

ABSTRACT: Marion and Warren Hoffman are long term residents of Bladensburg, having moved there after they finished college in Washington, D.C. They are both very active in the community programs, special events, and the town government. They discuss personal stories about the development of the Bladensburg, relate the vast history of the town and how it is presented, and give varied opinions about the town in the past and today. The married couple is firmly planted in Bladensburg and understands the many facets of Bladensburg.

Marion Hoffman on Patriotism: “I would like Bladensburg to be known as a “historically patriotic town,” even more so than the other Port Towns. We have a great deal of history. The Indian Queen Tavern. We have the Bostwick House. We have the Free Hope Baptist Church, which is an African American church. We have the Magruder House, where Dick Charlton’s accounting business is located. Then, of course, Peace Cross. I do many of the ceremonies there. You have a remembrance of how we are free. You have the World War I and World War II memorials. The committee that I was chair of collected money to build the Vietnam Korean memorial. The county has now put in monuments, trees, to remember 9/11. They thought we had a collection of different monuments, so they chose that area. Jerry Globets, from Morningside, talked to John Rhodes, at Park and Planning, and they put in a holy tree in remembrance of Pearl Harbor. We still have a very simple ceremony there. We have a little plaque there now. It reminds us of why we are here and why we are free, because at times we had to have these encounters in order to be free. We have so much history here. Of course, in town, we have the new High School and three Elementary Schools. I do a “What the Flag Means to Me” writing program with the Elementary School. We try to start at a very early age to have the kids think about freedom and what the flag means.”

Warren Hoffman on Neighbors: “I guess one thing I would like to comment on is the closeness of the friendships. When we first moved here, we moved, because there were trees in the front of our house. After a year, I decided they weren’t attractive and we decided to take them down. My neighbors came down to help me. We lived, as Marion described, what was called a White blue collar neighborhood. There were electricians in the neighborhood. There were plumbers in the neighborhood. You always had some sort of help. My line of work was professional. The way I helped them was to get their sons and daughters jobs with the federal government. It’s been a closeness. Now, after 50 years, many of those neighbors are deceased, moved on, or retired, gone different places. There are still neighbors across the street that come over and help me with projects, putting lights in the light sockets outside. The neighbor across the street, when I was in the hospital, either he or his daughter would come over and shovel our walks in the snow. It has been a community spirit in the block area and in the whole town.”

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Bladensburg 250th Anniversary

From left to right: Mayor Ben Stephenson, Adele Stephenson, Councilwoman Marion Hoffman, Congressman Al Wynn, Councilwoman Susanna Yatman, Councilwoman Della Busher, Councilman Otis DeCollins



Bladensburg Waterfront Park



Publik Playhouse – Rt. 202



Bladensburg Public Library – Rt. 450

Port Towns Interview Project
Suzanne Stasiulatis interviewing Marion Hoffman and Warren Hoffman
Interview at 5313 Tilden Road, Bladensburg, MD
February 18, 2008

Suzanne: Can you both state your name, age, and where you're from?

Marion Hoffman: I am Marion Marie Powell Hoffman. I'm from Washington D.C. I am almost 74 years old and have lived here in Bladensburg for about 50 years.

Warren Hoffman: My name is Warren J. Hoffman. I was born in Trenton, New Jersey, but have lived in the metropolitan area all my life. I will be 77 on April 14, 2008.

Suzanne: And how long have you been residents of Bladensburg?

Warren Hoffman: Since October, 1959.

Suzanne: What are your occupations or previous occupations?

Marion Hoffman: I just retired from the Bladensburg Town Council, after 22 years. When I first worked on the Council, I was a Contract Instructor for the Office of Personnel Management. I taught in the area schools for a short time, actually just summer school and night school. Both of us went to Wilson's Teacher's College, graduating from Washington Wilson Teacher's College, the first class when it was called The District of Columbia Teacher's College. This was when Minor's, the Black institution and Wilson's, the White institution, merged.

Warren Hoffman: My occupation for the time that I worked was in Personnel Management. I worked for different federal agencies in Washington, including the Internal Revenue Service, the Commerce Department, and the Navy Department.

Marion Hoffman: What about Town Council?

Warren Hoffman: I also served on the Town Council of Bladensburg for 10 years.

Suzanne: Marion, what was your favorite story when you first moved to Bladensburg?

Marion Hoffman: My favorite story when I first moved to Bladensburg...I can't give you a story when I first moved to Bladensburg, because at that time both of us were working. When you have a full time, day time job, you don't have much association with the town. The first fond memory I have is when I used to work with groups putting on a dance at the fire house in Bladensburg. I met my very best friend, who I call my sister, Gloria Brown. When I met her I said, "Hi. I'm Mike's mother." Mike was our wire hair fox terrier. I knew she knew Mike better. Warren used to walk the dog around the town and so forth. So, I introduced myself as Mike's mother.

Suzanne: Warren, what was your favorite story?

Warren Hoffman: I guess, again, when we first moved here we were busy like any other couple going to work. I can remember one of the stories. The snow was about 8 or 9 inches deep. In front of my house, I'm at the foot of two hills. In order to get out of the town and on the way to Washington D.C., I had back up in reverse up one hill to get the speed to get over the other hill. After I cleared those, I knew we could get to anyplace in Washington D.C.

Suzanne: That was right here?

Warren Hoffman: Yeah. Right here, the foot of that hill, halfway up that hill to get over this hill.

Suzanne: They didn't have any Department of Transportation snowplows?

Warren Hoffman: Yeah. They plowed well in town, but that was 7:00 am in the morning.

Marion Hoffman: I don't think they did as good a job then as they have in recent years.

Looking at birds

While we are recording, let me say this to you: We are sitting in the dinning room of our home, and in recent years, since we have retired, on of the things we have loved is the birds outside. Warren feeds them. Suzanne was just looking at a woodpecker who was eating the suet. As we eat our meals here now, the birds entertain us.

Suzanne: If you were writing a history of Bladensburg, what would you include?

Marion Hoffman: I think one of the things that I would say is that a municipality is closest to the people. When you are on the council, you have more of an outreach to the people. I think that attachment is really great. We had a Treasurer leave and she said she wanted to go to another municipality, because of the closeness of the community. Community has changed, as you and I were talking Suzanne, because it was totally White. It then became White and African American. Now, we have Latinos moving in. We have African American, Latinos, and a few Whites that are left. A few Asians also. I think this is part of the challenge, getting all these different groups working together.

Warren Hoffman: I guess one thing I would like to comment on is the closeness of the friendships. When we first moved here, we moved, because there were trees in the front of our house. After a year, I decided they weren't attractive and we decided to take them down. My neighbors came down to help me. We lived, as Marion described, what was called a White blue collar neighborhood. There were electricians in the neighborhood. There were plumbers in the neighborhood. You always had some sort of help. My line of work was professional. The way I helped them was to get their sons and daughters jobs

with the federal government. It's been a closeness. Now, after 50 years, many of those neighbors are deceased, moved on, or retired, gone different places. There are still neighbors across the street that come over and help me with projects, putting lights in the light sockets outside. The neighbor across the street, when I was in the hospital, either he or his daughter would come over and shovel our walks in the snow. It has been a community spirit in the block area and in the whole town.

Suzanne: We want to know about the history and development of the Port Towns. What were your experiences or what has changed in Bladensburg?

Marion Hoffman: I would like Bladensburg to be known as a "historically patriotic town," even more so than the other Port Towns. We have a great deal of history. The Indian Queen Tavern. We have the Bostwick House. We have the Free Hope Baptist Church, which is an African American church. We have the Magruder House, where Dick Charlton's accounting business is located. Then, of course, Peace Cross. I do many of the ceremonies there. You have a remembrance of how we are free. You have the World War I and World War II memorials. The committee that I was chair of collected money to build the Vietnam Korean memorial. The county has now put in monuments, trees, to remember 9/11. They thought we had a collection of different monuments, so they chose that area. Jerry Globets, from Morningside, talked to John Rhodes, at Park and Planning, and they put in a holy tree in remembrance of Pearl Harbor. We still have a very simple ceremony there. We have a little plaque there now. It reminds us of why we are here and why we are free, because at times we had to have these encounters in order to be free. We have so much history here. Of course, in town, we have the new High School and three Elementary Schools. I do a "What the Flag Means to Me" writing program with the Elementary School. We try to start at a very early age to have the kids think about freedom and what the flag means.

Development wise... We've had a number of revitalization projects. We've had some façade treatments. I am the contact person with the Bladensburg Local Development Corporation. Various presidents from that organization have gone around and talked to the businesses and tried to get them to fix up their facades. We have an industrial area, where you have most of your employment. We've tried to work with them. I know there are projects underway now to upgrade the general area. I would rather see us going towards a historically patriotic town, rather than a town of amusements. We have had night clubs and restaurants that have not really helped the community. I would rather see it go the other way.

Warren Hoffman: In terms of history in Port Towns, there is the Dueling Grounds over in Colmar Manor. We were also the site of the first unmanned balloon launch in Bladensburg. We also, according to history, were the terminus of the first railroad, because they didn't want the railroad scare the horse and buggies in D.C. We were also involved with the first telegraph. We also, unprudently, had the cock fights down where the Peace Cross area is. It became noted for the origin of the cocktail, a drink that they had at the cock fights. There are other historical things.

It originally developed with some apartments along 450. Old Rt. 450 used to be known as the milk route. Trucks from southern Maryland would come up Rt. 450 into D.C. to the dairies, where they processed the milk. Then it was, like this area, single homes. Later on, apartments were built in the west part of the community. Even since then, they have put in several single home developments in the town boundaries. The development was first stores that catered to the local community, drycleaners, variety stores, Murphy's Five and Ten, a small Safeway, a small Acme, and Humphreys Mens store. They have now, pretty much, been turned into chain stores owned by people outside of the community. That's basically the development.

Marion Hoffman: You were actually on some of the planning groups. What were you on?

Warren Hoffman: County...when they developed the zoning for the area. They had community development plans. That was a long time ago. They had two or three amendments to that. There is quite a process for zoning in the area.

Marion Hoffman: On the town Council...weren't you there when they had the first town administrator come in?

Warren Hoffman: Yes. The old town government was based on a mayor and four councilmen. They, pretty much, did all the business of the town. The business of running a town...I forget what year...we hired our first Town Administrator. Now, it's quite a complicated government.

Marion Hoffman: You were also the ones who built the building down there. The first Town Hall was built when you were on the council.

Suzanne: Why did you decide to move here?

Marion Hoffman: An advertisement. We both worked for the Navy and there was an advertisement on the bulletin board.

Warren Hoffman: After a couple years of living in an apartment. We both had grown up in single houses. I had friends who lived their entire lives in apartments, and they never wanted to move to a house. We wanted to move to a house and we started looking around in different areas. I spotted this house on a bulletin board. An employee in the organization we were working for had this house up for sale. We came out to take a look at it. I had my brother-in-law who was a builder take a look at it. Her father who was a painter and fireman and conversant with property took a look at it. It looked like a pretty good real estate deal. This was back in 1959.

Marion Hoffman: The other thing was the closeness to Washington D.C. We were both working for the federal government. It was in the area. Plus my mom and dad had moved to an apartment in Brentwood. It was in kind of in that same general area.

Suzanne: Why did you decide to stay here?

Warren Hoffman: We stayed because of the neighbors. The community...and we were becoming involved in it. We were working with the community to make it better. I got interested in it, because there were no funds in the town budget for recreation. We had our son and neighbor's children. Some of the people came and said there was no basketball for their children and no place to play. I ran for the town council to start getting some money for recreation. We stayed because we loved the community.

Marion Hoffman: Actually, we did think about moving once. Then, we looked someplace else. We felt it was just going to strap us too much to move there. We liked the community anyhow.

Warren Hoffman: We know people who moved. In order to make their house payments, they had to eat peanut butter sandwiches all the time. We called them the peanut butter sandwich group. I guess credit was tougher then. People were at the end of what they could afford. We just figured it wasn't worth it to live like that.

Marion Hoffman: I have to tell you something funny. When I retired, one of the things I said was I was going to stay home so my husband wouldn't have to eat peanut butter crackers. Because whenever I was out to events, I'd always say, "Well, Warren couldn't come. He's at home eating peanut butter crackers." I didn't know it went back to peanut butter.

Suzanne: What community activities do you participate in?

Marion Hoffman: Now? When I retired I said I would do four things. I would work on the Waterfront Park, because that's really my main focus. When I first came in, that was called a destination. And DeMatha, Elizabeth Seaton, Catholic University, and University of Maryland have crew teams and practice down there. Walter Johnson, I think, one of the schools in Montgomery County. The pontoon boats and blue heron are down there. I'm still active with that. There isn't much happening there right now. The thing I have to do this week is call Brendon Quinn, who is the new chairman of the Bladensburg Local Development Corporation, because we have four meetings a year for Executive Board meetings. We try and work with the businesses in the community and try to help the town out. That's two. The third one is the Patriotic Committee. I am off on that for a bit, except I'm taking someone out to dinner tonight. That will start up in May for Memorial Day. Currently, I am working with American Legion Post 131. They're my military contact. That's changed through the years. Then, the final one, is where you're living, Bostwick. I was the one who went to the legislature when we got the money to buy Bostwick. Pat McCauly currently has been the key point there. I have only been attending some of the meetings on occasion when I can, because they set them up and they don't check with me, which they don't have to and I'm glad they don't because time goes by.

I should tell you this. We had a Lady's Club here, which I believe is 69 years old. It just dissolved a year ago. I still get together with some of those ladies. Many of them have

moved or are older now. That was a nice thing in the area, where people got together. I do attend certain things when they come up. I'm retired so I wouldn't have to go to all the meeting that you should go to if you're on council. Now, I did go down when former Mayor David Harrington was sworn as State Senator a couple of weeks ago. I do occasional things, such as that. I also used to work with rec. council. That has changed considerably. I try and talk with people in that regard. I really am trying to get somebody to set up some Spanish/English classes. We can help some of the Latinos learn to speak English. I'm not doing to well on that right now. We have channel 71, which carries the Town Council Meetings. I don't watch them, because I know me. If I see something that is either wrong or really good, I'd do something. When I retired, part of the reason was so he wouldn't eat peanut butter crackers and also to have more contact with my family.

Warren Hoffman: The only project I'm involved with now is the Board of Directors with the Publik Playhouse up here on Rt. 202/ Rt. 450. That group started 25 years ago, when the county purchased the old Cheverly Theater, in order to allow community groups, actors and choral groups, to come perform over the 25 years. We are still helping to buy equipment for the playhouse such as curtains, or lobbying with the County Council or the Park and Planning Board. I still work on that.

Marion Hoffman: I am an honorary member of the Board, so I go with him. It's interesting, because they used to show porno films there.

Warren Hoffman: At the end of its career as a movie house in the County. Then, it caught fire and the County bought it.

Marion Hoffman: That was when...Winnie Kelly was County Executive then.

Suzanne: What is your favorite spot in the community?

Marion Hoffman: I have two. My favorite spot is the Waterfront Park...Just to sit under the rope walk. I had been working with them trying to dredge. The Corps. of Engineers had to come in. They had a professional dredge. That is really wonderful sitting there. They have summer concerts too. When the town had its 250th Anniversary, we had a band shell there. We had the symphony. We had DeMatha's wind ensemble. It is exciting. Have you ever been to Ocean City, Fager's Island? When the sun goes down, they play the Overture of 1812 and the cannons fire. I'd like to see that here in Bladensburg. When we had that 250th Anniversary, and we had the band shell and the concerts and all, we had simulated cannons go off and the orchestra played the 1812 Overture. And here we are in Bladensburg. Here is the sun going down. Here is the water. Here is that music. That was probably one of my best moments here. The Ball, which you have pictures of, is another one. The other place is Peace Cross, because that says to me why we are still a country. I do a lot of the ceremonies there.

Warren Hoffman: I guess the Waterfront Park. The trips down the river are very nice. It's like being in a different land with the Blue Herron and the King Fishers and the

turtles and the snakes and the fish popping up out of the water. It's a nice ride down to the botanical gardens and back.

Marion Hoffman: Actually, they are going down to the botanical gardens now. You can get off there. They didn't used to be able to do that. If you don't have a motorized boat, you can take another route down and you can go down to the lily ponds. You can't take a motorized boat down there. You know where the lily ponds are, off of Kennilworth Ave.? You can go in that pathway too. You have to get to Hane's Point.

Suzanne: How do you feel about the term Port Towns? Is it an effective tool for drawing attention to the history of the community?

Marion Hoffman: I think a combination of groups can be helpful. I don't think it helps a whole lot in terms of the history, honestly. The other towns, selfishly she speaks, don't have as much history. They have a little bit that could add a little bit on. For a tourist type attraction, the Port Towns could be good. More importantly, when you're asking for money, they see people working together. That's a challenge working together. As four communities, they are more inclined to give you money as a grant or money to do things. We also have Port Town pins. We have a new one, because they added Edmonston. We used to have Port Town banners. That's another story. I don't think we have those anymore. That was nice, because you could see the flags of the Port Towns. They added the Edmonston flag on to that. I think the most important thing is the identity as the four of them working together. I will always be glad to work with people, but I don't want to lose Bladensburg in the mix. I will be a part of it, but I don't want to lose Bladensburg.

Warren Hoffman: The term is relatively new within the history of the county and people. As they are here longer, they grow up with the term Port Towns. The older people are more familiar with Peace Cross or Bladensburg, rather than the Port Towns. Again, it has been a good lobbying, economic drive. I don't think it has much to do with the history. It has yet to catch on with the county. We do have Port Towns tags on our cars.

Marion Hoffman: Yes, we do. They had those for a while. I don't know where those are now. I keep telling people, when I go into a motel I don't have to worry about what is my tag and all. We are PTXXX. I've been trying to get them to buy them that way.

Suzanne: What are the major political issues in the past or today in the Port Towns?

Marion Hoffman: I think there is a challenge of working together as Port Towns. Police protection in a community is one of the things I really think is essential. You call and the police are there in 5 minutes or 3 minutes. As you extend out, it's going to take longer. I really want to keep our police here. Now, if we can help other communities. There is a signed an agreement where we work with Hyattsville. We and other communities have a communications center. We have Mt. Rainer police on with our police. Mt. Rainer is not Port Towns. Yet, there is also a police agreement where if something happens, other people will come and help you. I know Hyattsville is on it, because I went to a meeting in

Hyattsville when it was signed. I think police presence is important more than anything else today.

Code is very important. Whenever, you go to the county it takes too much time. With codes you're not going to be shot or knifed, but it's still very important in terms of how your community looks. You need someone to go around and see whose doing what.

Public works. They are timely. They've been better. We have had vacancy in certain departments. Public works is very important too. They pick up the leaves. It goes hand in hand with code. Snow removal is important. In Virginia, it took them 8 or 10 hours to get home. That's very important. Then, of course, you have your front office staff. You have a Treasurer and a Town Clerk. Of course, you have Pat McCauly. Pat has done a lot, because we've had vacancies, over and above Town Clerk. Dianne Griffin is the Town Secretary. I guess I have worked with 8 or 10 Secretaries over the years. No one could be more personable than Dianne Griffin. I think they all look professional. You come into the Town Hall and they look professional. I think that covers everybody I can think of.

Warren Hoffman: I guess one of the challenges is going to be finances and taxes. We are going through the state. The state isn't going to give enough money to the counties, and the counties are not going to give enough to the municipalities. Maintaining livable standards in your community is going to be a big problem. And being able to pay a living wage to your employees.

Suzanne: Were there political issues in the past that were really important?

Warren Hoffman: Well, one of them a long time ago, and I was around when they first fought this, there has always been a county tax and a town tax. We fought with the county to reimburse the towns, and it wasn't just Bladensburg it was all the towns, a certain amount of money, because we did our own policing. We did our own trash collecting and we did our own street maintenance and things like that. The county was getting that money and keeping it. A long time ago, they worked out a formula. Now, over time, I don't know how that works with the town. They just say...when the town tax rates come out, there is a tax rate for the town and a tax rate for the unincorporated areas of the county. Every town has a different tax rate to pay the county. That's how they worked that differential out.

Marion Hoffman: It really depends on who's your County Executive, because I have sat in on some of those meetings. They have a little bit of leeway on the monies they give back to the towns. It just kind of depends on how that works out.

Warren Hoffman: That was one of the biggest political fights that were going on between all the municipalities and the county. That has been resolved.

Suzanne: What was it like to be a woman growing up in Bladensburg and what is it like to be a woman now?

Marion Hoffman: When I look back now...safety. I don't think it was that paramount 50 years ago, but it is now. I think, as Warren mentioned, having shops that you can go to. The Men's Shop, Colonial China...I think that was sort of why we moved here. It was a gift shop. That moved 2 or 3 years after we moved here. We had someplace to walk and go to the store. We just have one son who is going to be 45. I could take him around in the stroller and go to the grocery. All of those things have changed now. Sitting on this corner, Suzanne, you see the Latinos walking their kids to school. Now, my son went to St. Jerome's. We're Catholic. He went to St. Jerome's. I see the Latino mothers walking their kids to school, and they tell me they go to the library a lot of times. I see people walking back from the stores with their groceries and laundry. The librarian tells me that a lot of Latino ladies come in for Spanish and English books. I was working with these groups. I was chairman of the promotion committee when we had the 250th Anniversary. My friends that have moved...a lot of people moved back where they have family. The former Mayor's wife, he and the wife, have moved to Harrison, Virginia. Another friend lives up in Mt. Airy. Lillian lives down sort of towards Harrison. They have said it was a Camelot when they were here, because of that 250th Anniversary Celebration. As we worked on these things, all of us got together. As I said, we had the Women's Club. We had pollyannas. We bring little gifts. We find out what was going on in the neighborhood. As a community now, we watch out for one another. As Warren said, some of the people came and helped out when he had this four way bypass. They helped shovel the snow and so forth. Around here, I look to see what is happening. We had something stolen just across the street the other day. We didn't realize what was happening and we didn't yell at the person and the person got away. I reported it to our police chief. We look out for each other. Maybe, when we first were here, it might have been called being nosy. Now, having been on the council for over 20 years, I think it's being concerned for people. Is somebody sick? Is somebody doing something to somebody they shouldn't? We have the High School up nearby and the kids coming back and forth. Are they getting along? Is something happening? I feel comfortable here. I'm not sure I don't feel partially comfortable, because I know the police department and the town staff. I think it is even more important that they outreach. For a number of years now, we have had community policing, where the policemen can get out in the neighborhoods more. You can say hi and know who they are. For a woman, I think that's very important to have that security as much as you can now a days. I think that's very important. I think if I had to go out and work that would be very important to me.

Suzanne: Have you seen a change in the way women or gender roles have changed?

Warren Hoffman: Not really. When we graduated from college in 1956, a good number of the professional interns were women and moved up the ranks alongside me. I had women bosses any number of times along my professional career. I am not working now, so it's hard to say. I don't really notice it that much that there is much change today for a woman to come into a field and move up. Now, that was in the federal government and maybe business was a little bit different. That's changed quite a bit now to.

Marion Hoffman: What we find now, though, is everybody works more. Women, in our times, they stayed home. You had children and you were able to stay home. Now you

almost can't. I think, partially young lady, you and I are the cause of it. And men too. We want better things and to be able to afford that. Now, there are a lot of people, just to pay the heat bills and the medical expenses, they have to. Almost everybody works. I don't know hardly anybody who doesn't work, after they have had a family. What does that do to the family? The Councilman said to me the other day, "Marion, part of the reason we have some of these problems is these kids come home and they don't see their parents." They are luck to come home and have two dollars on the table to go out and get something to eat for dinner, because the guys are working two jobs and the mother working one job. The family structure has changed considerably through the years. I just think there are more women working nowadays than there used to be 50 years ago.

Suzanne: Was there racism in the community and is there now?

Warren Hoffman: There was 50 years ago. I point out that there was a tavern down on Edmonston Road where Blacks weren't invited into. Right now, I don't see any signs of racism in our community.

Marion Hoffman: How about in Cheverly the school board, they changed the boundaries. I can't remember. It was a basic court case. It affected...people moved from Cheverly because of that. What was that?

Warren Hoffman: That was the decision that said you couldn't have separate schools and then they started busing. That caused a lot of problems. That has been over for a number of years.

Marion Hoffman: That was still when we were here. I guess it was the busing that did it. It probably affected some in Bladensburg...the Port Towns, probably not that much...Cheverly definitely. I know the people who could afford to move moved back then. Here in Bladensburg, when we first moved in, it was almost all White. Then, it changed to a combination of White and African American. I think you're always going to find a little bit deep down in some people. There is a little remembrance of times gone by, whether they were good or bad. I think it is superficial. I don't think it hardly raises its head. You know, as you get to know people you realize there is no difference. I look at my African American friends, and I have some very, very good ones, that I like just as much as White people. You know, it doesn't matter. We really have had an interesting time, because we have gone from White to Black to Latinos now. Curtis Gill...Elma Holway...Senator Gwendolyn Brit...She just died. She died when she was in the House of Delegates. She was 66 years old. I loved her. She and I and her husband used to be on a committee years ago. It's been interesting, because you might have been a little standbackish and cautious, as you got to know people you realized there were good and bad people, Black, White, Latino. This has been a transitional area. It's hard for me to speak. The council right now is one Latino and four African Americans. We have a mixture in terms of staff. It's been interesting coming from Washington D.C. where everybody was White. When the African Americans moved in...what are you going to say?

Warren Hoffman: Everybody wasn't White in Washington D.C.

Marion Hoffman: In my area.

Warren Hoffman: There was racism in Washington D.C.

Marion Hoffman: I'm not saying there wasn't. Where we lived it was all White, in NW Washington D.C., Petworth. When I went to schools, Elementary and Junior High School and Roosevelt High School, it was all White. We didn't have any African Americans then. As I told you, when I went to college, our graduating class was the first class where the Blacks and the Whites reunited. Now, it's the District of Columbia University or I forget what it's called now. It's been interesting living through these times. In fact, I can remember when someone crossed the line. When the first Black person moved into the neighborhood. And boy, "A lot of people are going to come now." Everybody was scarred to death. That was way back then. Now, Gwen Britt, the one who just died, went to Glen Echo and they wouldn't let her ride the merry-go-round and wouldn't let any of the African Americans ride. They had a protest there. I think it's on April 26, they're going back there to the park and have a special dedication for her, as one of the people that was in that protest and was turned away. It's really been very interesting.

Suzanne: How do children fit into the story of Bladensburg? Do the children who grow up here stay in Bladensburg?

Marion Hoffman: No. Not at all. We only have the one and he moved to Rockville.

Warren Hoffman: The Kinkles have moved back to the family house. Sheila Rice lived on the other side of Rt. 450 and when they got married they came here to live. There were some people who have come back.

Marion Hoffman: None of the kids have. None of the kids our sons' age have stayed. The families stayed because they had houses. Kinkle came back, because that was a family home. His dad died and everybody had died and who was going to have the house? think he's very comfortable there now. Sheila Rice moved about the same time we moved here. They had 7. All of her kids are not here. The kids are not staying. It's interesting to me. One of the challenges is you're trying to attract a greater cross section of races to this area to by homes. Another thing is the school system. I don't know what they can do in terms of quality and a mixture of different races. Actually, the African Americans, I'm guessing at this, are reacting to so many Latinos in schools with the African Americans. How does that affect things? Very few Whites in any of our schools. The answer to that one I don't know.

Suzanne: Any thoughts on kids in the community?

Warren Hoffman: Not really. For many years it has not been like a small town in Pennsylvania. A lot of the migration of college kids from those towns is because there are no jobs for them, so they came back. I think in the United States people have become

pretty mobile. Kids go off to college and learn about different areas or meet girls or boys and go in different directions.

Marion Hoffman: The other thing too, the federal government has changed so much. Whereas we used to be able to go back and forth to D.C., which doesn't talk about kids, but it talks about families. With the kids I should say, we have a rec. center. Two African American guys really worked hard. I did a little bit, in terms of getting our rec. center there. They do have programs for kids in the community. It's been interesting, the rec. council tried to do a boxing group. I don't know what happened to it. I think it folded. They were trying to get the guys, the African American guys, off the streets and into something where they could have activity. The rec. center also had a basketball league. The town actually paid for some of the things. That was really good, because it got the kids off the street and into the rec. center. They were able to play there. That was good.

Suzanne: What economic changes have occurred in the past 10 to 20 years, since the town became the Port Towns?

Marion Hoffman: I think it has been an exchange. Some businesses have moved in some have moved out. We have had some changeovers. All the stores are pretty well occupied now. Of course, part of it is who they are catering to. Joe Rodriguez who was a former president of the BLDC has a Latino grocery store down here. We have Murry's and a Save-a-lot up here. I see people walking back and forth. That's good that they can walk back and forth to do those things. Other than that, in the last 10 years, I don't think we have had much change.

Suzanne: Has anything changed since the creation of the Port Towns concept?

Marion Hoffman: I think one of the things is that when we have gone for money, they say, "Oh you're part of the Port Towns." I think that has carried a little bit of weight. They're doing development in Colmar Manor, the high rise. Finance-wise, I don't know if that's still moving ahead. One of the things, I don't know how they did this: the Pointe, the three high rise buildings on 57th, they re-did those. I went to the opening of that. They've redone all the apartments there. That's good. They did get some money from a Community Development Block Grant, probably to do street widening and lighting. The High School is right across the road. I think that could be an upturn for the town. Other than that, going to places and saying, "Hey, there are three and now four of us working together." They have Port Towns Council meetings. I have not gone. That is one series I have not gone to. I really don't know. I know they're working on that one development in Colmar Manor. Other than that, I think there is a significance of identification, when we had the car tags and I don't know if we are still doing that or not. The banners and so forth. What does that mean if you're living in the Port Towns?

Suzanne: Tell me about your experience working with the town.

Marion Hoffman: I can't even think in terms of before I wasn't on the Council. I was on the Council for 22 years. It depends on whose Mayor and Council. Just like any political

thing, it depends on whose there and whose in charge and how it's working. You need a strong support staff. I said to all the council people when I left, "Number 1: You have to save time for your family. Number 2: You have to have enough time to do your full time job, because the council doesn't pay you much." You've got to have a full time income. Then after that, because you have sworn to be councilperson or mayor, you should have time to devote to the job you have accepted. It's become harder and harder, because they've had to work more and more. We used to have a time when, before someone would take the position as Mayor, they were either retired or they were at a high enough level, they could have control over where they would go and what they could do. You need to have a certain amount of time. Some of the people now don't have the time we used to. You have to have a strong support staff. That has been our problem recently. We don't have a Town Administrator. A Town Administrator is key. Someone who knows what they're doing. The Police Chief is great. We have had many Treasurers. The young lady who is there now, I hope she will do well. We don't have a Public Works Director. Thank heavens we are coming out of the snow season. We still might get some and also legal council. You need to get good people into those positions, because then the Mayor and Council have people to rely on. Being off the Council, I don't have any problems. I know all of them. I worked with all of them. Maybe I didn't say this on your tape....I told you I worked with four things: the Waterfront Park, the Bladensburg Local Development Corporation, the Patriotic Committee, which is my ceremonies and all, and finally Bostwick.

Suzanne: What are your satisfactions and dissatisfactions with Bladensburg?

Warren Hoffman: Well, if I had major dissatisfactions I would have moved. Basically, I'm satisfied. Over years, we used to have heavy trash pick up once a week, now it's once a month. We used to have a truck rental program. We would allow an individual a weekend to take one of our town trucks and fill it up with junk and public works would drive it to the landfill. Well, the problem now is at the landfill you have to separate what you deliver, like trees and equipment, and refrigerators you can't take. Because of the cost to the town, they've had to get rid of the truck program. It's little things that have taken place over time. That's a function of the ability to collect taxes and have money for your pet projects. The town about four years ago tried to start up a program of going in cleaning out trash and shrubbery, erasing graffiti from the walls. I don't know what has happened to that program. I have no major dissatisfactions with the town. It's just little things that have changed. It's changed how people respond to you in the stores. Life's nature is how it is today.

Satisfactions: Police force, public safety, trash removal, snow removal. The way they try to keep the town clean. I'm satisfied.

Marion Hoffman: Dissatisfactions...what he said and some of those things changing, partially because the county is changing. Where you can take leaves has changed. What he was talking about, the rent a truck program, it changed because of what the county did. A lot of what we have done is because of what the county has changed. He's right. It depends on how you spend your money and what you want to spend it on.

On the positive side, I think all the things he has indicated are very positive: the police, the code. I think they do a pretty good contact job. I have two things that I scream about. One of the things, I always wanted to make sure we had a monthly newsletter. Now, we maybe have one every two or three months and it's hit and miss. It's ridiculous. I think it's very important that we communicate with the people. That has been a problem. We haven't communicated with the people to let them know what is going on. From a positive standpoint, I think I said all the things.

Suzanne: In what respects is Bladensburg unique and how is it unique among the Port Towns?

Marion Hoffman: We are unique, because we are a historically patriotic town. We have so much history and I've already listed all that. We have more than anybody else. We have had people through the years work on these different things, and we could do 100% more. You mentioned the unmanned hot air balloon, and we have the balloon park. We could do a whole lot more with that, Battle of Bladensburg, etc. The ceremonies at Peace Cross...we take so much for granted in terms of our freedom. I do too. For 30 years, we've never gone anywhere for the 4th of July. We've always been here and we don't have fireworks. That's a lot of money. They were saying something the other day. I think it was on the elections, they were saying how we don't realize how lucky we are that we have our freedom. That was when the country was born, the 4th of July. Yet, we have picnics and fireworks and so forth. We don't think of some of the more basic thoughts, in terms of how we got here and why are we still here. I think the historic and patriotic side of things is what I really like about the town.

Warren Hoffman: We're unique, because of some of the past Mayors we have had and the professional staff. Our Mayor who used to be a fireman fought to have our own communication system. It's on top of the water tower. We had to fight the county several times to keep it for ourselves. Our codes are probably more updated than a couple of the other Port Towns areas. The reason I say that, is they're even trying to copy some of them now. Our code enforcement has stood the test. The other towns are now trying to copy them. Their Code Enforcement Officers can do more to keep the towns clean and updated. Recently, there have been problems throughout the whole metropolitan area with the way houses are rented, the number of renters and the number of cars parking on lawns. Last year, we enacted that you had to have so much green space. If you had a vehicle parked it had to be on a cement base or a block base or some other base, so you don't find our yards cluttered with five or six cars. The town has stayed ahead over the last 30 to 40 years with updating its code and fighting for the town. That's due to the council people we have had, the Mayor, and the professional staff. The other towns haven't had as big a professional staff. They haven't had full time people. The other towns, she just looked up the other day. They only work a half day every day. That's not the Port Towns, but some of the smaller towns. Some of the other towns haven't had the paid staff to support them, so that's made us unique. Now they're writing our codes and our statutes. That's what I would say.

