Hamburg local

Bartholomew Day, a school teacher who later took a second job as a postman beloved on rural routes around Kampsville—where they started their family in 1911 before moving their five children to Jacksonville in 1930 to attend Routt High School where Virginia was literary editor of the school paper, *The Wag*.

On her 14th birthday in 1933, despite the Depression, she began her optimistic “Daily Diary” about her high-spirited teen life in Jacksonville with friends, school, jobs, dances, movies, and ice-cream-social events with students at the Illinois School for the Deaf. At Routt, she met varsity scholarship letterman George Fritscher in 1935. (She signed her graduation photo to him, “Always, Virginia.”) Her brother John B. Day, the priest who in World War II became a famous Army Chaplain, married them at Our Saviour’s Church in July 1938. They welcomed their first son at Our Saviour’s Hospital in June 1939 before moving to Peoria in 1941 to find work at Caterpillar.

When I was small, we used to drive uphill to Hamburg to visit my Grandma Day and uncles and aunts and cousins. We’d push with our hands and feet on the back of the front seat as Daddy went up the hills, because cars were new to everybody and we thought pushing on the seat was helping the old Model T to climb.

She left her heart in Kampsville and Jacksonville. On her last visit to Kampsville in 1980, she was as delighted to meet the young archeologists as they were to trade stories with her who donated to them the arrowheads, pottery shards, and river pearls she had collected seventy years before the world heard of Koster.

This charming diary of a girl and her family is not a history of big world events. It’s a playful American story of Southern Illinois nostalgia told in the eager voice of the teenage author happily involved in family, courtship, and the popular culture of two small heartland towns. Included are photos and news clippings about the family. Oh, what a lovely major motion picture it will one day make!

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16th Birthday,
July 12, 1935



April 1, 1938



Virginia Day Fritscher, Christmas 1994

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Baby Bart Day between father, Bartholomew Day, and mother, Mary Lynch Day, with brothers Tom, Joe, John, and Jim, and sister Margaret (Mag), 1891



Honorah Anastasia McDonough Lawler, Norine, Mary Pearl Lawler Day, and baby Virginia, 1920