



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

By Tina Mathews, CRRL Intern, editor

Interviewed by Nancy Bruns

Tomi Lewis Reneau

This is Nancy Bruns from the Oral History project and today is Sept. 22, 2005. We're in Tomi Reneau's kitchen where we've met so many times to work on oral history and we're doing something a little different. I'm interviewing our own long time member, Tomi Lewis Reneau. Tomi is a Fredericksburg native, well known for her knowledge of local history, her skill in photography and graphic Y, arts, for her genealogical research, and as a book collector. Tomi and her husband Cal are relocating to Tampa, FL. Those of us who have worked with her have always thought she would make a good subject. So here goes.

Interviewer: First, tell me when and where you were born?

Tomi: I always thought if anyone asked me that I would say as Charlie Brown's Snoopy did, "It was a dark and stormy night." Basically it was the blizzard of 1940-Feb. 7, 1940. Mom and Dad (Thelma Runyon Lewis and Magnus M. Lewis, Jr.) lived at 415 William St above Dad's store. My sister (Thelma Lewis Jr. called Tucky) has been born at home upstairs four years before and mother didn't want home delivery again. Two years after Tucky was born, Mother had a child born at the hospital and that baby girl (Eliza Susan Lewis) did not live a full day. So this time around Mother was going to a Dr. Rucker in Richmond and he was famous for his "magic pills" which I think were probably some kind of drug to reduce the pain. Dad called Ann Shelton King. She was the only one of them having a car. And the three of them took off for Richmond in the blizzard.

Interviewer: Ann driving?

Tomi: Oh yes, Ann driving. And a policeman pulled them over way down toward Richmond somewhere and he saw that Mother was definitely in labor. So he turns the red light on and I get an escort to the hospital. And as Mother said, she got as far as the entrance way and I decided I was not going to wait around. We didn't make it to the delivery room and she didn't get her magic pill. That was Feb. 7, 1940. I was born in Richmond and brought home to Fredericksburg as soon as possible.



Interviewer: And you lived in Fredericksburg?

Tomi: For 19 years.

Interviewer: And you married a Marine and moved away. But you came back which we're getting to. But let's go back to the basics, as we always should do.

Your mother and father and their dates of birth...

Tomi: Dad was born here in 1896 and died in December of 1953. Mother was born in 1904 in Kentucky and then died in 1999 in Tampa. But the years of their married life they spent in Fredericksburg.

Interviewer: Living over the drug store at 415 William St.?

Tomi: I believe so. I think that's the only house they ever lived in during their married life.

Reconstructed view of The Fountain Service circa 1950 by Tomi

Interviewer: That was a local custom? Merchants quite often lived over their businesses?

Tomi: Yes, that's right.

Interviewer: But somewhere I read that your father wandered around a bit before he settled down. Is that right?

Tomi: I believe so. They weren't married until the early thirties, so Dad was about 36 years old before he got married. He had joined the Army in World War I and served overseas in France in the medical corps. He was not a doctor but he was a medic. And then he came back and went back to college-to VMI for a while. In the meantime his brother (Charles Lewis) had inherited their father's drug store. And that store is now Hyperion Coffee which is at 205 Princess Anne St. It was Lewis Drug Store on the corner of William and Princess Anne Streets when my grandfather and Uncle Charles had it. So Dad opened his own drug store down on Princess Anne Street and ran a sandwich drug store down there for a while and then moved over to 415 William St. It is now The Flower Shop. But it was called The Fountain Service in Dad's day. He had a drug store there of fountain service, comic books, newspapers and sundries, and a pharmacy at the back. (According to an account published in the Fredericksburg Times of

August 1995, Mag and Thelma Lewis bought 415 William St. a building which dated to 1826 in December of 1934 and undertook extensive renovations to make it safe and comfortable for their family and The Fountain Service. The debt on the building was finally paid off in 1944 by what Thelma said was saving "a nickel here and a penny there. ")

Interviewer: Could he fill prescriptions?

Tomi: He could not fill prescriptions. He had two daughters who would run prescriptions down to Uncle Charles' and back. So everyone knew we'd be the legs on the prescription services. Two or three times a day we'd gather up the prescriptions and run them down to Uncle Charles and wait for them and bring them back. Dad also had a Post Office substation there and a lot of people came in to mail packages, buy money orders and stamps. I think this may have been the only substation in town.

Interviewer: It was a busy place?

Tomi: Very busy, very busy.

Interviewer: Did you help? I mean besides running the prescriptions up and down the street.

Tomi: Yes. I am not sure I was a big help but my job was to go down and pull all the old comic books off the shelf and restock it with the new ones.

Interviewer: What a terrible job.

Tomi: Yes, a horrible job. I had to read them all to make sure they were old or new. I pulled the magazines and the newspapers and put out the new ones. I learned how to make sundaes at the fountain. And I watched Mom make sandwiches upstairs on her kitchen table.

Interviewer: Those are the legendary pimento cheese sandwiches?

Tomi: Yes, the legendary sandwiches and others.

Interviewer: Is it true that people would line up and wait for her to get her sandwiches finished?



Thelma Runyon Lewis

Tomi: They would. People would come in and wait to make sure that Mrs. Lewis' sandwiches were ready. She always tried to have them ready by 11:30.

Interviewer: Were there other things served?

Tomi: Basically she made chicken salad, pimento cheese salad and once in a blue moon a sliced ham or tomato sandwiches. And people would come in and say what they wanted and Dad would go to the back of the store and hit the buzzer for the dumb waiter which she would open in the kitchen upstairs. He would call up to her: "Two pimento cheese and put a slice of tomato on one." She would make them up on our kitchen table. She trimmed the edges off the bread. You never had edges on your bread. And then she wrapped them in wax paper and sent them down on the dumb waiter.

Interviewer: Could you have wheat bread or something like that.

Tomi: No, it was white bread.

Interviewer: It was purchased white bread?

Tomi: Yes. She did not make her own bread, but she made her own mayonnaise. I tried it one time. I couldn't do it. You have to add eggs to the vinegar or something. I never could make it.

Interviewer: Had she learned how to cook as a young girl at home?

Tomi: Probably. Her father was a regular Young Thelma Runyon Lewis with brothers country doctor out in Kentucky and her mother was a combination music teacher and church piano player and homemaker. Daddy doc was gone a lot on his calls. He didn't have a car for a long time. He had a horse and buggy. So it was Mamoo who was running the house, with my mother and her two brothers, Paul and Harold, growing up.

Interviewer: So your mother Thelma probably did a lot of cooking?

Tomi: Probably. You know the doctors in those days were often paid with food -vegetables and chickens and such. It was that kind of system.

Interviewer: What brought her to Fredericksburg? I looked over the notes and I could not figure it out.

Tomi: I'm proud of Mother. She went through high school in three years and was valedictorian of her class there. And she went through Transylvania College in Lexington in three years. Then she taught in Illinois and in a small school in West Virginia. Then she met a couple from Fredericksburg and they all came back here together. She taught for a while and she met Dad.

Interviewer: Do you know how they met?

Tomi: No. I did ask her once if it was love at first sight and she said, "No, I made him look two or three times."

Interviewer: So I'm right in thinking she was a character?

Tomi: She was a character. They went back to Kentucky to get married. Got married at her home in Kentucky and then came back and settled at 415 William St., above the store. It was a three story building. The first floor was the drug store. We lived on the second floor and they rented out the third floor.

Interviewer: Was it big?

Tomi: Yes. The front room was Tucky's and my bedroom, then there was a living room, a dining room, a huge kitchen, enclosed back porch and a music room and a bathroom and upstairs there were three bedrooms and an enclosed back porch that had 16 windows that I used to have to wash all the time.

Interviewer: Did those people who rented the upstairs rooms eat with you all downstairs? No. They were the Hesters and they had their own kitchen. Mother took it out later on.

Interviewer: What's your earliest memory of knowing that you lived above the business? That your father went downstairs to go to work?

Tomi: I do remember when I went out the front door I could turn and go into the drug store.

Interviewer: Did it have separate entrances?

Tomi: Yes ... my earliest memory of that is that I decided to hide behind the door that went into the store and Dad was coming down that hallway to come to the safe and I jumped out at him. I think it is the only time in my life that my dad ever raised a hand and spanked me. He said, "Just don't ever do that again." I was too young to understand about robberies and things like that.

Interviewer: Was there ever anything?

Tow No, not that I remember. Dad worked late into the evening. The store was open until 10 and usually some friends would come in and they would sit around and chit-chat while George Alexander would come in and mop the floor and they would be cleaning up the soda fountain.

Interviewer: Did it have black and white tile floor?

Tomi: Red and white.

Interviewer: Did the other Lewis Drugstore have black and white tile?

Tomi: It had marble floor. I have a picture of the other store taken with Dad, Uncle Charles and their father (Magnus Muse Lewis Sr.)

Interviewer: I would like to see it.

Interviewer: To fill in a little right here. Dr. M.M. Lewis Sr. was the first member of your immediate Lewis family to come to Fredericksburg?

Tomi: That's correct. I think I don't know why he came here, but he did.

Interviewer: And he married Susie Rose?

Tomi: Correct. He married Susie Wellford Rose. Her father Lawrence Rose had been mayor here right after the Civil War. There's a whole bunch of old family tales about all of that. In fact there is a tale that her mother was carrying Susie (as a baby) back toward Fredericksburg. They were trying to get back home across the bridge and a Northern officer stopped the war to let the woman carrying the baby get across the bridge.

Interviewer: Good for him.

Tomi: And I always thought that was a fake tale and recently someone told me that he had been to a round table discussion of the Civil War and the speaker was the descendant of a Northern officer who said his great, great grandfather had said when he had been in this battle in a town nobody had heard of -Fredericksburg-he had stopped the war to let a woman carry a baby across the bridge.

Interviewer: So it was probably true. Nice to know there's a way to stop a war.

Tomi: Just carry a baby across a bridge.

Interviewer: This might be a good place to bring in the Wellford family since your middle name is Wellford and Susie Wellford was the baby. Your mother named you?

Tomi: I was named after her parents, Thomas Ezekiel Runyon and Minnie Clark McLean. So you take Thomas and Minnie and you get Thomina-(pronounced Tamina). It was Thomine to begin with. But when I was 10 days old Mother made Dad catch a bus-remember we had no car-and go down to Richmond and change the e to an a.

Interviewer: Your sister's name though is also unusual.

Tomi: Yes she is a female junior named after our mother. Thelma Runyon Lewis, Jr., and Wellford is my middle name and it goes back to Dad's side of the family.

Interviewer: The Wellford's are the family that you go back to here in town?

Tomi: We go back to Dr. Robert Wellford. He was born in England in 1753 and he came over with British General Howe as an assistant surgeon. He landed in Philadelphia and he was in charge of one of the prisoner of war camps up there. Through that he got to know Gen. Washington and Gen. Lafayette on the other side and he came down to Fredericksburg several times. His reputation of taking good care of the prisoners of war led Gen. Washington to offer him a commission in the Continental Army. He declined. Later on Gen. John Spotswood, a grandson of the governor, invited him here and he liked it so much he decided to stay. The family tale goes that he wrote home and said these colonists have the right idea: freedom is a very precious thing and I am going to stay. His father in England said if you do your name will be stricken from the family. He stayed and began to spell his name

with two Ls and that was the beginning of the Wellford family in America.

Interviewer: And there was a big family wasn't there?

Tomi: Yes. I come down from John Spotswood Wellford's second wife. His first wife was Fanny Nelson and his second was Janet Henderson. She was the daughter of David Henderson who had owned the Apothecary Shop. Anyway David's daughter Janet met John Spotswood Wellford, a widower with three boys. They married and had six daughters and a son. And I come down from one of the daughters.

Interviewer: So Susie Rose was of Wellford descent.

Tomi: That's right. Susie Rose was a Wellford.

Interviewer: She has the most charming wedding account I have ever seen. The story names the guests in their formal attire and names guests who did not come in formal dress. As you know obviously, it was an evening wedding at the Presbyterian Church. Do you have a picture of that by any chance?

Tomi: I don't but I have a picture of Susie. It was at the Presbyterian Church because Susie's father had given land for the Presbyterian Church on the condition that there not be a graveyard there. He built the three adjoining brick houses there for his children to use and they did not want to look out on a graveyard.

Interviewer: I've let us wander way off the subject of The Fountain Service. Did you ever hear your father (who was Susie's son) say why he decided to open a drug store?

Tomi: I think because he had studied medicine and had been a medic. I think he was comfortable with it. His father had been a druggist and had a drug store and I'm sure the boys had grown up hanging around the drug store. They knew the drug store life.

Interviewer: Do you have any idea if his drug store was anything like the original Lewis Drug Store?

Tomi: Well Uncle Charles had inherited the original Lewis Drug Store.

Interviewer: Was he the oldest?

Tomi: No. Aunt Elsie was the oldest of the three Lewis children, then Dad born in 1896 and then Uncle Charles born in 1900.

Interviewer: Did The Fountain Service open at 8 or 9 o'clock?

Tomi: It opened whenever Dad got there which was at least no later than 7:30 a.m. People would come for coffee, to buy newspapers, mail packages, buy stamps -things they wanted to get done before the start of their business day.

Interviewer: I hadn't realized until today that there was a postal substation there. Was that a political appointment?

Tomi: Probably.

Interviewer: Did you help out there?

Tomi: You are not supposed to be working in a post office when you are 11 or 12 years old. When Dad died I was 13 and a freshman in high school and my sister was away at college. He had two really good employees Flossie O'Bryhen and Ruth Kirtley, and I don't know what mother would have done without them. Mother went through deep grief and she had never worked in the drug store except to make sandwiches. So Flossie and Ruth ran the store and I went down and worked in the store and Tucky did too-when she was home from school. And sometimes I worked in the sub-post office. It got to be funny. Lem Houston was post master and if anybody saw Lem coming-these were the customers too-they would stop him and have loud conversations and give me time to get out of the post office and either Flossie or Ruth to come back and be in the Post Office, It didn't happen that often but it did happen. Dad had an old ice chipper in the back and you would put the ice in and grind it.

Interviewer: For ice cream?

Tomi: No, for sodas. The coca-colas were made from scratch, homemade. When you pulled the handle the right amount of cola came down in the glass and you added the carbonated water to it at the fountain. We had cherry cokes and vanilla cokes. And root beer floats and we had ice cream from the Farmers Creamery.

Interviewer: That was a local business?

Tomi: Yes, a local business. We had chocolate, vanilla, and strawberry and I remember when butter pecan came in. That was big for awhile. Once in a while something like coconut. Strawberry was big. It had real strawberries in it. That makes a difference.

Interviewer: And you worked in The Fountain Service regularly?

Tomi: I worked behind the counter but I won't say regularly. On Saturday mornings I had my chores upstairs and then I could go down and work at the counter. I made five cents an hour and eventually I was making twenty cents an hour. I got fussed at because I made the ice cream cones too big. We had five cent and ten cent ice cream cones. Five cents was a lot to me because that was what I made an hour so for five cents I thought you ought to get two or three scoops.

Interviewer: How long did the store last after your father's death?

Tomi: Mother kept the store two or three years and then she rented it out. And the Willises came up and rented it a while and some other people rented it a while. And then that faded out, and Mrs. Holt came and rented it as a flower shop. Mother eventually sold it, sold the whole building as one unit. Sold the fixtures and everything. Except for two items-a fan which shows in a picture of that store in the 1800s and is a Hunter fan-- and a display case which I use as a bookcase.

Interviewer: Did the store have ice cream chairs and round tables?

Tomi: Yes, it did. And I'm sorry. Yes. I have one table and four chairs.

Interviewer: Did people come in and sit down and have a coke and just sit there and gossip?

Tomi: Oh yes, all the time.

Interviewer: And women who had been shopping would come in too and sit there with a coke and gossip? Tomi: Yes. Mother herself would come down at 4 o'clock and sort of hold court and talk to whoever had come in and have a coca-cola and then go back upstairs-back to whatever she was doing.

Interviewer: So a great deal of your knowledge of what Fredericksburg comes from overhearing these conversations at the drug store?

Tomi: I was a listener. I remember one thing about the drug store and it must have been in the mid-40s. Mother always dressed Tucky and me in these cute little dresses.

Interviewer: Did she sew?

Tomi: No, she starched. She could starch and iron to beat anybody. And she had me in these cute little dresses and Mother had me in Shirley Temple curls or two cute little pony tails. And I do remember that during the war days, Mag's as it was called-was a place for the military to hang out because it was very family oriented. There was no liquor served and very little smoking and since Dad had been in World War I they could talk about military things. And I remember just being passed from lap to lap. I loved the smell of starched uniforms and the wool and I loved the guys in uniform and military. Needless to say I married a military man, a Marine. These were Army and Navy guys and Marines and they would tell jokes and laugh and pass around pictures of their wives and children and give me hugs and I just thought it was cool. Before the guys would leave the store they would tear off their patches and Dad had them all around the store. I kept some of them. I have Dad's helmet and boots... he stayed very active in military things. He would march in the parades and take me with him.

Interviewer: What about Poppy Day. Didn't you have to sell poppies?

Tomi: Oh yes, I did. I always did all right because I sold them to the people who came in the store. Dad kept it open all the time. I remember going down on Saturday nights and watching the guys listening to the fights and I wouldn't swear to it but I think they had a little something to celebrate with. But the door was locked.

Interviewer: You told me that Sidney Armstrong once worked for him.

Tomi: That was in the earlier location. I didn't even know that until I started doing oral history and Sidney told me he had worked for him on Princess Anne Street. Sidney said Dad probably had one of the first drive-ins or curb services in town and people would drive up and pick up stuff and Sidney would have to go out and pick up the order and then run it back to them.

Interviewer: Now this is still the days of Prohibition?

Tomi: Oh yes. I understand that while he was down on Princess Anne Street - and it's a tale that I have been told - and there were some poker games going on upstairs and there was an argument and a gunshot. A murder. No one was ever charged.

Interviewer: No one ever told?

Tomi: No one ever told. There's little written about it so it is hard to pin down.

Interviewer: So this is Saturday night poker?

Tomi: I remember in later years Dad would say he was going down to Dinty Moore's to have a Reuben or a corned beef sandwich. I think that they served beer at Dinty's. I think that was what he wanted to go down and have a beer one night a month. Mother really did not like that.

Interviewer: But this was after Prohibition was repealed. Attitudes weren't still that strict or were they?

Tomi: I really don't remember alcohol being served in our house on a regular basis. There would be drinks for parties and there was famous Lewis eggnog at Christmas. No wait I take that back sometimes if Mother had a lady guest in the afternoon they would have a cocktail.

Interviewer: Did she play a lot of bridge?

Tomi: Oh all the time. Any time she had a chance. She played with some of the best. She played with Hortense Key, Virginia Goldman, Virginia Brooks, Fan Holloway. They would play bridge any time. She would walk me around to Cousin Fan's on the corner of Charles and Amelia. And I loved that big old house. They would sit there and have a cocktail and I was to sit there and be quiet.

Interviewer: Were you aware of how much of the color and history-the details that we both like so much you were absorbing?

Tomi: I should have been more aware. I look back now and wish I could have understood and appreciated it more. Dad and Uncle Charles had a sister Elsie. I don't think she ever worked at a paying job a day in her life. She took care of my grandfather's brother, Uncle Aldrich, and later I think she took in roomers. But they ate off premises. I would wake up a few times a week from my afternoon nap to Aunt

Elsie rubbing my back. Aunt Elsie would wait until I had my pinafore on and my hair-done just so-- by Mother and she would take me for a walk and walk me all around the town pointing out where relatives lived and what was important. And she did this at least three times a week. I don't think I ever knew how much I was absorbing. It didn't dawn on me then. It just soaked in.

Interviewer: Tell about her and the Christmas pageant at St. George's Church.

Tomi: Aunt Elsie was in the choir but her Christmas pageants were very famous. We had men who would sing the roles of the three wise men. The oldest girl teen who was still active in Sunday School would get to be the Virgin Mary and the next would be the angel and then we had the same tableau that we have now but she was before her time in the costuming. She used old tapestry and old rugs and in these rich colors and just beautiful things. You have to picture this tableau in front and the wise men start coming in singing.

Interviewer: The same person didn't sing the same role every year, or did they?

Tomi: No. Not always. But Wardell Leacock had the most wonderful baritone voice you'd ever want to hear. Ben Early played a wise man one time. He was a professor at the college. Pete Myers was one. Larry Duckwall was one. I did get to play Mary one time and a friend of mine, Doris Webster, was the angel and we got the giggles. We also played the little angels once--the little angels who sit on the steps and sing the Jesus song-- and her halo started slipping and she started crying and I just took her hand and held it and somehow that made it a little better. We've done a lot together during our lifetimes including celebrating birthdays. I think we celebrated the first 16 together and others including the most recent one when I flew out to New Mexico and we celebrated together. When we were both here we'd have them at each other's homes or even at the Community Center.

Interviewer: I haven't heard much about the Community Center. Did much go on there? You are talking about the center we call the Dorothy Hart Center?

Tomi: Yes. Doris' father by the way designed that center. It was a USO center during the war years. It was used for many things when we were growing up.

Interviewer: I understand there was even a farmers' market in there at one time?

Tomi: I don't think so. But you forget I was away from town for 20 some years.

Interviewer: I do forget that. I think there was a farmers' market in there at some point. How about school, where did you go?

Tomi: I started out at Lafayette and then went to Maury, when it was called James Monroe middle school, and then ours was the first class to go all the way through the James Monroe High School which they are getting ready to tear down. It'll be gone by the time this is done. I'm real proud of our class-the class of 1957-it is probably the only one I know of which gets together every year. We had a reunion last weekend and out of 90 we had probably had 30 to 35 original classmates still there.

Interviewer: I am still confused on the name. Wasn't it called Fredericksburg High School?

Tomi: Maury was James Monroe High School. After the new high school was opened in the present building it was called James Monroe, and Maury began to be called Maury. (It had once been called Fredericksburg High School.) The Lafayette School (now the library) is where we all started out together. Playground out front, across the street.

Interviewer: And you walked?

Tomi: Yes. Well, I do remember I was a good roller skater-a city roller skater-- and I used to skate down that hill that goes toward the school and be able to stop in time. Sometimes just in time. And I used to walk on stilts. Nobody walks on stilts anymore. I used to be able to walk up and down the stairs at home on stilts.

Interviewer: You were a tom-boy.

Tomi: I was. I was a tom-boy. And Tucky was too, in her own way. We both rode horses a lot, played ball together a lot. What is a parking lot now on the corner of Prince Edward and William when I was growing up was a sand lot. It was a dugout sandlot and Benny Pitts was going to put a theater there. So all the neighborhood kids would gather there and we'd play ball. Very few could hit over the fence. One or two of



the boys but it was a long hit because it was a soft ball instead of a hard ball. I had friends all over the neighborhood. To throw out some names: Diane Drew lived around the corner as did Jimmy Jones and in the next block was Beth Massey. Some other ball players were Hamilton Scott and Hunter Lee and Helen Corell and Jo Jo Holloway.

Interviewer: I want to back up-what did Miss Elsie look like.

Tomi: Aunt Elsie? You always saw her with her hat on and her glasses were always on a string around her neck. She always wore a dress and she had a coat with a fur collar. She was stout. She was probably about 5'5" or 5'6" and she always had a smile. And was well known in her town for her laugh. You could hear it for blocks away. It was a wonderful laugh. I do remember going to her house for Sunday dinner once a month and we would listen to the radio and listen to Adlai Stevenson or Eleanor Roosevelt or talk about serious subjects. But I also remember listening to Charlie McCarthy and Mortimer Snerd at Miss Elsie's. And she had a collection of slides and a view master which I now have and she would talk about her travels throughout the world. She was a world traveler. I think what I am most proud of her was back in the 1950s. A black family wished to attend and join St. George's Church and there were those in the congregation opposed to having that happen, even having them coming to church. Aunt Elsie stood up before the entire vestry.

Interviewer: Is that a very large group?

Tomi: This was a big uproar at the time so there were a lot of people at the meeting. Aunt Elsie just looked at the vestry and she said, "What would Jesus do? Would he ever turn anyone away? Would he stop someone from coming in the church door?" So we had our first black family come to church.

Interviewer: Did they stay?

Tomi: I think they did for a while. And more came. Aunt Elsie taught us all to be very fair in our judgments based on Christian upbringing.

Interviewer: Which she certainly contributed to.

Tomi: Well she taught Sunday school and she taught all of us and all of our friends who went to the Episcopal Church.

Interviewer: Church and religion were very much part of your upbringing and of what influences you, aren't they?

Tomi: There was Aunt Elsie who ran the Sunday School, Mother taught Sunday School and Dad was an elder. My grandmother in Kentucky played the piano at the Christian Church and my grandfather was a deacon in the Baptist Church. They also voted differently. One was a Democrat and the other was a Republican. But that was the way they did it, and nobody thought anything about it. So yes to answer your question. Yes, church has always been a big part of my life.

Interviewer: That wedding at the Fredericksburg Presbyterian Church when Susie Wellford Rose married Dr. Lewis was a little out of character for your family or was it?

Tomi: No, everybody had been Presbyterian until the Lewis's came along and then we (our family) became Episcopalian. The two churches were very close knit. They are comer to comer and have always worked closely together.

Interviewer: That's right. I believe I heard somewhere that the Presbyterians never built their steeple because they felt if the Episcopalians had one, they didn't need one.

Interviewer: Do you remember a lot about holidays?

Tomi: I know Santa Claus did not come to see me until Christmas Eve when he brought the Christmas tree. Everybody else would have their trees up early, but not us. Santa brought it on Christmas Eve. And we got to see it Christmas Day and then somehow or the other it disappeared about New Year's Day so it was a very short season.

Interviewer: Did they go out and cut it.

Tomi: No I am sure they had it delivered. It was always a fresh tree which Mother stayed up and decorated by herself because Dad kept the store open. Christmas Eve was a busy time for him in the store. Men were in there doing their last minute shopping-the boxes of candy and the bottles of perfume. He didn't close the store until 11 o'clock.

Interviewer: Did the other Lewis drug store also stay open?

Tomi: I don't know. I don't know as much about that store as it might seem I should. Uncle Charles and Aunt Ann had one child, Charles Taylor Lewis, and I just talked to him last night by coincidence. He married Betty Fay King. Charles Taylor is 11 years older than I am and I didn't know him that well. We would go around to their house one day a year for dinner. They lived on Cornell Street in that gorgeous white house. Charles Taylor went into banking and became bank president. And he is now retired. It was amazing too what you could get away with as a child in this town. Dad used to send me to the bank to make the deposits or to get change or send me down to the main Post Office to get stamps. And I would be 10 or 11 years old walking around with hundred dollar bills and coming back with change or stamps. I was perfectly safe. No question about it.

Interviewer: Your father's death when he was really so young must have been a terrible shock.

Tomi: It was. I remember when the phone call came. Mother answered the phone and then she hung up and just looked at me. And she didn't say a word.

Interviewer: Was he in Richmond in the hospital?

Tomi: No, he was in Mary Washington. I was going to say at the old Mary Washington. The old new Mary Washington, the one before the present one. The one where I was born.

Interviewer: No you were born in Richmond at the door.

Tomi: That's right. This is the one where I had my appendix out. The one on Sophia Street. Yes, Dad had a heart attack and he was in the hospital and they just called and said it was over. I don't remember a whole lot about the funeral. I remember Mother's brother and his wife coming in from Kentucky and I remember Doris, my friend, coming with her little collie dog Bruce to cheer me up. Don't remember a lot about that time. Mother sort of hibernated during that time and Tucky was at Transylvania College and then came back to William and Mary. I remember Easter one year. It must have been the second Easter after he had died and I said something about Easter and Mother said, "Let's go get a dress." It was the first time she'd shown any interest in clothes or shopping for a long time.

Interviewer: Had she gone back to teaching at this time?

Tomi: She didn't go back until I was about 18. She taught one year of Latin and they liked her so well that they requested a second year of Latin. She also taught English. I give a small scholarship in her honor at Stafford to anyone who takes Latin. You don't have to get an A. Just take Latin. Then I give a small scholarship in Dad's honor at James Monroe to anybody who is not an A student. Dad was not an A student and I said anybody who wants to go on for any type of training. It's just enough for books.

Interviewer: When it came time for you to go to college you went to Mary Washington.

Tomi: I was a day student at Mary Washington. I went there my freshman and sophomore year and then the summer between my sophomore and junior year I was 19 and mother wanted to go out to visit her family in Kentucky. I just didn't want to go. At 19 back then you weren't old enough to be left alone so she put me in college on campus in the dorms for the summer.

Interviewer: Mary Washington?

Tomi: Mary Washington. And my roommate was the senior student government representative; my suite mate was the dean's daughter and the head of the student government. I was supposed to stay out of trouble that summer.

Interviewer: And you didn't?

Tomi: And that's the summer I met Cal Reneau and we ended up eloping.

Interviewer: You did?

Tomi: We did and it's been 46 years. It was in September, 1959, and we were going to tell Mother but then my sister had her first child and that wasn't a good time. And we kept putting it off and putting it off. And finally-after we'd been married for off. And finally-after we'd been married for about four months-in January one Saturday morning when Cal was visiting at the house. I was still living at home. He was in the U.S. Marine Corps. Mother called us to the kitchen table, plopped this big Bible on the table and she said, "Thomina put your hand on this Bible and Calix Lee put your hand on this Bible and tell me about this." And she had the motel key. And she said: Tell me about this. And we

said it's okay, it's legal. We're married. We had to produce the marriage certificate.

Interviewer: How had she found the key?

Tomi: I never throw anything away. Besides that was special. And she gave me until 5 p.m. to get out of the house.

Interviewer: She was angry?

Tomi: She was furious, absolutely furious. Aunt Elsie called about 4:30 p.m. and said I've found a place for you. She'd talked somebody into giving us the first floor of this real nice house on Hawke Street.

Interviewer: People don't realize about the housing shortage during and after the war.

Tomi: Cal was making \$98 dollars a month so we couldn't afford much either.

Interviewer: Did you fall in love with him right away?

Tomi: The first date was kind of funny because he was my third blind date for that day.

Interviewer: That day?

Tomi: Life was fun that summer. I met him and we double dated with another couple. I asked him something about his name what he had said his name was... He said "Cal (as in kale)," and I said let me tell you something I'm from Virginia and I don't date anybody named kale or turnip greens. What is your real name? He said Calix and I said spell it and he did and I said I'm going to call you Cal (as in Hal). It took about 10 years and his mother finally started calling him Cal. I can always tell when it's a real old friend because it will come out Cale. Well I was not going to date anyone called Cale.

Tomi: It goes way back, the oldest son of the oldest son has been named Calix for generations. Our grandson is the eighth generation.

Interviewer: It's kind of cool.

Tomi: It is cool. I have no idea of where the name came from. We had thought we had screwed up and that maybe his great grandfather

hadn't been named Calix. Last year we finally got back to Duluth and a lot of family research and there was James Henry Reneau and I said oh I could have used one of my perfectly good Wellford names, but we found his birth certificate and it was Calix James Henry Reneau. So our son is Calix Lewis and his son is Calix Josiah. Our daughter is Lisa Lynn and her daughter is Brenna Michelle. And then we have a second granddaughter Alexandria Elyse-Sasha- and she's my son's daughter. C.J. and Brenna were born within six weeks of each other.

Interviewer: Go back to that summer you eloped. You said you had three blind dates in one day. Did you have time to go to school?

Tomi: This was on a Saturday. It was kinda of weird because as a freshman you were allowed one date a week. Then as a sophomore, two, then as a junior, three.

Interviewer: Is this in the days of Mrs. Bushnell?

Tomi: Oh yes and they had to come in a coat and a tie. Check you out of the dorm and go through this long procedure.

Interviewer: I knew someone Mrs. Bushnell blackballed and it took a long time to get off the blackball list once you got on.

Tomi: She was very picky about things. We were not supposed to date enlisted Marines. We could only date officers. Cal was enlisted so we kind of fibbed about that by saying he was a friend of a friend. I don't know that she ever knew.

Interviewer: Well I would think when your mother threw you out of the house.

Tomi: Mrs. Bushnell found out all about it.

Interviewer: Did your mother cry when she found out about the elopement?

Tomi: No, she was angry. She didn't cry. She was just plain angry. That was in January and then in April we turned around and got married again at St. George's. Tom Faulkner was the minister when I was growing up and when we met for pre-wedding counseling, he took out the prayer book and reviewed the ceremony. He said: "Dearly beloved" well we need that. But we don't need this part and we don't

this part and that you've already done. As nearly as I can figure out all I have to say is "Dearly beloved, you are now man and wife."

Interviewer: Was it a big wedding?

Tomi: No. Cal's mother had come up from Florida.

Interviewer: She hadn't been upset by it?

Tomi: No. I had gone down-this was when Cal and I eloped-we had driven from Fredericksburg to meet his mother in Florida. The only way I was allowed to drive with him was if his grandmother went with us.

Interviewer: I don't see how you eloped.

Tomi: Well we went all the way to Florida and I met his mother and 24 hours later she asked Cal if he was going to marry me and she would give us a honeymoon in the Bahamas. It was a nice introduction to his family. So I called Mom to tell her I was in Florida and everything was nice and Cal and I were hinting about getting married. Mother exploded on the phone. No, get home right now. No. No. No. The weather's fine. No. She didn't want to hear anything.

Interviewer: Why did she feel that way?

Tomi: I was not old enough. I was supposed to be 21 and through college before I got married. So anyway we drove Mrs. Blazhowski who was Rose's mother and living in Lorton home and between Lorton and Fredericksburg we decided to keep on going so we drove all the way back to South Carolina. Woke up his best friend and we got married. And then turned around and drove all the way back to Fredericksburg He had to be back at work and I had to be back at school and three days later we were going to tell Mother. Then that's when Eliza Susan, Tucky's oldest daughter, was born. That didn't seem like a good time. So we didn't bring it up.

Interviewer: So did your mother become reconciled when you got married in the church?

Tomi: A little bit. Mother was there and his mother and some of his family were there. I wore a real pretty turquoise dress with a jacket, white gloves, white hat. I think the dress was a size six or seven. I laugh when I see it today.

Interviewer: Was there a reception?

Tomi: Just a very small reception at the house. Just family.

Interviewer: So your mother sort of came around?

Tomi: Yes sort of, and then when it turned out that Cal could play bridge that was fine.

Interviewer: You mean she'd known him all the time you were dating and she didn't know he could play bridge?

Tomi: We were dating.

Interviewer: But you play bridge.

Tomi: I used to play bridge and I love to play bridge. I'm looking forward to getting back to it. We would play party bridge. Not the heavy duty stuff.

Interviewer: Is there duplicate bridge in this town?

Tomi: Probably.

Interviewer: Well go back now to your mother. She lives on as a widow. Does she have any boy friends?

Tomi: She said she was a one man woman and that's what she was. She stayed upstairs at 415 William St. until someone tried to break in and that put a scare into her and she bought a house in Tampa. Tucky and her husband (Charles Abel from the Hartwood area) had moved to Tampa. Charles was a coach and Tucky and Charles had children, Eliza Susan (named after our baby sister who died), Chuck (actually Charles Abel, Jr.) and Magnus Murray (named after Dad and Charles' father). So the five of them lived in Tampa and Mother bought the house across the street and lived there until she went into a retirement place down there.

Interviewer: She didn't mind leaving?

Tomi: She minded. But she'd had a fall. She was there alone and Fredericksburg changed over the years and downtown was not as safe as it used to be.

Interviewer: When was that?

Tomi: It was in the 80s. Downtown was definitely changing from what it had been. I remember taking her out to Shoney's which to us is downtown, but back then was way out of town and it was a thrill to go out to Shoney's. In the days when I first lived here I did all my shopping downtown. At Miller's, Fashion Plate, Carley's and places like that-you would wait for the spring clothes to come in and the winter clothes to come in.

Interviewer: What was your favorite store?

Tomi: Probably Fashion Plate because it was closer. But the two of them are so close in their styles that it didn't really matter. Fashion Plate was on Princess Anne St. And Miller's was downtown.

Interviewer: What about hats?

Tomi: Mother always wore hats. She was known as the lady of the hat. She wore hats even after she moved to Florida where people didn't wear hats.

Interviewer: Did she go to Lena's? (A popular hat store)

Tomi: Of course. I remember loving hats as a teenager and I wore hats and gloves to church. When I had my photography studio (where was that?) I had a collection of hats. I had Mother's and then a collection from a very fashionable friend of the family, Irene Culver. I had all sorts of hats.

Interviewer: Well how many kinds were there? I remember brimmed hats and then the ones that looked like overseas caps.

Tomi: There were lots. Big brims, cloches, turbans... I want to tell you about a group of us who grew up together here. Everybody had groups, clubs. Ours was called Stardusters. And there were 17 of us. It started early in high school. We would put on dances at Christmas and things like that.

Interviewer: Your group would?

Tomi: Yes. Here's my notes from one dance we gave. There were seventeen Stardusters and we collected \$8.50 apiece for \$144.50. We gave a formal dance at the Community Center and we had \$18.32 left

over when we got through. We had flowers, an orchestra, invitations, we rented the USO, we moved the piano, and we had refreshments. I want to give you the names of the Stardusters because they deserve a lot of credit. The Stardusters were: Peggy Baker who moved away, Mary Jo Deere who lives here now, Mary Katherine Goodwin living here now, Donna Green who is in South Carolina, Judy Hawkins who lives here now, Lou Hubbard who lives in Northern Virginia, Margaret Thompson who lives 'in North Carolina, Beth Massey who lives in Virginia, Joyce LeFevre who lives in Montana, Sarah Key who lives in North Carolina, Michaela Miller who lives in Northern Virginia, Shirley Stevens who lives in Virginia, Johnny Day Strohecker who lives in North Carolina, Hale Van Valzah who lives night here *in town, Don's Webster who lives in New Mexico and me. Sally Spiller is deceased.

Interviewer: And there were other girls' clubs like these.

Tomi: I guess so, but Stardusters might have been the largest. Also some of us used to have a dance program which we put on. Michaela Miller and I were tap dance partners and competed once against Wayne Newton. Mike and I and Margaret Thompson and Mary K had a dance troop and performed for almost all the civic groups in town at one time or the other. We had quite a program, a single tap number by me, a single tap number by Mike, a tap duet by the two of us, a toe number by Mary K. A toe number by Margaret, a ballet duet by the two of them, a foursome tap, and the grand finale was a hula dance by the four of us. Doris Webster played the piano for all of it.

(Interview is stopped for the day and resumes on Sept. 25.)