Dr. Virginia B.: When my youngest child, I had three, when he went to college, I moved him into the dorm on a Sunday. School was going to start, Monday. I came home. House was empty. I was working full time, but I remember sitting on the couch saying, "What am I going to do?" and it just came to me that now was the time and I decided I'd go back. I went back as a mature adult. I was 50 years old when I started the program.

Liesel: Welcome to The Magic Mountie Podcast. This is a podcast that's dedicated to helping faculty and other college employees as they try and navigate the challenging fabric of serving students, especially at Mount San Antonio College. But everyone's welcome.

Sun Ezzell: Hi, this is Sun Ezzell with The Magic Mountie Podcast. Retiring interim vice president of instruction Dr. Virginia Burley is a professor emeritus and retired vice president of instruction. She's also a lifelong learner who went back to school for her doctorate. She was called out of retirement this year to serve as interim vice president of instruction. Before she left, she sat down with me to share her reflections on her life in education as a teacher, a manager, and as a student. Join us as Dr. Burley shares her thoughts on the importance of listening, the value of dissenting voices, how courage can open doors and the simple thing everyone can do that just might change someone's life.

Dr. Virginia B.: I was sitting in my classes and I realized at one point that I was a student. I was a parent of students because I had ... My three kids were in college. I was a teacher because I was still teaching part time and I was also a part time administrator. So I had this wonderful perspective of looking at the complexity of the educational dynamic. When I was union president, when I sat at the negotiation table, I learned, even though I didn't like it, I learned the value of conflict and the value of listening. You can't reach a conclusion with a position of strength until you've listened to all the voices. It doesn't mean that it's easy to come to conclusion and it's easy to resolve the problems, but you have all of the possibilities of what's true within the complexity of the organization. So that's one of the things that I found very, very important, that each person should be listened to and valued and respected.

Dr. Virginia B.: So while I'm here, I spend most of my time talking to people. That commitment to making connections, to welcoming people here into my office or into institutional life by listening, I do know that when I can listen from a position of truly accepting that everybody has something to say, it strengthens the institution and it lessens that divisions that cripple us. That ended up being my focus to support members of my team. If somebody asked for an appointment, I make time because that's why I'm here. I remember this lovely story. It was so moving to me. I used to go to the end of the year celebration ceremonies especially they have a lot of them in student services for the like the Bridge or the students or different groups like that. The end of the semester could be a time of feeling tired and worn out by the work and the grind of our work. I found those ceremonies very uplifting and I would go, even though I was tired in the evening.

Dr. Virginia B.: One night they had, I think it was the Bridge students and there were maybe four or five former Bridge students who came back to talk to the group that was just finishing that semester and getting ready to move on. This young man, I shared his story and he said, "I remember the first time I came onto this campus, I had been invited to come to the orientation or information session for the Bridge program and I came, I was interested and I was walking up to building, I think it was at 9C where the student life center is and I looked around and I looked at all these big buildings and it's such a huge campus and I just, I just knew I didn't belong here and I just didn't feel good being here. I was getting ready to turn around and go back to the parking lot. This young woman walked by, she was walking toward me and she smiled and she said hello to me in my own language, in Spanish."

Dr. Virginia B.: It completely changed everything for him. He decided it was okay to go to the information session and he ended up signing up. As he was speaking to the group, I believe he had just been accepted into a master's program. The difference in his life had been a smile and a greeting. We think about the fine work of our campus, which is enormous, this wonderful work and the work groups and the committees and the initiatives and all of that, all those are important. But you know, bottom line, it's the people that provide the welcome, the support and the inspiration every time. I think about that story, just that one smile can make the difference.

Dr. Virginia B.: So I think that at times of discouragement, when you think that what you do doesn't matter, you're not important enough on this campus. Guess what? You very well might be the most important person in someone's life. When I started at Mt. SAC, I was recently divorced and I was really struggling for money. It was a very difficult time in my life and I, when I got the full time job, I had left a marriage that was very, very difficult for me. I was starting my life over again and I knew when I applied for the position, I knew that if I didn't get it I would have to leave teaching and education and just get a job as a secretary or something because I couldn't survive. I didn't have enough money to live.

Dr. Virginia B.: I got the job and I was so excited. I still remember I was so excited when I got the job. I've taken a big risk to start over and make something new and I want to keep learning and growing while I'm here. That was a really important decision from the very beginning of my career because it opened my mind to lots of different possibilities. I started as a full time faculty member of when we had a two year probation provisionary period. So I was tenured after two years. I became the department chair of English beginning of my third year as a faculty member. I mean, I think it was nuts when I think about it. I was completely unprepared but I did. At the end of that, toward the end of that year, a notice came up from the Union saying the person who's took a two year term as president of the Union, the faculty association has decided not to finish his term. So we need to do an emergency election.

Dr. Virginia B.: I thought, "I'll just put my name on there," and I won. I don't know why, but so I became a union president. Again, no preparation, but I opened my mind to new possibilities. Every single thing I did, I learned. Not only learned a new job, but I learned a different perspective. So when I was an adjunct faculty member, I learned to see teaching in one way. As a full time person, I looked at teaching from a different perspective. As chair, as faculty association, going through grievances when people were upset about something. Then I became associate dean in humanities. I just did all sorts of things, you know? Then I became dean here in instruction. As dean, I learned a lot about the processes that run the college. As union president, I learned a lot about faculty participation in governance, which was enormously important to me.

Dr. Virginia B.: I think that that's very beautiful to be able to go through life and widen your perspective. You don't forget what it's like to be a struggling adjunct faculty member or a single parent trying to manage the complexity of your little family. You don't forget those things. You add them to your arsenal of experiences that helps you bring wisdom and solutions that are humane and realistic. So I think that that, those kinds of things have been very important in my life here at Mt. SAC over the decades that I am very happy to say I could be here. I've had this wonderful, wonderful experience here in the last few months of doing final interviews for new faculty. Their doors are opening now too. People are getting positions. So there's a nice closure that the cycle of the college, the life of the college, bringing in new people, saying goodbye to the people who have decided they're finished, facing problems, listening to the voices, all of that, it continues. It's part of the fabric of the college.

Dr. Virginia B.: I believe that if you keep your eyes open and your mind open as you go through life, doors will open up. Possibilities will be there and if you recognize them and you can get past your fear, it's really interesting what you might walk into next. It's wonderful to share my memories and my thoughts about the work we do together.

Speaker 2: Hey, thank you so much for joining us for The Magic Mountie Podcast. We love your likes, we love your shares and we love your comments. So please engage with our community, download from wherever you love to get your podcasts, iTunes, Google, Rate My Professor. We're there and we want you to be back with us next week. Remember, any opinions that are expressed in this podcast do not necessarily represent Mount San Antonio College or any of its agents. We'll see you next time.