

Chapter 1 – Introduction

Announcer: Toni Garner is the daughter of a Cherokee educator and a first-generation Lebanese homemaker. Having grown up with flower shops on both sides of the family, she learned the ins and outs of the trade from her grandmother and her aunt.

Toni graduated from Northeastern State University and opened Toni's Flowers & Gifts in Tulsa in 1983 when she was 26 years old.

Toni was one of a hundred floral designers invited to do the inaugural flowers for George W. Bush's second term.

Locally, she has given her time and resources to many community organizations, non-profits, museums, and universities. She and her good friend, Charles Faudree, published a book titled *Country French Florals and Interiors*.

Listen to Toni talk about the challenges of Valentine's Day, her friendship with Charles Faudree and Pat Gordon, and the story behind "Merry Christmas Anyway" on the podcast and website of VoicesOfOklahoma.com.

Chapter 2 – 10:25

Chief Ross

John Erling (JE): So my name is John Erling, and today's date is September 30th, 2025. So Toni, would you state your full name, please?

Toni Garner (TG): My name is Antoinette Marie Garner, and I go by Toni.

JE: How did the Toni come about?

TG: Because it was kind of a nickname because I really didn't want to spell Antoinette at school when I was young, so I just became Toni.

JE: But I like that name: Antoinette.

TG: Yeah.

JE: Good name. And we are recording this in the recording facilities of Voices of Oklahoma. Your birth date?

TG: It's 10-5-1956.

JE: Your present age?

TG: It's 68.

JE: Soon to be.

TG: 69 on Sunday.

JE: October 5th. Where were you born?

TG: I was born at Saint John Hospital in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

JE: Let's talk about your parents, your mother's name, maiden name, and where she was born and raised.

TG: My mother's maiden name was Olga Lys -- L-Y-S -- Beshara, and she was born in Haskell, Oklahoma.

JE: She grew up there?

TG: She grew up in Haskell, Oklahoma. Yes.

JE: You said "Beshara", is that a relative of -- I called him "Hoss" Ed—

TG: Of Ed Beshara? Yes, that's her brother is Ed Beshara.

JE: Your mother—

TG: —and Ed are brother and sister.

JE: And so the young Ed is your cousin.

TG: Yes, he is. He's my first cousin.

JE: Who had, has had Beshara's Clothing and it still is open—

TG: —and he's my landlord.

JE: Yeah. OK, but your mother was of what descent?

TG: My mother was full blood Lebanese like Ed. Yes.

JE: Was that a community in Haskell of Lebanese people?

TG: Well, yeah, there was a couple of families there. There was the Nesser family and the Beshara family. And the Nesses had, I think, five children. And my mother, there were eight girls and three boys that were born. Their mother passed away when my mother was three years old, and there's one younger sister than her, but they're all gone now.

JE: What was your mother's personality like?

TG: My mother's personality, she was kind of matter of fact. She didn't let things -- she just kind of went with the punches. And she was very creative. She became a milliner. She went to school to become a milliner, and she made hats. And she had a shop in Muskogee. I couldn't believe how contemporary -- we found her sacks, and they were black with like a silver platinum that said "Olga Lys" across it. And it was very contemporary. And I thought, wow, she was very modern or creative way back when.

JE: Where did she go to school for that?

TG: She went to school in Saint Louis for a while and then she worked in Texas at a department store.

JE: You got to admire her. She wanted a career.

TG: Yes, she did. She wanted a career.

JE: Right.

TG: Yes.

JE: Then your father's name.

TG: My father's name is Bill Ross Garner, William Ross Garner. And he was born in Eldon, Oklahoma, and he is of Cherokee descent. He grew up there in Tahlequah, Eldon. And then they moved to Tulsa and he attended Will Rogers High School.

JE: Your father, what was his career? What did he do?

TG: He became a superintendent of schools, but he started out as a football coach at Collinsville and Owasso, Oklahoma. And then he became superintendent at Owasso and then he became superintendent at Collinsville. So we're education, public education children.

JE: Yes, right. Did they drill that into you when you were a child?

TG: Not necessarily, but he was always an equal person. I learned a lot from him that everyone is equal and you respect everyone and you don't judge anybody by anything. You listen, and we're just all the same.

JE: So they talked about that, specifically talked about that, no matter what you look like or whatever.

TG: Yeah, he always told me not to -- like in school, because he was around a lot of children at school, but we never knew who was going to be at our dinner table at night. If some person was having trouble at home or something, he would bring them home. Or they didn't have clothes, he would get them clothes. And we didn't have a lot. There were four children, and it was a long time ago. It's in the 60s and 70s.

JE: So he probably had an outgoing personality then.

TG: Yes, he did, but he was always for-the-underdog to me. He always listened to his teachers. He always took their side, I think. It was always kind of, I always learned a lot from that.

JE: So you've drawn from that, I'm sure, and wanting to treat everybody equally. How did your parents meet?

TG: My dad was attending Northeastern University in Tahlequah, and my mother's brother, Maurice Beshara, brought him home one weekend to Haskell. That's how he met my mother. So they started to date. And I think my dad, after school, he enlisted. He was in the army during the Korean time or something, and he was in Texas. And I think that when she was working in Texas, and then they came back and got married in Haskell.

JE: I think there's a story about your grandparents, though.

TG: My grandmother, her name was Sally Ross, and her sister was Merle Ross. And she was, Merle Ross was born in the Merle home. And we're direct

descendants from John Ross, Chief John Ross. He's our fifth great grandfather.

JE: Right? Chief of the Cherokees --

TG: Cherokees. Yes. And so Sally Ross married David "DJ" Garner. But that's how that came about. It was on my grandmother's side that we're related to John Ross. So we're mixed blood.

JE: Very interesting combination, isn't it? Your education, your grade school. Where did you go to?

TG: I went to grade school in Owasso, where my dad was. We lived there first. I was born when they were living in Collinsville, but then we moved to Owasso, and I went to school there.

JE: And the school that he was superintendent.

TG: Yes. At that time when I was starting school, he was a football coach and then a principal. Back then they had a dual job, and then he soon became superintendent.

JE: You were in grade school there and then to junior high?

TG: And then when it became time for middle school, we moved to Collinsville and he became superintendent there.

JE: All right. So what was it like to be the daughter of the principal?

TG: Oh, well, it was good some ways and bad some ways because you always had to set an example. He wanted us to set an example because he didn't want to have any trouble or go, "Oh, well, she is wearing her dress four inches above her knee. And it's supposed to be two inches." So there was always that. Personally, I think I was a very good person at school. I tried to always go by the rules, but I did do a few things. I did skip one day. I did get in trouble.

JE: Your introduction to flowers goes back, and I think you were five years old. So tell us why.

TG: Well, my grandmother in Collinsville had a flower shop, and I would always hang out there. And they would give me, like, a bolt of ribbon and tell me to make a bow. And so I'd make a bow. And they had a big old box of them,

and I think they were just keeping me busy. But I loved watching them do everything, and I wanted to learn. So by the time I was a junior or senior in high school, I was helping them at the flower shop after school or on Saturdays. And so I thought to myself: "I always want to have a flower shop". In the meantime, this is so interesting, my mother's sister needed to have a career because her father had died and they had these buildings in Haskell. So she opened a flower shop. So I had it on both sides of the family. That's how I became a florist. When I worked and I got out of college, that's when it happened.

JE: So then did you think at a very early age, "I want to have my own flower shop?"

TG: Yes, but frankly, I didn't know that much about it. I just knew about doing bouquets or helping or waiting on people. So I learned some basic skills.

JE: Then high school was in

TG: Collinsville.

JE: And what year did you graduate?

TG: In 1974.

JE: All right. In high school, did you participate in any functions?

TG: I was in band. I played the clarinet for twelve years. And then we were in different things. We were in a small class. We had 125 people in our class. We all knew each other and did everything. So yeah, we did a lot of activities and things.

JE: So were you a good student?

TG: Yeah, I was pretty good.

JE: Yup.

TG: I was not bad, but I was good. I was in the upper.

JE: In the upper level, I'm sure.

TG: Yeah.

Chapter 3 – 6:35
\$35,000

John Erling (JE): So you graduate from high school. Then what do you do?

Toni Garner (TG): I went to Northeastern in Tahlequah. I debated a lot where to go to school, but I decided to go there. I felt comfortable going there. I was kind of a mom and dad's girl. I didn't want to leave that far, so I went there, but I loved it. I enjoyed it so much.

JE: So going to college was just an automatic in the conversation in your home, wasn't it? You didn't have any choice in that.

TG: No, not really, but yes.

JE: So what was your degree in?

TG: Well, back then it was a Bachelor of Science with business, and then they called it home economics. It's a whole different thing now.

JE: But so then what was your training in? What were you?

TG: Well, I took a lot of business courses, and then I took a lot of -- it was weird back then. I took a lot of -- it was kind of like home economics. It was really kind of interesting, but we learned fashion merchandising and different things like that. Maybe into the dietetics field a little bit.

JE: Business-wise, what you learned there would have been helpful to you—

TG: —and a little bit of it, yes.

JE: Later on—

TG: —a little bit, yes.

JE: Did you have that in mind when you took those courses?

TG: I had kind of thought about that, and then when I got out of school, I went to work at a luggage store that was out of Dallas, and I became a manager. They were just opening up in Tulsa, so that kind of laid a foundation of doing daily bookwork and being responsible for people and that type of thing.

JE: All right. What was the luggage store?

TG: It was Bag and Baggage. It was a long time ago.

JE: Where was that located?

TG: It was at Fontana and then downtown at the Williams Center.

JE: Oh, yes.

TG: So I worked there and managed. Worked my way up to managing those stores for like three years before I opened my shop.

JE: But you were thinking all along that you were going to open up, and that you weren't ready yet to do that. That's why you went to work there.

TG: Yeah, I was saving and thinking about it, and then in comes my uncle Edward.

JE: He comes in—?

TG: —because he asked me to come to work for him, so I did. At Ed Beshara's. He asked me to come to work there at his shop.

JE: Ed Senior?

TG: Ed Senior.

JE: We call him "Hoss."

TG: Hoss. Yeah, Hoss asked me to come to work for him and help him. I would do the bookwork for him and be a salesman on the floor. And then he knew I wanted a flower shop. So when he had a space open, he said, "Are you ready?" And that's how it all came about.

JE: Well, how about that?

TG: He was instrumental. He and my family co-signed at the bank for me to get a loan.

JE: Oh, they did help you that way.

TG: Yes. That was my help, and that's how I got started. I borrowed \$35,000.

JE: To open that store. And what year was that?

TG: That was in 1983.

JE: Thirty-five thousand dollars.

TG: And I paid it back in under four years.

JE: Right. Oh, man; but that had to give him a lot of satisfaction to know that he got you started.

TG: Yes, he did. And he would always come on the first of the month and collect the rent. He would tell me, "Quick pay make quick friend."
(Laughing)

JE: (Laughing) "Quick payment make quick friend."

TG: That was my funny --

JE: Yeah.

TG: So that was a very big learning experience.

JE: Yes. And of course Ed became such a big personality in our town.

TG: Oh yeah. I learned a lot about salesmanship from him. He always said, "When a person comes in the door, you greet them, 'Hello, how are you?' You just always let them know you're there. You make everyone feel welcome." He was much like my dad, where he thought everybody was the same.

JE: I have great memories of Hoss.

TG: Oh yeah. You know why he called people Hoss, don't you?

JE: Why?

TG: Because if he couldn't remember their name, he would just say "Hoss."
(Laughing)

JE: (Laughing)

TG: They had this wall in the back of the shop at Ed Beshara's where they had all these names. And I think when he couldn't remember a name and he called them Hoss, he would kind of walk back there and go over the names and say, "Oh yeah, that's who that is." So—

JE: —then he'd come back and use their name?

TG: Yeah. I learned that. That was very interesting. I learned a lot, but that was good.

JE: I imagine his son Ed Junior learned a lot from him, and they were so completely different personalities.

TG: Yeah, it was fun to watch them work together. They were interesting. They were cute. And yes, he was very instrumental in helping me.

JE: There were other flower shops in town, and some well-known ones too. And that didn't faze you. You figured, "No, there was enough business for everybody," or what?

TG: Yeah, I always thought that. And that comes from another person who was a very dear friend, Charles Faudree. He would always say, "Toni, there's enough for everybody. Don't worry about the other person. Stay in your lane." And that was one of the best pieces of advice I've ever had. Because I don't worry about everyone. I take care of my employees, and I do what I think is right, and we learn and do our creativity to help people. There were a lot of shops, so I just stayed in my lane. But I was friends with everyone, and we used to have a good time. There were some great florists in town that I learned a lot from, and they were mentors also.

JE: Oh, and so you were...?

TG: We were friends.

JE: Friends with the other stores?

TG: We were friends with Mary Murray's, and Gwen from DeHavens, and Carol at Aviva Flowers. We would all get together and have dinner and do things socially together. So we had a nice-knit community.

JE: Even though they were in some ways competitors, I suppose, but you still got along.

TG: Yeah, we did. It was really fun. Things are different now, but I still stay in my lane.

Chapter 4 – 12:35
Word of Mouth

John Erling (JE): Those early days, OK, and then you're located. You were at 36th?

Toni Garner (TG): We were at 36th and Harvard in the strip center, we were where Fellini's is -- the sandwich shop -- we started out there, and then as we got a little bigger and needed more space, we moved on the end where there was a ladies' dress shop. We moved there, and then in like 2008, we moved to our location now on the end. So I've been in three spaces, remodeled three spaces, kept going.

JE: Yeah. So do you remember when you opened your first day, your inventory? How did you know how many flowers you were going to order?

TG: I had kind of watched my aunt in Haskell, how she did it, because my grandmother had passed away by then. So my aunt in Haskell, I would help her a lot. I kind of followed her rule of what she had. And then I read an awful lot of magazines because back then we didn't have the internet or anything. So I got every kind of flower magazine or any classes online -- not online -- I could send for or do. So I would go to the wholesale houses, which I was friends with because I had met them through my family floral shops. So they knew me. They knew I was going to give it a whirl.

Then I felt connected because opening in Midtown, it was a great location. So I had the best of all worlds, I think. I started going to garden clubs and talking to them, word of mouth. Then I would send things to people to kind of get their attention and just kind of worked my way that way. My mom and dad's friends would call, and Ed had friends, and they would all start calling like, "Toni's opened a flower shop." So it was word of mouth. We did send out mailers, but I thought word of mouth was the most effective. Or showing something you could do, or donating to something where you did it, and then it just took off like, "Oh, that little shop did something." That's how it worked.

So it was word-of-mouth and talking to garden clubs and to different

organizations, and just kind of doing my own marketing, really. You know, like that.

JE: Yeah, talking to garden clubs, you would tell them about your business?

TG: Yeah, and do demonstrations and let them know we could do things and that they should come and shop there.

JE: You're very creative in your flowers. You learned that, I suppose, from those shops you worked in. You watched them? Your mother?

TG: And my grandmother and aunt.

JE: Right. You learned how they were creative and then you probably took that to another level.

TG: I never thought I would own a flower shop in a larger city. I always thought it would be a small town. I had that small-town mentality because that's just what I thought. But when it happened, it happened so fast that I just kept going. I'm not going to say that it wasn't hard when I started because it was very hard, because it was myself. And then my sister stopped by to help me and helped me paint a cabinet, and she never left.

JE: Stephanie?

TG: Stephanie, but I have to hear about it every day because she's still there (Laughing).

JE: (Laughing)

TG: But if it weren't for her... We'd make a few arrangements, and she would go deliver them. So she became the delivery person when we first started. So it was a two-person operation.

JE: Did she do the bookkeeping?

TG: No, I was doing bookkeeping, and my mother helped me a little bit with that too. But I was doing the bookkeeping, which is not my forte; I'll just say it right now. (Laughing)

JE: But did you eventually, obviously, hire somebody?

TG: Oh, yes, definitely.

JE: But it got you through. It was pretty simple at first.

TG: Yeah. At first it was like, "OK, we took this much in, we've got to pay this bill."

JE: Do you remember the first customers or maybe the first big event that you had?

TG: Gosh, I'm trying to think. I think the first thing was a wedding. I think my first big wedding -- don't laugh -- it was like \$500, and I thought I had hung the moon. I told my mom, "Oh my gosh, I've got a \$500 wedding."

And she goes "Okay!"

And so we made it. And it was out in Mannford. It's just a hilarious story. But they'd had a tornado, and the church had changed to a different church. It's just one of the most funny things I think back on right now. Like, it was just funny. Because they changed the church but didn't tell me. So I was around the circle in Mannford saying, "Oh, there it is!" Just different things.

JE: And then to haul those flowers up there, it must have took several trips.

TG: Nope! It was just one in the van.

JE: You had bought a van then.

TG: I had bought a van. And so we took it out there and set it up and waited for it to be over because it was out there. It was just something funny.

JE: Now I'm by your store all the time, and you've got four vans sitting out front right now, don't you?

TG: Yes.

JE: At the beginning, did you know what types of flowers to buy? But I suppose...

TG: Yeah, I did. I bought basics. But then I learned there were a lot more beautiful flowers out there than what we used in small towns. Like, I started noticing people go, "I don't want carnations. I don't want daisies. I want something different." So I started kinda feeling out different kinds of

flowers and researching different flowers at the wholesalers that they would have. It opened up a whole new world.

JE: Name some of those flowers you're talking about.

TG: There were lilies that I didn't really know when I was growing up. There were hydrangeas; there were -- I mean, these were flowers that were different then. Growing up, we had carnations, daisies, irises, roses, you know. And then we started getting them from different places -- you know, from all over.

JE: From different wholesalers.

TG: Yeah, from different wholesalers and from different countries.

JE: Oh!

TG: So we used to get everything from California, then it became Mexico, then it became Colombia, then it became the Netherlands. There's flowers come from all over. So that's fast-forward to now -- 40 years. 43 years and you get a lot more.

JE: So are you ordering today from other countries?

TG: Yes, I order online now. I order and it comes through our wholesaler here, but it comes straight in a box, and nobody else touches it. So we get to process them ourselves. That's why I feel like our flowers last longer. But we do buy a lot of flowers, too, locally from farmers -- like farm-to-table and farm-to-florist type things, too, also.

JE: So we are growing flowers in Oklahoma?

TG: Stillwater, Collinsville -- there's a lot of other places that are growing them around town.

JE: You talk about tariffs these days. Could that have affected you in any way?

TG: Yes. So far we've paid \$6,000 in tariffs on Christmas merchandise that we've received so far.

JE: Really!?

TG: And vases. But one of my vase companies that I just bought a lot of vases from, they waived the tariff due to them losing business. People were

doing other things. They said they'd rather pay the tariff. Because from China, really, we've always paid really like a 10-15% tariff, but if they raise it to 35-40%, it's high. And a lot of our Christmas product comes from China and those other places, so yeah.

JE: What doing about China, are you...?

TG: My sister is the pricer, shipping, and receiving. So she puts into the price, but we try to be as fair as possible, but that's a lot of money for small businesses to take over. Right now, everybody's just kind of grin-and-bearing it; but in a small business, if you take, say, \$12,000 off the top for a tariff you didn't have ever before, I mean, that's a lot of money you have to recoup.

JE: So you've had to increase your prices?

TG: A little bit, yes. And the flowers that are coming from the Netherlands are a little bit pricier too, right now.

JE: Why now?

TG: I think that they're putting it to tariff-type things.

JE: Oh.

TG: Yeah. I think they're embedding it in the prices. I'm trying to figure it out. I'm visiting with wholesalers to try and figure out why prices are so much higher. They fluctuate a lot. It's a different world now.

JE: You've no doubt been Holland...

TG: Yes.

JE: To see the tulip festival?

TG: Uh-huh (in agreement).

JE: Margaret and I have been there to see that. That's just so beautiful.

TG: And the auction.

JE: Yes.

TG: That's where we get a lot of our flowers is off the auction.

JE: Auction? So they auction in Holland?

TG: The flowers, uh-huh (in agreement).

JE: Okay. Tell me about how that works.

TG: So I go online and they have all the flowers that are available. Like, they have them in categories. Starting with, say, roses -- I don't buy roses from there because they're really expensive -- but Gerbers and just all different types of flowers. And you can just go in and buy them. And you can buy like 100 stems at this amount or 50 stems at this amount. They have them in groups where you can buy them. And if you order by Thursday, you can have them on Monday.

JE: Oh.

TG: So all the time they buy them off of the market.

JE: Okay.

TG: The auction.

JE: And how do they keep them fresh?

TG: They go from there, they go to airline and then they're refrigerated until the airline.

JE: But they will survive about 2-3 days? Is that it?

TG: Yes. 2 days.

JE: And into your cooler?

TG: Except if we have a shipping problem and something goes awry; if the airplanes or things have a problem then we do have problems.

JE: So what happens when you have a problem like that? Do you have to eat that loss?

TG: Sometimes we do, but most usually they take care of it.

JE: The airlines?

TG: The company.

JE: Oh, the company who is sending them. And they'll send you another.

TG: Uh-huh (in agreement). But I've had a lot of companies not do that. Like I got roses one time. I spent \$13,000 on Valentine's roses and they came in frozen off of Southwest Airlines, but nobody would help me with it. The airline wouldn't help me, the sender wouldn't help me, no one. So I was very disgruntled, but I went through every way I could get to have somebody help me but they didn't help me. That was just a bad deal.

JE: And so that was for Valentine's?

TG: I ate that.

JE: You ate that. So then what did you do to have roses for Valentine's?

TG: I got new ones in, but I just didn't recoup that. That was not a good thing. I was depressed about that. I still talk about it, so, you know, I've got to let it go.

Chapter 5 – 11:55

Valentine's Day

John Erling (JE): Was there ever a time you didn't know whether you'd make it or not?

Toni Garner (TG): Yes. I can't believe how strong you can be, but I just show up every day and do the best I can. But there are times. There were like in 2008, 2009, 2010, I noticed the economy was doing things a little different. And I thought, I just can't continue to do the bookwork myself. I can't do it anymore. And I would do it and then send it to a bookkeeper. I thought I need somebody in-house. And so I contacted George Dotson. I always look up to him as a very smart individual. And I said, "What should I do?" And so I told him about the amount that we did and what we do. And he says, "Oh, Toni, you should have a CFO of some sort, either in-house for a few hours a day or something, or somebody to do all that. You can't continue to do that and be the creative and be the salesman." You just can't do it anymore. So we hired a CFO, and she's been there like 15 years now, completely turned around that side of my business. So I don't even worry

about it. I don't do it. And then we have a person that comes in and does morning bookwork and everything, and she comes three days a week. And it makes life so much easier and I don't have to worry about that. Everything's on time. We pay ten days ahead. I don't worry. I love it. And so I'm very lucky.

JE: Back to whether or not you were going to make it or not. It was that you just had to, it was, I suppose, depressing. You just put your head down and say, "OK, one step ahead of the other." Is that kind of the way you handle that?

TG: Yeah, I just went there every day. Some days I had it all in my mind, but I never wanted to let my employees know that I was down. I never fully really told my sister. I just said, "We have to just keep going and keep selling it." What's fortunate about, and how lucky, I feel like I'm lucky is we kept having good days, so I could bring in what we needed and everything would be all right. I just kept going, but it was hard there for a while.

JE: Was that in the 80s, 90s?

TG: Actually it was 2008, 2009, 2010. The 90s were good. I think it was after 2000 things started gradually. It was just harder.

JE: The economy of our city. It wasn't because you were doing poor things. That's just the way, and maybe other florists were feeling the same.

TG: Yeah, it separated a lot of people. A lot of florists went out of business, and they're still going out of business.

JE: Really, today?

TG: Yes.

JE: How many do you think we have in town?

TG: I think there's maybe 10 to 12. There's a lot of florists that do things out of their home or a studio, and they're not like everyday florists that do everything. There's not that many anymore, and I think when I went in business there were 50.

JE: Really?

TG: 30 to 50, yeah.

JE: And you thought you could make it work. (Laughing)

TG: I thought I could make it. (Laughing) I went to visit Mr. Arnett at Tulsa Greenhouse because he was a family friend, and he said, "Oh gosh, are you sure you want to do this? It's very competitive. You should really think this through." And so I thought, well, I was young and I thought, I'm gonna do it. I can do this. So I did it.

JE: And how old would you have been when you opened it in '83?

TG: I was 26.

JE: You call some of this luck, and other businesses will say luck, but if you can do it and come through, the luck comes in the opportunity that was handed to you. You could have not come through on that opportunity, and yet you did. I hope you pat yourself on the back a few times because you could have screwed this whole thing up.

TG: Yeah, I think I could have given up a few times, but I thought I have to have a living and I support these co-workers, so I need to get going, quit feeling sorry, and get going. And actually, I'm kind of an emotional person, but I would not let it show.

JE: It was just you and your sister, but then what led you to hire your first employee?

TG: We got busier, so we hired a driver, and so we needed an extra person indoors. So we hired a retiree, and that was a very good experience to have. And then we hired another designer. It just kind of kept going. As time went on, we'd need to get more people because when we started out, we'd have like three or four deliveries a day, and then it got where we'd have ten or twelve, and then it got to more and more.

JE: And how many do you think you have today?

TG: We do 60 to 75.

JE: Deliveries in a day?

TG: Uh-huh (in agreement).

JE: (Laughing)

TG: (Laughing) Yeah! Some days not that much, but pretty much, or then you throw in an event here and there or a wedding on the weekend or something.

JE: How many employees do you have now?

TG: Well, we have 10 full time and like seven part time. It fluctuates. I call the CFO, the bookkeeper, a driver, and a phone answerer the part time.

JE: OK. All right. And how long have some of those employees been with you?

TG: Well, my sister, of course, 43 years, and then we have Melissa. She's been there 18 years. I did have a 27-year employee, but she left. So yeah, they've all been there a long time.

JE: Well, that's a compliment to you.

TG: Yeah, I think so. And then I have my nephew there now, and he's been there a long time.

JE: Let's talk about Valentine's Day.

TG: Oh yeah.

JE: Is this the biggest time of the year for you?

TG: Yeah, we call it the biggest knock in the head a year. (Laughing)

JE: (Laughing) All right, so obviously it's February 14th. So take me back. How many days ahead of time do the calls start coming in?

TG: Oh, they start in January. People know to call early because I'm gonna let you in a little -- I take the phone off the hook. I know that's bad business, but I can only do so many. I can't do thousands. I say were a small business, but... I mean, we have people who walk in and we do deliveries.

So Valentine's Day is a week-long thing. Like this last year, we work and make ahead every day for the next day, but we are always processing new flowers because we want the freshest and best for everyone. We can get 300 deliveries out by 1 o'clock. And how we do that, we started out this Madeleine Women's Church group. The men and women's group come from there and they go in pairs, and we give them a little muffin for breakfast, and then we have a little box lunch, but they'll take out 10

deliveries at a time in one area, and they're in groups. And that way I give back to their organization and they're helping me. So I give to the women's club.

JE: And what church is this?

TG: This is Madeleine Church. We used to do it with the Linnaeus Garden, they would do it too, but they've kind of disbanded now. But they come and they help, so there'll be like 10 cars of two. And they've done it so long, they're kind of getting older now, we're gonna have to figure out something new. But they come and we have holders that fit in the back of the car and they put them in, and they love it. We give them all the ones in Midtown and around, and then our drivers take the rest. That's kind of one of my favorite things that we do.

JE: And that was a great idea.

TG: Yeah, and that way we're giving back to organizations, so that's a good thing. But everybody kind of works, and we stay late a few nights and get it done, and just get there.

JE: Then I suppose some will walk in on Valentine's Day and say, "I'd like a dozen roses for my wife." And what do you say to that person?

TG: Well, my mother used to say, "Did you just get hit by the love bug?" when she was there helping. But now we keep at least 50 or 60 things made up out front. So we'll keep making things as the day goes. The walk-in days are the day before and the day of. A lot of people come in, they expect to just get something. Instant gratification is the word of the world now. They want to walk in, see something they want, pick it up and take it with them. So we box it up and give it to them.

JE: OK, so you can accommodate somebody who walks in?

TG: Yeah, we can. We do that nowadays.

JE: Right, because I've been in your store picking up roses, and I've heard somebody walk in and I said, "Man, where have you been?"

TG: Yeah, and we don't always have it for everybody every time, but we do our best.

JE: You called somebody “the designers.” When designers come to you, do they have to be trained for that? Some have a real creative flair and others may not.

TG: I don't mind teaching. I like to teach people to do and teach them the right way to do. I've had a few veteran-type designers work there, but actually I have a granddaughter of a florist that I was friends with. She had a shop for many years in Broken Arrow, and her granddaughter works for us. So she has kind of an understanding of the business. And then we have a girl, she worked for a florist of a friend of mine in Fort Smith that we used to go to conferences together, and she moved to Tulsa. So she kind of had a background also. And then there's my sister. Then I have two other ones, but I'm teaching my niece, she's 23, and so she's doing quite well, Molly. So I like to teach them. I like to take them from the ground up and teach the basics of how I like it. And so I try to make it more modern for them.

JE: So there is a basic thing that you start with and then you kind of get a flair beyond that, apparently?

TG: And then kind of go in stages to get them up to doing everything.

Chapter 6 – 7:25

Faudree & Gordon

John Erling (JE): You mentioned Charles Faudree, and I've interviewed him for Voices of Oklahoma. What a character. First of all, describe a Charles Faudree.

Toni Garner (TG): Gosh, I don't know if I can do it without, I get emotional. He's one of my most favorite person I've ever known in my life. He was so caring. I always felt like he was so caring about me. He taught me so much. I just can't even say enough nice things about him. I never have talked about a deceased person so much in my life. I have his picture on my desk in my bedroom office thing, and I look at it every day. I have it by my parents. He means a lot to me. He said, "You need to have a legacy. You need to do a book with me." And I said, "Oh, I don't think so, Charles. I don't, I'm not that. I'm not all that." And he said, "Oh yeah, you're going to do it." And so we

did, and I never had so much fun, and he taught me a lot. I can't even say enough stuff about him, but I loved him so much.

JE: How did you first meet him?

TG: Well, actually, he came in my shop and I wasn't there. My mom was there. I had gone to run an errand, and he brought this cake in and he goes, "Is Toni here?" And my mom said, "No, but I know who you are. You're Charles Faudree." And he said, "Yes." He goes, "Well, I just want to know what's the story of her? What's the story of Toni?" And she goes, "Oh, well, it's my daughter." He goes, "Oh, it is your daughter." So he goes, "Well, I brought her a cake. I just wanted to meet her." Is that not funny? And so we just kind of became friends after that. We would hang out and do things. He was something else. I have funny stories, too many probably to mention, but he played so many jokes on people. He played them on my mom. He would call up and he would disguise his voice as a woman or something and say, "Now, I'm getting a new car and I need a big red bow for it." Or he'd call up and say, "Somebody died and I need a casket of flowers and I need them in 30 minutes." And he would do all these crazy things.
(Laughing)

JE: But did somebody catch on to him, or did he have to say it? "No, I'm just kidding."

TG: We would catch on after a while, but yeah, it got kind of funny. But he was such a dear friend. I felt like he always put me first for things. You know how people have a lot of friends and you always think you're their best friend. We all think we were Charles's best friend. He had a lot of friends. So we always tease, "Well, I was his best friend," so it's kind of a cute story.

JE: He was an interior designer that became nationally known, maybe beyond that, and created all the fabrics.

TG: Yes, his fabrics are beautiful.

JE: A very, very talented man, and you were fortunate to be in his friendship.

TG: Yes. And I'll never forget all the things he did, or taught me, or just being a friend.

JE: And the book was called Country French Florals and Interiors.

TG: Yes.

JE: So the book was about interiors and florals. How did the two of you work together?

TG: It was all both of our customers. So we did flowers in the homes he decorated, and then I would do flowers in them. So that was kind of fun. So we would just go and shoot the different homes, and it was cute and rewarding, and I love it. Now, it wasn't his best-selling book, let's just be on record, OK? I always have to do the downfall. He goes, "You know, it's not the best-selling book that I've done," but we did it and it was fun. So it was always cute.

JE: And he did many books, didn't he?

TG: Yes, he did. I think he had five or six books. He was a go-getter. I love that about him.

JE: I've forgotten how old he was when he died.

TG: Let's see, I went to a 70th birthday party in France—

JE: Oh, really?

TG: — or 75th.

JE: Of course it would be in another country.

TG: Yeah, it was fun.

JE: Did he love France?

TG: He loved France. He loved the flea market there.

JE: In Paris?

TG: In Paris. We all went and bought stuff. I bought stuff when I was remodeling my shop for this third location, third time. And I bought stuff for it, and it was fun. And he would just mark it. And he pretended he could speak French to all these French men, and they understood him because they were his friends that he'd known a long time when he'd gone there. But it was the most beautiful day. It was a day in February, and we went and it was so gorgeous. It was like a dream. We thought we were in a movie. It was so much fun.

JE: One of the big takeaways from this would be for me to think that he walked in with a cake, unknown, and wanted to meet this Toni. Isn't that amazing?

TG: Yeah.

JE: And I can see you're emotional talking about it now. Well, another friend of yours is Pat Gordon.

TG: Yeah, same thing. I love him also, and I met him through Charles.

JE: Oh, really?

TG: Yeah, we were on the Tulsa Cares board together.

JE: And Pat's been a friend of yours for a long time.

TG: Yes. We play bridge on Wednesdays -- Wednesday nights now.

JE: Oh, really?

TG: Yeah.

JE: Of course, now they have that tribute to him at Philbrook, which is beautiful. I've seen that.

TG: You've seen it? It's gorgeous.

JE: Yeah, it is gorgeous. And you see some of the flowers and pictures that came from Toni's flowers, isn't that true?

TG: Yeah, he always says I'm his muse, but I know he's got a lot of other muses. But he's always very kind about that. If I get a really unusual flower or something fun, I think it's paintable, I'll go, "Hey, I'm gonna send you this. It's so pretty. I think you should paint it." So he takes lots of pictures of things that he can have; but he's super sweet and so talented, and I'm so proud of him right now about his show at Philbrook.

JE: You know this story, but I love this story that Pat tells, and I've interviewed him as well. That when he was setting up in Tulsa, there was an empty space, and he set up his paintings for sale. And people came and they wouldn't buy them. Like, say I'm going to use a number of say \$100 and they wouldn't buy them. And he thought, "OK, I'll raise my price." And he says at \$500 and he sold every painting. So you can't undercharge. They

got to give value to it. They thought, if this is only \$100 that can't be worth anything. But it was worth something when they paid \$500.

TG: Isn't that interesting? I love that.

Chapter 7 – 5:28

Electrical Fire

John Erling (JE): So you've had challenges along the way, and I remember walking in one day when you lost your electricity, and I've forgotten why that actually happened in the first place.

Toni Garner (TG): Actually, it was... Valentine's was on a Tuesday, and on Saturday in the middle of the night, I got a call from security and they said, "You need to get down to your shop. If you don't get down there, they're going to bust your window in because your shop's on fire." So I throw on my coat and my tennis shoes and I head down there, and there were some policemen. I unlocked the door, and there was an electrical fire. Somebody had put our electrical system on fire at the back of our shop.

JE: So it was intentional?

TG: Yes. They had used some type of accelerant to catch it on fire because we didn't have any trash. The trash men like us and they know we're busy, and they come on Saturdays during a holiday and pick up. So they had been there to pick up, so there wasn't any trash. And so we aired it out and we stayed there all night. They said, "We have to unhook your electrical and we have to turn everything off." We called PSO, so we had to wait for PSO. This is at three o'clock in the morning. We waited and got everything aired out. It wasn't anything damaging inside, but it was all the electrical. I thought, "Oh well, we'll just call a guy and he'll hook it back up tomorrow." Wrong. It took six weeks. They had to completely redo the whole electrical. We were on a generator just for lights, computer, cooler, and phone, but not heater and air conditioning.

JE: But you had the generator installed a long time ago?

TG: The generator came within that morning by eleven o'clock.

JE: Oh, so you ordered one.

TG: I called the electric company that I thought I'd need to get help from, and they came right away with a big one.

JE: Right, right.

TG: So that's what happened. We continued. That Sunday everybody was coming in, and I always do breakfast on a holiday when we're going to work on a Sunday. I called everyone and I said, "OK, everybody come, but bundle up a little bit, and if you have some type of flashlight or something, do it." My nephew works there, so he got all his Robi work lights and lit it up the best we could. We opened up and started working. It turned out to be one of the best Valentine's we've ever had.

JE: How could that be?

TG: I don't know if it was that we just worked hard. Actually, somebody put it on Facebook. I don't know if my nephew put out that we had—I don't like to share that many things on Facebook, like personal problems or anything like that, but we kind of put it out because there had been different arsonists happening down Harvard and things. Just to let people know to be careful. Then the news came and they started interviewing. People came and brought cookies and cakes and all kinds of stuff. Everybody was so—when we felt the love, it was very nice. We got through it.

JE: And that went on for six weeks? You worked that way?

TG: Yeah -- no. When the generator got there on Monday, we had lights.

JE: Oh, then you had lights and coolers.

TG: But over the weekend we did not.

JE: You said something about "6 weeks."

TG: We didn't get our full electricity for six weeks. We just had that generator out there.

JE: And then heat -- you didn't have heat.

TG: We didn't have heating and air for six weeks.

JE: Wow.

TG: So it wasn't too bad a winter, so everybody just bundled up. They're cold all the time anyway because I keep the air conditioning on all the time. Sorry.

JE: Right. Well, that would have been a great time to get depressed, wouldn't it?

TG: Yeah! No, but I didn't. I thought, OK, I channeled my dad. When I told the people, I said, "I want this to be a positive interview. If it's negative or we sound sad, don't air it, because I will not be defeated." I said, "We must move on, and things are always better the next day. So if you want to bring down or talk about how it happened, don't do it, because we're going to move on."

JE: Great. As a female business owner, do you think that's met with challenges just because you're a female?

TG: Yeah, I never thought about it that way. Sometimes now I think about it because they always talk about female-run businesses versus male. I can tell you there was discrimination, I think, when I went to get my bank loan. I don't think they like to give—I shouldn't say that—but if I hadn't had my uncle or someone, I don't think that would have fared so well. That was another lucky aspect. I think there have been times where if you're a woman, you couldn't get the same treatment. But I'm not going to get on that bandwagon that much because we are what we are and we do our best.

Chapter 8 – 9:05

Technology

John Erling (JE): So as we look over the last, let's see, how many years, 40?

Toni Garner (TG): 43

JE: 43 years -- how has the floral industry changed? I'm thinking about technology and social media and online orders.

TG: Oh, yeah; it has blossomed huge.

JE: To use the word: “Blossomed” (Laughing)

TG: (Laughing) It has blossomed. Social media has been a game changer. Personally, I don’t use it to the fullest extent that I should, but yes, that’s a game changer. Computers are a game changer. Nowadays we have our system where you can look and see how many times they bought, who they bought for, what they spent, etcetera. It makes it so much easier to have that at your fingertips. So, yes.

JE: Do people order from you online?

TG: Yes, we have e-commerce. They can order online.

JE: So that’s been a big deal. You probably get a lot of business that way.

TG: Yes, we do, and we have to control that sometimes because you can get too much on a holiday. Here I am again. Because you get so much, you have to say when and how, but we do try to take care of everybody.

JE: So some people -- I didn’t even think about this -- may order online, have it delivered, and never come into your store at all.

TG: Yes. And now we have AI calls.

JE: Artificial intelligence? Are you really?

TG: Yeah. This guy, he does it all the time. He’ll always pick it up on his way home from work at 4 o’clock. He’ll say, “I use AI to order these flowers.” So they’ll call in and order for him, or however he puts it in, and they call and order it.

JE: Really? I use it myself to ask questions, but I didn’t realize this is really going to take over a lot.

TG: The only thing I can think about is thank God we’re a handmade, hand-delivered product. I know you can do pictures of flowers for your website maybe for AI, but thank goodness you can’t make it because we’re handmade, hand-delivered. I just have to keep that in mind.

JE: Unless a robot took over.

TG: Which they probably have tried that.

JE: Customers and their preferences for flowers or arrangements, has that changed over the years? When you started in '83, is it different today when people ask?

TG: Back then, I didn't know anyone. I soon learned about what people liked in my mind and in my filing cabinet. Like, I have never been in your home, but now know -- I kind of get it. Like, I know you like a contemporary look.

JE: Margaret does, right.

TG: And like today I brought you just a touch of fall, just for fun.

JE: Toni brought some flowers in here this morning. So then it's you start getting to know the customer?

TG: Yeah, I get to know the customer and know what they like and dislike, what they like in their home or don't like. That has taken years. So I always think about what will happen if I'm not there to do it for them. I don't want to say I own them, but I know what they like or don't like. If I go to their house and see something somebody else sent, I'll think, "Oh my gosh, somebody else sent this and it doesn't match their home," but that's OK. They still say, "No carnations." That's my favorite one. Or here's my favorite thing: They go, "Now, it's for a dinner party and we want it low so people can see over it." That's my pet peeve because I know it should be low so that people can see over it. I don't want to make it tall. I feel like they're still micromanaging, still, after all these years, when I know it's supposed to be low.

JE: Right. Sitting at a table, you've got to look around.

TG: I think that's the pet peeve of most people. They'll say, "I went somewhere and it was too tall and I couldn't see over it." You know, just different things. It's interesting.

JE: Is there any customary request, or order, or memorable event that triggers your mind? That stands out? Has anybody ever ordered black roses?

TG: One time we did a wedding and they wanted it to have peppers. They wanted peppers, like an arm bouquet of peppers for their bridal bouquet. And I'll always remember that.

JE: And you provided it.

TG: I provided it. And I did a little garland for their dog out of peppers.

JE: And you were invited to do the inaugural flowers for George W. Bush's second term. How did that all come about?

TG: I was on the Society of American Florists' Retail Council. We had meetings in Washington, D.C., and we lobbied for different things for the floral industry. When it came time for the inaugural, they said, "Would you like to come?"

And I said, "Well, sure!"

There were about 200 of us. There were designers and people who helped get everything where it needed to be and took care of the flowers and all that. I worked on the Cheney/Bush -- well, Cheney mainly -- at the convention center, their ballroom.

JE: Vice-president Cheney, his party.

TG: But George Bush was going to be there too. So I worked on the entryway and the staging for the photographs.

JE: Really?

TG: So we did like big arrangements. So that was quite interesting to do. I just went by myself and met florists from across the United States. We would take buses to where we needed to be. We always had to go through security, and so we would go as far as our badge would let us go.

JE: But the flowers were ordered from someplace else. Surely you weren't bringing them.

TG: No, I wasn't in charge of that.

JE: You were there as a designer and presenter

TG: Yes. We made these big topiaries that were really big, and they would go, "You three make these five-foot topiaries. Then when you get done with that, you'd move to the stage and do the big arrangements there, and then to the entryway." It was very organized.

JE: Did you get to go to any of the balls so you would see your work?

TG: No. Actually what we did was we got on the subway and everybody was dressed up with tennis shoes on and their heels in their pockets and their coats. We'd go, "What ball are you going to?" And we'd tell them different ways. We went to eat somewhere. We didn't go to the ball or anything.

JE: You've been in the room enough.

TG: Yes, we'd been in the room enough, but we had a good time. We went to the parade and walked all over. It was fun.

JE: When you said -- about that electric outage -- and how people came and helped you and you felt the love, so don't you feel your shop has become part of people's lives? You've celebrated births, weddings, funerals. You've become part of their life, haven't you?

TG: What's really interesting is when you've did a wedding and then you've done their children's wedding. I don't know whether to feel old or how to feel. (Laughing) Or you've done all the family's weddings -- like three girls', you know. So that's always been fun. I'm mean, I'm very honored to do that -- that they trust me to do that enough.

JE: Then you can do grandchildren's weddings, and "I can remember I did your grandmother's" stories and flowers. You can tell them that, too, right?

TG: Yeah.

JE: Some of them might be alive and some of them might not be. That must be a nice side effect you didn't anticipate, probably, when you got into the business.

TG: No, I did not anticipate growing to love so many customers or people, or care about them. I didn't realize that would happen. I didn't feel like I would have those feelings. You can't just walk away from it -- you have feelings.

JE: You become involved in their stories, and some of them are not fun, but you're there to support them.

TG: I never thought I would do funerals of my florist friends I knew, or, like I never thought I would do their last floral tribute or things like that. You know, so it's kind of interesting.

JE: Yes.

Chapter 9 – 10:30
Merry Christmas Anyway

John Erling (JE): You've already alluded to this, but you are a leader. You were president of the Oklahoma State Florists Association, president of the Ozark Florist Association, member of the Society of American Florists, you were on the Government Relations Committee, the Retail Council, and as you've alluded to, lobbying in Washington, D.C., for research funding and causes benefiting the industry. You didn't have to do that, but you did it. Why did you do it?

Toni Garner (TG): Because of love of the industry. I just loved my job. I still love my job. I just want to make it a better place. I know I sound kind of cliché to say that, but if you're going to spend as much time doing something, you should do the best you can. You want to slap yourself into doing that every day, because if you don't, you just don't want to, that's it.

JE: You'll be 69. You see yourself doing this until you can't do it anymore?

TG: I always think about when my family passed away or my mom, so I'm thinking, "OK, we should maybe think about an exit strategy." My sister and I have talked about it. We kind of want to do some other things too, maybe in the future. We feel pretty good, so we will keep going a little while longer, but we are thinking about it.

JE: You don't need to do this the rest of your life is what you're saying.

TG: No. I'll still want to help people or volunteer or do stuff, but life's short and we should do other things.

JE: Right. Well, you've given to many organizations, nonprofits, museums, universities, by donating flowers, your time, scholarships, educational presentations. Throughout your career, you've really embedded yourself in many people's lives by donating time and flowers. That's got to make you feel good.

TG: I think a lot of people recognize that too, and I don't do it for that. I do it from my heart. My mom always said, "We're just passing through. Make the best of it."

JE: Is there any business lesson that took you the longest to learn?

TG: In my particular situation, it was to get, I'm a creative type, to turn over the bookwork. I kept on top of it, but I didn't do excellent at it.

JE: George Dodson was the one who told you to turn it over.

TG: Yeah, he said, "You have enough business here. You can afford to hire somebody."

JE: What is the most pleasing part of your day? Is it being creative? Is it designing? What do you look forward to?

TG: I think it's every day getting to share what I can do in flowers to help that person or make that person happy. Just knowing that I completed the task of what I needed to do and it had a good outcome and maybe touched somebody's life to make them happier.

JE: Flowers affect people's emotions, don't they?

TG: Definitely.

JE: How do they do that?

TG: I think they do it in many ways. When you watch people walk in and say, "Oh, that's beautiful," you've gotten their attention and they're going to be happy. That's what you strive for. So, if you can make somebody happy...

JE: But the great thrill for you is when -- somebody who didn't have it delivered -- they come in to pick it up and say, "Oh, that's beautiful."

TG: Yeah, it gives me a good sense. And I've learned you can't always make everyone happy. Everyone sees something different. That's what I've learned also. If you look at something and think it's beautiful and the next person doesn't like it, that's what makes the world. You've got to find a blend to connect.

JE: Have people come in and say, "That's not what I wanted"?

TG: Yes, I've had that before.

JE: They'll be that direct?

TG: Uh-huh (in agreement)

JE: And so then how do you respond to that?

TG: I go, "Well, let's try to make you happy. Let's see what we can do." Know that you don't have to take that particular item or arrangement. We'll make it better or see where you want to be.

JE: You don't have to pay for that. You'll make it right for them.

TG: I got this note in the mail from a customer. It said, "Dear Toni, if this were pretty, I would love it, but it's not. Too much Christmas cheer down there? Maybe I'll rethink sending people into you. Love—" and she put her name.

So I was just like, "Oh, my god!" She wrote it on this on yellow stationery with her name at the top. I was like, "Oh my god! What's wrong with her?" I put it on my wall. So I called her up and I go, "What's wrong? What'd we do so wrong that I got this 'Merry Christmas anyway' letter?" Because she put, "Merry Christmas anyway."

She said "Well, I wanted a pink poinsettia, not a red poinsettia." I said, "Well, your family ordered a red one." She goes: "Well..."

And I said, "Well, you should have called. We would correct it. I don't mind giving you a pink one rather than a red one."

So she goes, "I apologize. I wasn't in a good mood that day."

And I said, "That's okay."

But everybody always asks me if I'd do another book and what would it be. And I say that the name of it would be "Merry Christmas Anyway."
(Laughing)

JE: (Laughing)

TG: Because I would different stories about different things, you know. Because she was funny. Every Christmas she brought in the same silver compote, and she died at Christmas, so it was kind of interesting. She died 2 days after Christmas. And every Easter she'd bring in this same other -- so I had her down like a book, but it was so much fun: "Merry Christmas Anyway." That's my favorite saying. So this year, for Christmas, I had these

towels printed up that say, "Merry Christmas Anyway -- Love, Toni."
(Laughing)

I'll be sure you get one.

JE: Yes! That's funny. That's cute.

TG: OK.

JE: What advice would you give to someone thinking about opening a flower shop today?

TG: I would give them advice to say... I would say do it because you don't know that you can do it unless you do it. You've got to accept the challenge in your life. I'd give them a plan that they need to keep good bookwork, learn how to buy better, take care of your employees, greet the customer. Just all those different things -- the ten tips from Toni.

JE: Right. I should have asked you this sooner: About flowers -- which flowers are the most delicate and the hardiest?

TG: The most delicate flower would be like a gardenia because it bruises easy, I would say. People don't realize how strong roses are too. They come in such a variety of colors. I would have to say that's one of my favorite flowers even though it's a common flower -- there's so many colors. I like how they open, and they're sturdy, but people think they don't last long; but they do, they just don't care for them properly.

JE: And how do you care for them properly?

TG: We cut them underwater so they don't get air in the stem. That's why sometimes they get a neck that curls or whatever. But you just have to do care and handling. We have a person that that's all she does is puts up flowers. We all put up flowers. We all go everything at the shop.

JE: "Put up flowers" meaning?

TG: Process flowers. They'll come in like boxloads of flowers and we'll all process them.

JE: You're cutting stems on those, right?

TG: That's cutting stems and putting them in the proper temperature of water, etcetera, etcetera.

JE: What flower would last the longest?

TG: I think roses, lilies, hydrangeas.

JE: Oh, hydrangeas?

TG: Yeah. They last a long time.

JE: How would you like to be remembered?

TG: As somebody that gave it their best and cared about people, her business, and her employees, and customers.

JE: As you look back -- and you've referred to them already -- the key people who helped you or who were mentors?

TG: It would have to be my parents, my uncle Edward, Mr. Dodson, Charles Faudree, my sister. I couldn't make it without her. She's a stable person every day. I'm the happy, fun one. She's the "Oh, no, we need to do it this way". She's my boss. (Laughing) So, yeah. I've been very lucky to have so many nice mentors and people in my life that helped me blossom to what I am.

JE: So let me compliment you.

TG: Oh, no. (Giggling)

JE: All these things wouldn't have happened -- these people being interested in helping you and all -- if it weren't for your nice -- I'll use the word -- "blossoming" personality. Sweet personality, and easy to talk, and you're just a happy person. So you have brought that on yourself.

TG: Thank you.

JE: Well, thank you for doing this.

TG: Oh, well, thank you.

JE: This was fun. I learned a lot --

TG: You did?

JE: -- from you, and our listeners will too.

TG: Well, it's been fun. Thank you.

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