

Tomi Lewis Reneau (Part II) -- 12/14/2007

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Interviewed by Nancy Bruns*

We're once again in Tomi's kitchen.)

Interviewer: Let's try to pick up where we left off - although we lost some recorded material when one of the transcribers tangled the tape. We ought to talk about your interest in family and genealogy which I know continued through the years you lived away.

Tomi: Mother had given me a DAR membership for my 18th birthday.

Interviewer: Just what you wanted.

Tomi: Oh yes. I didn't want a car or a trip to Europe. I wanted a DAR membership. (Both are laughing) And I managed to totally ignore the DAR membership for years. Then when I was living in Florida a friend of mine, Judy Hawkins Barton, wrote or called and said she was the Regent of a new chapter that was forming. She asked me to switch to hers. Well of course I would. I don't know anything about the chapter where I was. So I joined and then over the years got to be registrar and then Regent.

Interviewer: This is of a Florida chapter?

Tomi: No, this is the Overwharton Parish Chapter in Stafford County.

Interviewer: Can you tell me anything about the history of the Overwharton Parish chapter.

Tomi: It was formed out of the chapter here ... the chapters just get too big. And others form.

Interviewer: How many of them are here? Are there three?

Tomi: It depends really on what you mean by here. There's one in Fredericksburg, then there's Overwharton Parish and then others in Stafford. They are a good group and I'm going to miss them. I enjoyed being registrar. Regent was a challenge.

Interviewer: The registrar is actually the one who works on the genealogy?

Tomi: Yes, back to genealogy again. Well, I'll probably switch to a chapter in Florida once I get settled in Tampa. I also joined the United Daughters of the Confederacy.

Interviewer: Had your mother belonged to that?

Tomi: I thought Mother had. I just knew she had. And I went to join under her name, but it turned out she didn't belong. The person she tried to go in on was a Yankee.

Interviewer: I don't believe that will work.

Tomi: No, but you can join the Union group and I did that. I belong to the Daughters of Union Veterans and the Daughters of the Grand Army of the Republic. I remember the day the postman came to the door and he was grinning. He had certificates from both of them-- the Daughters of Union Veterans in one hand and papers from the United Daughters of the Confederacy in the other. My husband about died laughing. He said are you going to tell the UDC that you also belong to the other group? I said I don't think so. At least not right away. But I feel I honor both of them.

Interviewer: I can see that you used your mother's relative for the Union group but who did you use for the UDC?

Tomi: Preston Wellford. Remember I said there were six sisters and one brother. Preston is the one I came in on. John Spotswood Wellford had several daughters and Preston. He is the one. He was a surgeon or medical assistant and helped found some of the hospitals in Newnan, Ga.

Interviewer: And obviously you could not use Dr. Wellford as your Revolutionary War ancestor for the DAR since he was British. (DAR members may use more than one patriot. Obviously, Tomi since she entered as Thelma Lewis' daughter was using a Runyon ancestor.)

Tomi: I'm not too sure of that. I am putting that through as we speak. Mainly a requirement is that the ancestors help with the sick and wounded. Well he did that and I have the letter from George Washington inviting him to live in Fredericksburg.

Interviewer: You have the letter?

Tomi: No. No, the only letters I have of the early period are from Robert writing to his wife about waiting to be paid by Washington for service. This was back about 1812. There are wonderful, wonderful old tales but I'm not going to go into them now. I do want to advise everyone to get the family stories down now while people can still recount them. We live history every day.

Interviewer: This is probably why you liked oral history. It's a way of witnessing history.

Tomi: I think it's basically getting a record in words a time of gracious living that is no more.

Interviewer: Too, we've gotten people who really experienced subsistence living, especially during the Depression. It's important to tell that story.

Tomi: People act and react to situations. Most of the people we interview lived through World War II and there was a coming together, a sharing. It was what can I give you, not what can you give me. Kennedy would have been of that same generation and he said Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country. So the people we interviewed knew how to take care of each other. They didn't have to be told. They had a higher moral standard than we do today. Young people today scare me sometimes.

Interviewer: But it's our fault. All the fast communication and yet we haven't been able to pass on moral values.

Tomi: And being afraid to say no.

Interviewer: Peer pressure.

Interviewer: I have a favorite oral history story. Do you?

Tomi: What's yours?

Interviewer: I have always called it Dr. Carter Rowe's pink poodle story but I think the poodle was more red than pink. It was a Saturday when his mother dyed the draperies red and the Rowe children then decided to see how their white poodle would look red. The next day was Sunday and the Rowes all attended the Presbyterian Church which kept its doors open during the summer. During a prayer when everybody had their eyes closed (but young Carter Rowe) the pink

poodle wandered in up one aisle to the feet of the minister who was deep in silent prayer, sniffed, and then departed. After the service a lady asked Carter Rowe if he had noticed a pink poodle... Well he told it much better than I do. (TOMI joined the Oral History project about five years ago. She has conducted and transcribed her own interviews including one with Mrs. Sidney Armstrong who refused to be interviewed by anyone else. She has also transcribed many interviews done by others and has provided graphics for all of the interviews done within the last five years. Her dedication to the project and her insistence on adding graphics have never been properly acknowledged publicly. She has been chairman of the project and also with Nancy Bruns co-chairman. Her participation started with a piece of pink paper thrust into the Oral History box at HFFI. It said Tomi Reneau will type oral histories.)

Tomi: As far as a favorite story, I don't think I have one. I always found something in each interview that delighted me. I always found something that interested and surprised me in every interview. I did a bunch of neat people. Wait, I do have one story. I'd done Hattie Wheeler and had finished up the interview. Hattie was a black lady here in town. Her husband had worked for Gari Melchers and she'd talked about her life with Fielding, her husband, and what they'd done as a young couple and what they'd done as a married couple. I was packing up to leave and I looked at a picture on the wall and there she was at the James Monroe Law Office. And I said Hattie what are you doing at the James Monroe law office. "Well," she said, "I was the slave over there for about 40 years." Later I asked John Pearce what she meant and he said she was just always there when they needed help. But the way she worded it I didn't know how to react...

Interviewer: Yesterday we were talking about the Stardusters and I had not heard of them in all the interviews that we have done. Now tell me about the grown up Stardusters, are they the BCs (Bodacious Chicks) that you talk about?

Tomi: Not exactly. Some are Stardusters and some are other friends from high school. We decided one year to get together without husbands and catch up ... We'd done it at the yearly class reunion but you just don't really have time. One of the women said why don't we get together for about a week and catch up and thus the Bodacious Chicks were born. At that time we had Mary Jo Deere, Libby Lindstrom, Susie Simon who is now deceased, Donna Green, Hale Van Valzah, Lou Hubbard, Mary Katherine Goodwin, Beth Massey, Margaret Thompson, Shirley Stevens and Anne Moore Hardesty. Then when

Susie passed away we added Marcia Carter and Sarah Key. But now we're back to about 13 of us. We used to go to the mountains and then the beach. Now it's just the beach. We rent a huge house with lots of bedrooms, and we just kick back and talk. It's sort of funny now we're talking about grandchildren. I think there's one woman who is a great grandmother.

Interviewer: And these were all in the same class. That must have been a huge class.

Tomi: No, I think there were 97 graduates. And we're down to about 85 living and these are all members of that same class.

Interviewer: When you were in high school were there a lot of fads, clothes fads, other kind of fans?

Tomi: Bobby sox, poodle skirts, those little peter pan collars. Lots of rock and roll music. Lots of sock hops. We graduated in 1957... Elvis came on the scene. Lots of getting together at somebody's house in the basement and turning the juke box on and really dancing, dancing like you're supposed to dance where you actually touch each other. You don't stand there and wiggle. Kids today don't know what they're missing if they don't slow dance. It was a trustworthy time, a good time.

Interviewer: Did you have a time to be home?

Tomi: You had to be home early by today's standards. First of all you didn't go out on a school night. It was either Friday or Saturday night. There'd be a pep rally before the football game at what's the old Maury School and that would be like on Thursday night before the game, and they'd go all the way through town. You know there would just this big parade and people would just join in and stop and whoop and holler and cheer every block and cheer all the way over and then cheer some more and go home. Then Friday night would be the football game. And Saturday night would be some kind of party somewhere.

Interviewer: And then Sunday morning you got up and went to church.

Tomi: You're darn tooting. You went to church.

Interviewer: People adhered to certain standards and patterns. You would wear a hat to church? Tow Oh yes, hats, gloves, heels and hose.

Interviewer: Ugh.

Tomi: When I came back I was one of the first people to wear slacks in St. George's. But I couldn't face hose and heels much more.

Interviewer: Did you find many differences when you came back? I know we've talked off tape about how the town had undergone some sort of transformation during the years you were not living here, beginning?

Tomi: The coming of Spotsylvania Mall marked the beginning probably. The people that I'd graduated with I saw every year and we had kept up with. We'd undergone the same experiences-the marriages, births, deaths, the death of John Kennedy, the moon landing, all the social changes. Yet downtown, they were the same. They were always courteous to the customers. If somebody comes in and he or she doesn't know how to treat the customer, the boss will show them in that nice southern way--by example. And meanwhile you just have to say, "Well bless his heart, he's doing the best he can. He just doesn't know any better."

Interviewer: Well that's probably true. But I've noticed that there is an element here of what I would term for lack of another way to describe them as real rednecks. Is that new? I grew up 'in a small southern town, too, and I simply don't remember rednecks.

Tomi: I think we've always had them. We called them country bumpkins. Actually we used to say, "They're from Stafford. We were from Fredericksburg and they were from Stafford." Now I know there are some good people out in Stafford, and I was possibly wrong in my assessment of that. I don't where they get it (the redneck behavior) from. I think the television and the music culture influence a lot of people. I don't think you are going to find a lot of prejudices in Fredericksburg as far as race relations go. There may be some on both sides but not a lot. I don't think you are going to find any more prejudice in race relations than in gender relations in Fredericksburg. The black community hasn't been held back any more than the women have been in Fredericksburg. Both have had a slow growth but a steady one. I look now at the Vietnamese and they have found their niche in the nail industry. We all have a way to fit in. You just have to work hard and find it. Too often people say no I don't want to do that. You find it for me and give it to me. That's not what our forefathers would have done. I cannot imagine the people who started this

country saying they were not willing to work and to fight for this country. That just wouldn't have worked.

Interviewer: Let go back again to your mother, as a widow she still lived upstairs above the store. Then she sold and had to move. She was not happy to move you said.

Tomi: She did not want to move.

Interviewer: What did she think she was going to do?

Tomi: I don't know. But I remember the actual day of the move; she was still at her desk on the third floor going through papers. They had cleared out the entire house and she was still sitting in her chair at her desk sorting paper clips. Tucky and I were downstairs in the kitchen trying to think how we were going to persuade her to leave. One of the truck drivers came in. He was a big burley guy, cute as a button. And he said, "Ladies I understand there's that lady upstairs and she won't move. I said you go upstairs and see what you can do. He went upstairs and he came flying down. I mean flying and he's sputtering and he keeps saying "Do you know who that is? Do you know who that is upstairs?" And I said "Yeah." And he said, "That's Mrs. Lewis. She was my teacher in high school and she used to come up to me in the hallway and point her finger at me and say 'young man you button that shirt up. We don't wear our shirts open down to the second button in this school. "She always made me button my shirt up." Tucky and I howled and said then you go get her. Well we hear this noise upstairs and things being sort of moved around. All of a sudden we hear Mother laughing her head off and he is carrying her down the stairs just like Rhett carried Scarlett. She is just laughing. And I have a picture of that. And once she moved to Florida she was fine.

Interviewer: Well there was bridge.

Tomi: There was plenty of bridge and there was church and there was the family (Tucky's) across the streets. There were three children there. And there was just plenty to do. During the years Cal and I had children and our son grew up and moved to California and our daughter Lisa was in Florida and she married and had a daughter. So people are spread out.

Interviewer: But your daughter Lisa is here in Fredericksburg.

Tomi: She and her daughter Brenna are right here. In fact she just bought a house.

Interviewer: Leaving a root in Fredericksburg.

Tomi: Yes, they'll carry on right here. In fact I just got word from the UDC that at the next meeting-which I am not going to be able to attend-they would have three generations, me, Lisa and Brenna for the first time in a long, long time. I gave Brenna a UDC membership for her 18' birthday.

Interviewer: Just what she wanted. (Both Tomi and the Interviewer are laughing.)

Tomi: Just what she wanted. Yes, indeed.

Tomi: We were talking about moving and I was saying I hadn't realized it but I've missed moving. About every four years you really clean and then you start over with everything clean and new. In the military you have to pass a "white glove inspection" every time you move. The first time we moved, the man really came in white gloves. And he ran a finger over the ledge on the inside of the closet and it was dusty. I didn't know there was a whole shelf to be cleaned below the stove top Well, you clean it again and they inspect it again and you learn how to really clean. You learn to hope that husband makes rank and you can have enough money to hire a cleaning crew to come in and do it. But in the mean time you watch what they do. I learned that Q tips work well on heat grills. Places that you have to clean that you never thought were there.

Interviewer: Did you have something you always took with you to make it seem like home?

Tomi: I did have a full sized poster of Santa Claus and a tree. And I remember every Christmas I would put that up until it finally gave up the ghost and it couldn't be put up any more. It was about six feet tall and about four or five feet across. Slowly we accumulated this furniture over the years. And we kept inheriting the furniture and paperwork that we had to accommodate. We bought this house because the furniture would fit it.

Interviewer: Like the dining room table? Where did you get this huge dining room table?

Tomi: Aunt Elsie. It was in her house but I don't think I ever saw it together. She used it in two parts.

Interviewer: Let's go back to the drug store once more because I'm now looking at a picture of the front window and I see a picture of Franklin D. Roosevelt. Was your father a Democrat?

Tomi: He never talked politics.

Interviewer: The people in the drug store never talked politics?

Tomi: If they did it was after hours. But I think it was not the thing to do when you are in business to discuss politics or religion. But I never heard mother or him discuss politics at all.

Interviewer: Do you remember any of the people who came in the drugstore? You remember Lem Houston coming in.

Tomi: They were just normal people who came in to get stamps or have a coke or an ice cream. They were just always there. If you were downtown at all at one or the other you came in the drugstore or in Uncle Charles' drug store.

Interviewer: And the Fountain Service had an awning?

Tomi: It did indeed and it had a coal shoot out front. A coal shoot was on the sidewalk and the doors opened and the coal truck came and dumped coal down it to fire the furnace. I remember one time going down in the basement from inside the back room in the store. I must have been nine or ten and I was going to walk under the store to see how far I could go. I must have gone 10 feet when I thought I heard a noise. I ran back out as fast as I could. I don't think I have ever been as scared in my life.

Interviewer: Was it the coal truck unloading coal?

Tomi: No, it must have been George Alexander having a nip. He was a colored man who worked around the store doing chores and helped cut grass and stuff. Dad said later there used to be a tunnel running from the store over to what would have been Becks. That was when the Becks had a bakery over there.

Interviewer: Across the street?

Tomi: Across the street, or in that general vicinity. We had a coal fired furnace for a long time and so the coal truck would come and open up the doors and throw the coal down there. And George would go down there and stoke the furnace. So it was probably George who I heard down there. But I never did go back. I'm not sure I'd go down there even today.

Interviewer: Let me backup again. You said that you do not know why your grandfather M.M. Lewis Sr. came here?

Tom: I do not know. I could look it up because I have all the family tales from all the family. I have just assumed that since he married a lady from here and she wanted to get married here they just I settled here and opened his drug store. First it was down on Caroline Street where Fuerherds was and then he moved up to the comer of Princess Anne and William.

Interviewer: A good comer. Tomi: A good comer because Princess Anne was Rt. 1 at the time.

Interviewer: Was Princess Anne commercial then?

Tomi: It had a few stores but it was Rt. 1, so all the traffic came that way.

Interviewer: So you would stop.

Tomi: You would stop. I don't even know if there was a light there. I do remember during Hurricane Hazel at that corner there was a square sign that said No Left Turn. One of the policemen, Joe Boggs, and I went down to keep that sign from blowing down the hill and we were almost blown away coming back up the hill.

Interviewer: William Street was called William?

Tomi: It was William when I was growing up, but before that it had been Commerce.

Interviewer: Why did the street names keep changing?

Tomi: I think the old names were more prestigious and more historic.

Interviewer: When do you think this idea of an historic town began? I know when Historic Fredericksburg Foundation was established, but I

mean before that. How did this community come to be viewed as an "historic town" more so than others in Virginia?

Tomi: I think basically Fredericksburg was just a sleepy little town but it was well constructed with brick homes. There were a lot of little towns with wood frame homes that over the years burned or rotted or something. But because Fredericksburg's homes were brick and it was on the river and it was a port etc. I think it just stayed the way it had been. It was a sleepy little town when I was growing up. We could all walk everywhere. We didn't own a car. Well, I say that. Mother won a car. In fact Mother won three cars. Mother was forever entering contests and winning things. She really won three cars, but she sold them all. Her idea was that we didn't need a car. We could walk where we needed to go or get a ride.

Interviewer: We started talking about contests yesterday and never got back to it. What else did she win besides cars?

Tomi: She won all sorts of cookware and she'd win at that time big checks for \$ 10 or \$25 or maybe even \$100. She entered every contest that came along. A lot of them had to do with writing. She could write and compose fresh thoughts and do bits of poetry.

Interviewer: I think we're ready to jump ahead some. You're married and in the course of your husband's military career you move 37 times. He finally retires from the service and you settle in North Carolina where you start your own business.

Tomi: Photography. I loved it. The crew he was working with there with Coty was a good crew and it was a good 20 years there for us.

Interviewer: But your love of Fredericksburg never went away. I remember Jack Johnson (late town historian) saying that you would call him from anywhere you were to ask a question about Fredericksburg. So you stayed interested all of those years.

Tomi: My mother taught Jack in school. That's what we figured out when we got together and finally got to chatting. Mother taught a lot of the people that we have interviewed.

Interviewer: When you called him were you following up on genealogy?

Tomi: I didn't get into genealogy as genealogy until about 25 years ago. I ignored it for a good 20 years. I had heard it all of my life. Aunt Elsie as I have said walked me around the town and told me stories, showed me everything. Mother also joined every group that came along. She belonged to Huguenots, DAR, and Colonial everything. She did it the hard way before computers. She would have to write off for proof and she would tell me about the birth and death of people. I wasn't a bit interested in genealogy until I inherited this collection of letters from the Wellford side of the family that dated to the 1820s and 1830s to the 1860s. This was the six sisters and brother all writing back and forth. And I started typing them and putting them all on the computer and that's how I got into it. They were not just tombstones they were real people. And the more I saw them as real people, the more I wanted to know about things and people in Fredericksburg that they were connected with. Not just homes, but places. And who were the Hurkcamps and who were the Willis's. And on and on it went. Then Cal got ready to retire for the second time and I said do you want to go where our daughter is living? No, I don't think so. Where our son is living? No, I don't think so. Your brother? No, I don't think so. And in the meantime I had been coming up to Fredericksburg at least twice a year for a long time. I would stay with a long time friend from high school (now deceased) and we would do Fredericksburg. Finally I said to Cal, "Do you care where we live?" And he said no he really didn't and I said, YES, I am going home. He didn't know it, but we'd picked this house out ... and 10 years ago we came back here. I have to admit I did not want to live out off the dreaded Rt. 3. I wanted to live downtown. We came back and we looked. What we could afford, our furniture wouldn't fit in and what the furniture would fit in, we couldn't afford. So we picked this house out. And we fit perfectly.

Interviewer: And I am sure the Wellford House was already occupied. It is a beautiful house. And you came here and you resumed your census work. You had been doing census work in North Carolina?

Tomi: I had been doing the census every 10 years and I came here and went to work at what they call "part time full time." That means that you are not a full time employee so they don't give you all the benefits. So some weeks I would work 40 hours and some weeks I would only work 20. I am considered as part time and I always had to be available. I would work seven or eight surveys for them at a time and I loved it. It forced me to get out and drive around the area and that was fun when we could afford the gas. Before today, I had all of Orange County for awhile and then I got Spotsylvania. Now I have Orange, Spotsylvania, a little bit of Stafford, a little bit of King George,

little bit of Louisa, and Fredericksburg. I do some census survey every month.

Interviewer: Is there something that you survey business or farming or something-and the average citizen wouldn't even know about?

Tomi: The one survey that's been going on the longest is employment statistics and that's been going on since the 1930s. So that's the longest running survey in the world. I do that. I do one that gets information on schools and one on housing.

Interviewer: I know you did one on prisons.

Tomi: Prisons, jails, the homeless. I worked on one of the first ever to survey homeless.

Interviewer: How did you find the homeless? What do you ask them?

Tomi: They had a method of locating people. Then we worked in pairs. That's somewhat confidential and it's a series of many, many questions. We do the one that Greenspan used to get the price index.

Interviewer: What else?

Tomi: We did find that a 10 year census is not enough so we are updating 10 per cent of the population every year. There are just a lot surveys, and once a year we all get together on each survey to update information.

Interviewer: Have you had some funny experiences?

Tomi: Well I've been threatened. I had a dog bite me. There was a man who wanted to answer census questions in the nude. You just keep cool. Most people are very nice. Every once in a while someone doesn't want to cooperate. I think it's because they just don't understand what the surveys are used for. I try to tell them that these statistics get roads in front of your door and keep the police and fire departments coming and help stores determine where to locate and helps government decide where to place schools. It's obvious that you don't need to place an elementary school in a retirement community. We have to know this information to help make plans.

Interviewer: And this convinces them?

Tomi: Most of the time it does. But there's always the ones who say, "You're not coming in my door. You're the government. I have no use for you."

Interviewer: Nobody has ever shot at you?

Tomi: No, not yet.

Interviewer: This was pretty new to you when you came to Fredericksburg?

Tomi: I'd done the 10 year one, but this is different.

Interviewer: This is a pretty fascinating job.

Tomi: I love it. I find out about people and how they live and get along. I worry about the elderly who live in such dire straits. Some people keep their lights off in order to afford their medications. We can't tell anybody about them because everything is totally confidential. But if we find someone in dire straits we can tell them where they can go to get help. We just can't tell anyone about them.

Interviewer: Besides this new job when you came to back to Fredericksburg, you also plunged into the preservation work of Historic Fredericksburg Foundation.

Tomi: Didn't I though? As Mother would say, "Up to my earballs", I was asked to be on the board of HFFI and I have thoroughly enjoyed that. Then someone got me into oral history. At first I couldn't understand why we didn't just do one a month. What was taking so long?

Interviewer: But you know now, don't you? You know that we've done more than 90 and that you've contributed to 60 of these. I truly don't know how we will ever do it without you. You typed HFFI house marker reports for a while. There is a great deal of work which goes into those.

Tomi: There is. I joined the committee for a while and typed reports. But mainly I did oral history. And my first one was Frances Armstrong who was my teacher and was our class mascot. She still comes to our class gatherings. Then I did Mary Faulkner who was the wife of the rector of St. George's when I was growing up. It was an honor to sit

down with these people and to ask them about things that happened when I was growing up.

Interviewer: I am always astounded about your knowledge of the town. You know where every street is. Between growing up here and the census, you know where everything is.

Tomi: Or was. Coming back to visit is different from coming back to live. I was gone nearly 40 years and there were lots and lots of changes. I think one of the better changes is Central Park. And I guess I am the only one in town to say that. The large stores that are out there could not have been put downtown and could not have been supported downtown. There is no way you could have had a Target downtown, or a Lowes or a Petsmart or any of those large stores. We needed those large stores as places to go shopping and for income for the city. And once the Silver Cos. got it started and the tax money began to come in it revitalized Fredericksburg. A lot of the small stores that went out and say that they went out because of Central Park might have gone out anyway. Fredericksburg was a very small sleepy town, slowly dying.

Interviewer: Tourism was not enough?

Tomi: No, tourism was not enough. When Spotsylvania Mall came in and it came in before Central Park, a lot of stores from downtown went there. That might have helped tourism a little bit. Then it was a question of what do we do with this dead or dying downtown and they revitalized it and came out with these wonderful little tourist places, antiques shops, book stores, all sorts of restaurants, jewelry stores. I love going down there and seeing the tree lined streets. The restaurants have their tables on the sidewalks. There are more people down there on any given day than there ever would be in a typical week back when I was growing up here. In fact when I was growing up we didn't have any place wonderful to go to look at or look for unusual things like Dan Finnegan's pottery.

Interviewer: We didn't have Dan Finnegan?

Tomi: We didn't have Dan Finnegan. He has done some wonderful stuff, there are new people coming in, new thoughts, new processes, new ways of doing things. I love the way it is coming out. It's great. I just hope they don't destroy things to make way for the new. The slave block was broken and I hope they don't decide to relocate it to the proposed slavery museum. Some things need to stay the way they

are. It needs to remain on that corner. Fix it. Protect it. But it needs to stay there. You wouldn't move that any more than you would take a monument from the Masonic Cemetery. I have been collecting postcards of Fredericksburg since we came back and I have several of the Masonic Temple. As a building, it tickles me because it has probably gone through eight or ten renovations over the years. I probably have 1,000 postcards of Fredericksburg and the Fredericksburg area.

Interviewer: You are going to take them with you?

Tomi: Yes.

Interviewer: This maybe a good time to say that we're sitting here in the midst of boxes. You and your husband are moving to Tampa, FL in just a month.

Tomi: They came from Virginia Historical Society yesterday to claim the Wellford papers, the three Wellford day books and some other things that belonged to the Wellford's.

Interviewer: These are the Wellfords who lived in the Wellford House?

Tomi: The Wellfords who lived in the Wellford house on Caroline Street.

Interviewer: This is the house at 1501 Caroline St.? We looked at it years ago and decided we couldn't fit in.

Tomi: It's not big enough for me. For the life of me I can't see how he fitted his family of six daughters and a boy into that house. How did they all get in and out of there?

Interviewer: When you were a kid growing up there weren't things like antiques shops?

Tomi: There was one.

Interviewer: Were there tourists at all?

Tomi: Very few. There were some tourist homes for people traveling through. There weren't that many attractions. There was Kenmore and the Rising Sun Tavern.

Interviewer: Mary Washington House and the Apothecary?

Tomi: The same ones that are here now, but they were just not as well presented. And now there is the trolley which is excellent and the horse drawn carriage. The tours are better. It's just nice to go into the Rising Sun Tavern and see the wenches there.

Interviewer: I think the restaurants have updated a bit to serve a tourist crowd.

Tomi: Correct. Cal and I counted when we moved here there were 38 restaurants within a two or three miles radius and now it's up over seventy.

Interviewer: And when you were a child there were two or three? People ate at the drug store counter.

Tomi: That's right. Next door to where I grew up there was the Blue Grill. I don't remember going in but once or twice in my life. It was not a place that girls went in. The Southern Palms Restaurant was down on Princess Anne. Rango's Circle was across the river. They were the first to serve pizza. Dinty Moore's was here.

Interviewer: Anne's Grill?

Tomi: Annie's was here. Then those who could would go to the Country Club. We didn't belong so we didn't eat there. I remember when the restaurant that is now Shoney's opened. I cannot remember the name, it had tablecloths and candles. It was a nice place. And it was out of town. It was quite a deal.

Interviewer: When you were brought up I think there were four banks.

Tomi: And now there's one on every corner and more opening all the time.

Interviewer: Just in a decade it's become quite a little metropolis. Sleepy no more.

Interviewer: This sort of brings us again to the present situation. What do you really think of what is going on here with all the people coming in and people who want to convert Fredericksburg to what it probably never was. What do you really think?

Tomi: I think that if Fredericksburg can maintain its identity, as the historic part can certainly do, then what goes on at the edge of town needn't matter. We need to respect the historic town that's here. It's sort like what goes on inside your home. What goes on outside and at the neighbor's doesn't matter. You need to be able to hold your head up. If we keep Fredericksburg as an historic town, then this part out here where I live will come and go. We need to have the new people and the new ideas, but they need to understand what's gone before them. If they don't know the history of the area then they cannot appreciate it. As of two months ago I had a house on either side of me with three small children each and I made sure those children got to visit Historic Fredericksburg. I took them. The parents had never even been downtown. They didn't work downtown. They work in Washington or Northern Virginia.

Interviewer: It is true where I worked (Rising Sun Tavern) that people would come in and say they had lived all of their lives here and never visited before. What do you think is the answer? How can people come to view it as it should be viewed?

Tomi: One suggestion might be a coloring book about Fredericksburg given free to first and second graders. That might help get the parents interested. That could be something HFFI could undertake. I think we don't have the Welcome Wagon anymore. But it was good. There are lots of things you could do--come downtown and get 10 per cent off a trolley ride. Come downtown and see what we have. This project with the dog and cats this summer--Pawsitively--was good because it got people downtown and you have to get them downtown if they are ever going to understand what Fredericksburg really is. It certainly has to be a process of education. If they never come downtown but live and shop four or five miles out and go to DC to work--

Interviewer: They might as well be in Arkansas.

Tomi: Right. Parents are not going to take the first step if they haven't done it. So it has to be through the school system.

Interviewer: I always thought it was interesting that the Welcome Wagon visitor was Frances Hewetson who herself was a come here, but she had recognized the value of the old town.

Tomi: It's a question with Welcome Wagon of how far out of town do you go?

Interviewer: Should we end by talking about the flood of 1942? No Fredericksburg interview is complete without the flood of 1942.

Tomi: I was about two then. Dad very seldom left the store because he was so busy. But he left the store and he and mother walked my sister and me up William Street towards the college and we got to where Kenmore Avenue is and there was all this water. He picked me up and he was holding me and he pointed out a boat and a relative's house (the Turners) was flooded. All I wanted to do is get down and play in the water. I couldn't understand why I couldn't play in the water. It smelled.

Interviewer: I guess it would. Was it still?

Tomi: No, I think it moved.

Interviewer: And you wouldn't remember how long it took for it to drain out.

Tomi: I have no idea.

Tomi and the Interviewer conclude the interview by talking about personal matters and committee business.