



RON TARVER / Staff Photographer

**Virginia Love, "88½," examines handwriting samples in her West Chester home. Her fascination with the analysis dates to the '70s.**

## *We are what we scribble? She analyzes*

By Rebecca VanderMeulen  
FOR THE INQUIRER

**V**irginia Love and 25 of her neighbors in the Hershey's Mill older-adult community outside of West Chester are having lunch at the development's golf club.

Maxine Hermann, who has never met Love, even though the two live nearby, sits at the circular table, takes a blank sheet of paper, and follows Love's instructions:

Copy the sentence "The quick red fox jumps over the lazy brown dog." Write another

sentence of your choosing and sign your name.

Love, who gives her age as 88½, studies handwriting nearly everywhere she goes — at the American Red Cross blood donation center in West Chester, where she volunteers; during her nearly daily visits to the West Chester Area Senior Center; and, of course, at regular meetings of the International Graphoanalysis Society.

On this day, she has been invited for a little lunchtime

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# Handwriting

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analysis.

Hermann, 76, a retired writer, shares her skepticism in the sentence she puts on paper: "What can be told from my handwriting? Very much, maybe."

Love, a lively woman with a crown of short, white hair, peers at the sheet of paper through the glasses sitting on her nose. After a minute she reports her findings in a measured, plainspoken manner.

"The fact that you've written very small is an indication that you like to focus on what you're doing," Love says. "You don't like to stop and start and be interrupted."

Hermann nods. "That's true sometimes."

Love continues.

She says Hermann has a hard time organizing, doesn't enjoy getting into arguments, thinks independently, likes having her own space, and is good at putting her thoughts into words.

Hermann returns to her ice cream. Love pegged her personality pretty closely, she says, but perhaps saw some characteristics many people share.

"It's just an amusing luncheon thing," Hermann says.

But for Love, the activity is not a passing amusement. She has been serious about handwriting analysis, or studying how people "graph their thinking," for decades.

"You're putting your own thinking into writing, and not everyone thinks the same way," she explained. "The different sizes of the loops, the slants, the down strokes,

the end strokes."

When she's doing a serious examination, Love fills out a four-page form noting various personality traits. Along with studying the form of each letter, Love underlines a writing sample with a ruler and uses a protractorlike tool to measure how much the letters are slanted.

People who slant their letters to the right tend to keep their feelings to themselves, Love said, while people whose letters are slanted left speak before they think.

Her fascination with handwriting dates to the 1970s, when she ran a nursery school and kindergarten. She read a newspaper article about a Delaware woman who claimed she could discern children's personalities by studying how they wrote their letters.

"We were teaching children to write, so I thought I'd have to see how that works," Love said.

Still, Love wasn't convinced until she checked out samples from her father, who earned a living cutting headstones.

"He would cut letters on the stone," Love said. "He'd cut flowers. He'd cut lambs, just with his chisel."

She studied her father's handwriting for indications of manual dexterity. And she found them. As one example, his script included flat tops on the lowercase *r*.

Love began her study of handwriting in earnest, earning a certification from the International Graphoanalysis Society.

She later worked with special-edu-



Virginia Love makes notations on a handwriting sample explaining how a loop in a lowercase "d" can denote sensitivity in a person.

cation students and says her knowledge of handwriting helped her understand their needs and learning styles better.

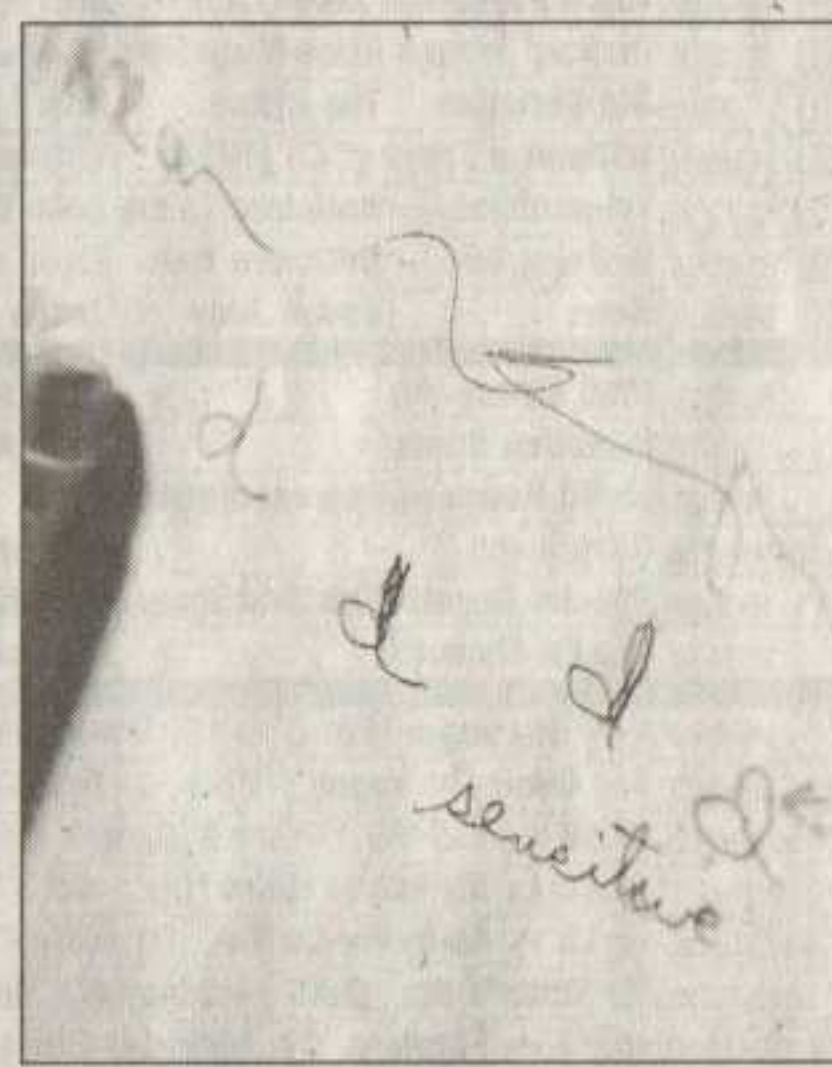
"I never told them," Love said, because she didn't want them "changing the way they were writing."

Anne Pierce, a longtime secretary at the Vanguard School, where Love worked after closing her nursery school, said she doubted Love's skills until she witnessed the results herself.

Pierce said that about 10 years ago, she and her husband went to see a financial adviser. She returned with samples of the adviser's handwriting for Love to check out without her knowing anything about the writer.

"The first words out of her mouth were, 'He's very thrifty.'"

Occasionally, Love sees traits that make her uncomfortable. She re-



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calls analyzing handwriting at a political meeting several years ago and meeting a woman whose writing sample indicated a promiscuous nature.

"When I looked at it, the first thing I thought was I didn't want her to babysit my grandchildren," Love remembers.

After Love's husband, Eddie, died in 1985, she began devoting even more time to handwriting analysis.

"I decided to do something mental and something physical," explained Love, who proudly shows off a box of medals from the Chester County Senior Games recognizing her exploits in basketball, horse-shoes, and ping-pong. She's also a self-taught painter and plays violin and harmonica in a seniors band called the Grateful Alive.

Her interest in handwriting led her to pursue a degree in psychology, reasoning that learning about

the human mind would give insight into why people write the way they do. Taking one class at a time, she graduated at 79 from Immaculata College in 2001.

Handwriting analysis isn't just for party games, though.

Professional analysts, or graphologists, are called upon in many situations. They come up with personality profiles of the writers of death threats. They help people glean the personality traits of their ancestors or figure out career paths. Companies even hire them to evaluate personality traits of job applicants.

Andrea McNichol, a nationally recognized handwriting expert, says a thorough reading of a writer's personality requires more than a few paragraphs of print and cursive.

"That's equivalent to you going to the doctor's office and him taking your temperature and saying, 'You don't have a fever. Goodbye,'" she said.

Skeptics view graphoanalysis as a pseudoscience on a par with astrology or palm reading. Among them is Richard J. Klimoski, a professor of psychology and management at George Mason University in Fairfax, Va., who researched handwriting analysis as a predictor of sales success. He said analysts seem correct because they observe their subjects' behavior and make vague pronouncements about what their writing means.

But Love remains convinced of its power. She produces file folders of assertions that it works, from lecture notes to quotes from luminaries, including Sigmund Freud.

Her response to Klimoski's doubts?

"I'd like to do his handwriting."