

at work with ...

Vivian Turok

Commercial real estate broker and senior vice president at Divaris Real Estate Inc.



JERRY S. ALTARES | SPECIAL TO THE VIRGINIAN-PILOT

GROWING UP in South Africa is very different from being in America. When I graduated from the University of Cape Town in 1974, times were very unsettled. It was the times of the riots. I was looking for a job in either public relations or personnel management. And it wasn't going well.

Everywhere I went they said they just couldn't employ me because I didn't have the experience. And then when I tried for secretarial jobs, they said soon I'd be so bored that they weren't going to take a chance.

One night during this time while I was looking for a job, my roommate Maryanne and I had Gerald Divaris over for dinner. He was her cousin and also a very good friend of my brother's. That night he asked me what I was doing, and I told him I was looking for a job. So he said I should come work for him and Michael Divaris.

At first, I thought I didn't want to do real estate. But I was desperate. I couldn't get a job. So I thought, "What have I got to lose?" And so I joined Divaris Real Estate in Cape Town for a three-month trial.

One day Gerald came up to me and he said, "You know what, I can't go to this appointment. If you do this deal, you can get the full commission."

Well, I clinched the deal and my commission was six times more than my monthly salary. So I was in Heaven. And of course I realized that real estate is really for me.

When I started my job I was the first woman in Cape Town to do commercial real estate. There were a lot of residential agents who were women. And be-

ing a woman in a male-dominated business was quite a challenge for me, especially in chauvinistic South Africa. I worked there for about 10 years.

My husband, who's an architect, had always wanted to live in America and work in America. And so he was looking for a job all over, looking for places where other South Africans were, because he thought that's where we'd be most comfortable.

And so Gerald called. He had been here for a few years, and he said, "If he's looking for a job in America, why don't you come and live in Virginia Beach?"

Paul (her husband) came here. He found a job, and he thought this was very similar to the little town I was from called Worcester. And so he called me and said, "I've got three months. And I thought, 'Oh, I've got a little baby of 10 months and a son of 4 years,' but I decided it was the best thing to move."

I thought I wasn't going to work when I got here. It was 1986. I thought I was going to be a lady of leisure, with two young kids. But then of course Gerald offered me a job, and I started working again.

It was very similar to South Africa in that it was a very male-dominated area. The immigration process was fairly long and complicated since I had no family here. And lit-

tle things like learning to drive on the opposite side of the road were all a challenge for me.

I got to know the people in commercial real estate here very quickly because I started out tenant "repping." And they soon found out that I was going to be one of the boys, and that was the greatest feeling for me.

Sales is not easy. The problem is, you can get very depressed if you let it take over. Over the past 20 or so years here, I feel like I've lived my commercial real estate life according to four rules.

No. 1 is to tell people what you do, and who you are. What you'll find is, your friends will know you're in real estate, but they won't really know what you do.

The second one is never give up. I persevere in everything I do. I'll call you, and if you don't call me back, I'll call you again.

The third thing is be honest with yourself.

Lastly, family comes first. My husband and my children have always been my biggest cheerleaders.

— As told to Pilot writer Josh Brown

THE TUROK FILE

Age 56

Education Bachelor's in psychology and sociology at University of Cape Town

Home Virginia Beach

Family Husband, Paul, two grown children, one Lab-mix dog, Smokey

Hobbies Entertaining, exercising

