

Tim Prentice
Cornwall
Interview by Ann Schillinger

[Tim Prentice is 80 years old and first came to Cornwall as a child, when his parents bought a summer residence on Todd Hill Road.]

The best story [about Walker] I remember was when a group [of adults and their kids] were playing Kick the Can outside Jack Calhoun's house [the modern house up the hill right behind the town hall]. Marie [Prentice, speaker's wife] ran through the house, which was breaking the rules of the game, I guess, and going out she ran into a plate glass door and cut her lip open. Walker sewed up her lip without any Novocain - no painkiller. Maybe he thought it was what she deserved for breaking the rules.

The greatest memory I have of him was on VJ Day - there was a whole bunch of us at that house and he was rendering all kinds of songs on the porch. [Wasn't he playing his guitar?] I seem to remember that it was the piano that he was playing - maybe they dragged it close to the porch. Some of those songs he sang aren't politically correct these days.

Teddy and Tom [the two older sons] used to put on minstrel shows in their barn: Mr. Bones, blackface, and all that kind of thing. Teddy ran it, and other boys worked on it - Herb Cobleigh, Paul Chamberlain, Billy [Walker], Doug Carlson, Sco [Soule], probably. The audience was the village - everybody's relatives. There was a barrelhouse piano kept in the barn. It had buttons under the keyboard that turned on lights, set off bells and so on ... There was a trap door in the ceiling where Tom would stick his head down and fire off blanks with a rifle.

Billy had a car that was always on its last legs. He was always working on it and bringing it back. It had a great sound system. He joined the Strategic Air Command flying big bombers and was stationed in Brunswick, Maine.

[Can you tell us anything about Katie Walker?] Katie was always chipper and an "up" person. The attention was more on her than on him at parties. She was great with arts and crafts. She liked to paint hearts and flowers on cupboards and walls - the Fenns, Polly [Calhoun], the Prentices all had hearts and flowers painted in their houses. She made rag rugs. She used to make Christmas trees out of tin cans - she and Dody (Prentice, speaker's mother) used to sit together cutting Christmas trees instead of knitting. She made other Christmas ornaments, and she painted a lot of floors with - what's that called, spatter? the Jackson Pollock treatment. In her house the waiting room had a floor she painted, with the big hooked rug on top.

I never heard of the Walkers taking trips or going on vacation. The family had a cottage across the Lake from the club - the boys used to go and work on it, but I was never there. My father had designed and built two small "cat boats," precursors of a larger sailing model. The Walker boys built two from his plans.

There was a special light installed for Dr. Walker at an intersection on Route 4. [Where exactly was that? I've heard it before] There's a church on the right [with 272 North in the outskirts of Torrington], a gas station on the left, [just before the bridge on Route 4] and Riverside Avenue turns off to the right. They finally put in a light there that allowed him to make a right turn [on red] to get to the hospital fast [without going through the center of Torrington]. It was a measure of his importance. People were awestruck when it happened.

“The romance of the country doctor:” He was the last of a breed. He treated everyone and made no social distinctions. He was so popular, such a character, there were always people taking a nibble at him - like, how up to date was he, living up here in the boonies? He took my tonsils out. Someone who knows the family, knows their conditions, can't help being an amateur psychiatrist along the way. The question is, was there any down side to it?

[Someone else told us this (quotes from Dr, Cobb's interview of about getting to know doctors too well, and thinking that someone's death is their fault)] Blaming? Doctors get blamed for their mistakes all the time - it's not exclusive to country doctors.

[Replies to questions about specific public health issues, re: VNA]*

[Sexually transmitted diseases?] I don't remember. He was pretty traditional - I think he was pretty conservative.

[Water and sanitation issues?] The town's water was his bailiwick and people consulted him about it. My parents' house was at the top of the system, and it went down to Route 4. The town well was on Route 4 opposite the graveyard but a little further up - there was a little driveway and a small building in there.

[Do you remember the name of the secretary, or the nurse, in his home?] No, but he had a secretary in his home. You entered the front door and she had a desk there on the left, in an antechamber to the doctor's office. She lived down the hill behind the houses in the Village toward Mary Sam's house [up the road from the landfill], and every working day for forty years she walked to work and walked home again. She made a little path doing that, about a foot wide and surrounded by tall weeds.

* TB; STD's; infant mortality; material mortality; diabetes; immunization campaigns; polio; water/sanitation issues' birth control; prenatal care; postnatal care; hookworm

