

Oral History Transcript – Janice Tomlin
Interviewed by Ashlea Sigman, November 24, 2013
Transcribed by Ashlea Sigman

Sigman: I saw your LinkedIn [account] and saw ABC listed, how did you get to ABC?

Tomlin: I started in print, worked at the *Dallas Times Herald*, which really dates me - as an intern then ultimately as a freelance writer. Did some investigative stuff for them. Then went to New York with the hope of working for Time or Newsweek but didn't have enough experience to step in as a senior writer and I wasn't willing to step back so I ended up in D.C. It was a non-profit, a MacArthur Foundation grant, called the Better Government Association. And I was part of the investigative reporters there and we teamed up with national print and TV networks. They would pay our expenses, but we, as a non-profit, were the investigative leg on stories and we partnered with them. And I ended up being partnered with ABC 20/20. I did two stories for them and I realized I'm spending all my time in New York and I'm working for them. So I went to the executive producer and basically pitched a story and said, "hire me." So that's how I segued from the BGA, which is Chicago based, but when they opened a Washington office and I was one of the initial people that they hired in the Washington bureau. So that's how I segued to television, which I said I would never do because it was shallow.

Sigman: [Laughing] wow.

Tomlin: And it turns out I've never looked back. When you compare images and words, it's a pretty powerful medium. But that's how I made the leap.

Sigman: Oh that's interesting, how big of a learning curve was there for you as far as having to write for video and describe everything in print.

Tomlin: It really wasn't hard. I guess I had – by watching, I co-produced the first two pieces I did for ABC. Kind-of watching, being part of a team doing it, you kind-of saw that you didn't have to say everything. And you're trying to create the imagery with your pen or your computer, when you're writing. When you've got the images, less is more.

Tomlin: And I didn't have any RTF classes when I was at UT. But I didn't honestly find it was that big a transition for me.

Sigman: Huh. How long were you at ABC before any talk of going to Romania came up?

Tomlin: Probably about 12 years, I'm just trying to do the math with my kid. I left 20/20 with a baby on my hip, after 13 years and shifted over to the documentary unit. And Marisa – I had just gotten Marisa in December. I didn't find Marisa on my

first trip to Romania. It was at least a year after I did my first story before I got Marissa. I went to Romania right after Christmas. Well, I went in 1990. Ceausescu was killed Christmas Day of '89. And I was in Romania that first week of January, in the midst of the revolution. So that was January of 1990.

Tomlin: I think I was at ABC in 1980 or '81. I was freelancing for them before I was working for them so I don't know the official date.

Sigman: Where in the tide of these stories about Romania and the orphanages and the babies and the women – where do you feel like your stories were in that tide? Were you guys in the very beginning of that? Or had you seen others and that prompted you to go over?

Tomlin: Oh no, we were the first western crew over there, one-hundred-percent. I didn't see any footage of the orphanages, I don't think anybody had been in the orphanages but over Christmas there was something - I think it was on CNN, just a little one-minute feature. AirFrance had donated a plane to some couples in France who had adopted children and the adoptions had been frozen by Ceausescu. With his execution, they had been going to pick up these children who had been all handed over. And the adoptions were frozen for a couple years. And the thing I remembered, was they had all these little shoes lined up. All of the shoes were gone except for one pair. And they said this one couple had given up. And that little boy, you know, when the group came over from France, there was one couple who didn't come.

Tomlin: My first thought was there must be American couples who are in that same situation and I found a couple in California and she was Romanian by birth, married to an American. She'd been here years and years. She had family connections to Romania and she had adopted a little girl four years before, when she was an infant and had not been able to get her out because just like the French couples, the adoption had been frozen. So I found them and they were like "yeah we're on our way, we're gonna go get Jessica." So that was the first story, "Nobody's Children."

Tomlin: When we got there – there was absolutely no infrastructure in the country. There was no – everything was just chaos, there were people protesting out in the streets, there had been a government coup, the military had overthrown the government. Everybody was trying to be in charge, so there was nobody in charge. And they had state-run television and the orphanages didn't have any idea –the only television crew that had ever even been in an orphanage and I'm not sure that any crew had, it was always state controlled so there wasn't any fear when we showed up. There had never – it was always quote "approved" if there was ever any media involved, so they really didn't question anything.

Tomlin: And I think most of the other reporters who were over there were covering the revolution and coup. And I went over there to cover the orphanages. But I never

saw another reporter or camera crew in any of the orphanages we were in, during that initial time.

Sigman: Okay.

Tomlin: 20/20 has been credited with breaking the story of the orphanages and then also when we went back a few months later and did “Shame of a Nation,” nobody had come in. Romanians didn’t even know these places existed. So we were one-hundred-percent the first ones to put the spotlight on just these horrendous, Auschwitz-like institutions. But that was not the first trip. The first trip was orphanages.

Sigman: How quickly did the first trip come together where you found the couple in California and you were on your way over?

Tomlin: A week.

Sigman: Okay.

Tomlin: And the only reason that I had a little bit of lead time, is that Toby and Ilona - her mother, the adoptive mom’s mother, was a concert pianist from Russia and she was playing a concert in Russia that they already had tickets to. What they said was, anytime they were ever near Jessica, they would always go visit. The ticket was to go to Russia to hear the grandma play. They had a flight to Bucharest. The original intent was just to go visit Jessica and now they intended to bring her home. So I went a little bit early cause I wanted to get on the ground and figure it out. So we were there when the Scotts landed. They bought me a little bit of time by the fact they were not going directly to Romania they had the stop in Russia in between. That gave me a couple of days to scramble and make a plan.

Sigman: I’ve been watching pieces of these stories on YouTube but I haven’t been able to sit down and watch all of them yet – was that successful? That first trip? Did they get her?

Tomlin: Oh yeah. What we ended up focusing on was – the first story was “Nobody’s Children.” And we followed two couples, Toby & Ilona Scott, who were the California couple I told you about and then we found Joe and Carol Stevens over there and Carol had had a large number of miscarriages. Carol’s heritage is Romanian. She had a relative at some point in Romania who had called them right around the revolution and said, “there are babies here, come over. I can help you adopt. We’ve just discovered all these orphanages. And people are going to be coming so come over.”

Tomlin: So the Stevens got on a plane and I met them, actually at a restaurant. They just were clearly Americans and I went over and introduced myself. And they were

the first American couple to adopt who hadn't already had an adoption like the Scott's, approved. They were the first ones after the revolution to go over, find a child, do the paperwork and adopt them. So we featured those two stories, woven into just going from orphanage to orphanage. And I think one of the orphanages alone had about 800 kids. I mean there were like two and three babies to a crib, room after room after room. Like a sea of kids. Just a sea of babies and you went into the toddler room and it was just like a mass of children running towards you.

Tomlin: So we got back and put that story on the air, a two-part story. Same night, but two parts. About a 35-minute report.

Sigman: And how long were you in the country for that story?

Tomlin: A week? A week to 10 days? That would have been a long time for a report. I would say at least a week but probably not a whole lot more.

Sigman: Do you remember on the first story, Nobody's Children, what the crew looked like? How many people you took over?

Tomlin: I picked up a crew from London and it was a cameraman, I brought a sound guy from New York and I can't imagine - we might have had an assistant slash lighting guy that would have also come from London. I can't honestly remember. There might have been a third person. And then I probably took an AP and then I picked up a translator and a fixer once we got there. Yes, I took an associate producer.

Sigman: And Tom Jarriel, the reporter, did he go?

Tomlin: He went. He was based out of Washington. And typically I would fly to Washington or he would fly to New York and we'd fly out of JFK. I don't honestly remember. The one thing I remember about the flight was coming in, all you could see was white and it was just so cold. I don't know that I've ever been colder on any shoot in my life. I had brought ski parkas, I really had brought heavy clothing and it was so cold and we were outside all day long, going and coming and nobody had heat

Sigman: Oh.

Tomlin: And it was just a crazy infrastructure situation. The orphanages weren't heated.

Sigman: Wow.

Tomlin: It was typical for us to have traveled together. It's been so long ago, I don't honestly remember. It would have been likely that Tom and Jim and I would have flown in and I know the cameraman came from London. Jim was the sound man. I don't even remember the cameraman's name.

Sigman: Yeah that's what I was going to ask, part of this paper focuses on the actual production of it. Did you pick a crew? Was a crew assigned to you?

Tomlin: Almost always I would pick a crew, this is a rare exception that I didn't. Again, I'm operating on memory here. It might have partly been that it was over the holidays and some of my regular people weren't available. This guy in London was highly recommended and he was identified to me as one of Peter Jennings' favorite crews. He was close to Bucharest. Part of it's budget, you know the airfare is one of the main things that gets you. And there was also a team going from London to cover the news coverage of the revolution and fall of Ceausescu. There was an ABC mini bureau that had been set up at one of the hotels. So typically I would pick the crew, this is probably one of the only exceptions that I would not have picked who I wanted and called them in advance to see if they were available. Then told the crew booking people who I wanted.

Sigman: And then were you always assigned with Tom, how did that come about?

Tomlin: When I first started working at ABC, the slot that they had open was in the Geraldo Rivera unit so I actually did my first piece for Geraldo, which is interesting.

Sigman: Yeah!

Tomlin: And the next thing I did was with Sylvia Chase. And then the story I did after that was supposed to be with Sylvia, but Sylvia had some health issues and she had cancelled two or three times at the last minute because of unexpected health issues and the last time she cancelled the executive producer said I'm going to reassign Tom Jarriel to this, we just need to get this done, we've put it off two or three times already. So Tom was assigned to me that time and I never worked with anyone else after that at 20/20. We just teamed up every single piece I did after that.

Sigman: Can you talk about how you split the research load? Did Tom do research work or was it mainly you?

Tomlin: Tom was not any different than anybody else. I mean the producers really do the research. I've never really had anybody ever do any of the research. What we do is put together, depending on the story, a – we usually called it a binder or a Bible, it is a binder. Depending on what the story is you put together news clips, an outline, contact list, it's just something that you can grab one thing and usually the correspondent will read it on the plane.

Sigman: Hmm.

Tomlin: On this one I don't know that I put together much because I was really just parachuting in. There had been a little article in the LA times. That said "Local couple flying to Romania to pick up adopted child. I don't know that I had much else. You know I had some maps in mine, some names and some pictures. You have to keep in mind, we didn't have the internet the way it is now.

Sigman: Right, yeah

Tomlin: I probably had the research department at ABC put together some facts on Romania, probably a quick bio on Ceausescu, what the population was, what the income level was. On this story, I was flying in and it was like *we're gonna go in and shoot what we find. We're gonna follow this couple, they're going to be our entrée into the orphanages. We're going to see how many children are there.* So this was not, I had done stories that had an excruciating amount of research beforehand, but this wasn't one of them.

Sigman: Okay. If we could take a quick side detour, could you talk about the difference in researching a story today versus back then?

Tomlin: Not that internet is infallible

Sigman: Right.

Tomlin: Just right now, the computer assisted research you can do in terms of just accessing – I could type in Romania orphanages and I could start printing and still be printing tomorrow with the things that would come up. First, there just hadn't been any reporting on the Romanian orphanages that I know of. You know back in the 90s – we just – that's not really how we gathered information. We had a research library and we would call on them and they would put together stories for us. I mean we did have computers but you know, today the very first thing I would do is I would get on the internet and I would put in key words and see what I came up with on whatever story I was doing. That's the way I would start. Plus, who has done it? Did somebody already do it? What did they do? So it's an automatic 'go to' for me.

Sigman: Like even the Stevens, in the age before internet, how did you track them down?

Tomlin: We weren't staying at the Intercontinental Hotel, but it had the best infrastructure. Keep in mind, on that particular trip, we took our own food.

Sigman: Wow.

Tomlin: Everything was in such shambles we were told by the team that had gotten there from London, you know, there's - no restaurants are open, nobody has food, they don't have refrigeration. Bring stuff you can either cook in your room or that's not perishable. Like, we brought pasta. And canned ham and canned stuff

Sigman: Wow.

Tomlin: And bread and wine! [laughing]

Sigman: [laughing]

Tomlin: And water, obviously, lots of water. So what we would do at our hotel is we would take our food down and they would cook it for us. They would boil water for our spaghetti. And towards the very end of the trip, they were starting to get a little bit up and running and you could get French fries and what they called pork steak. Which is just like pork chops.

Tomlin: So we were [eating] at the Intercontinental Hotel, which was probably the biggest at the time, it was the biggest hotel in Bucharest. And Carol had a big fur coat on because the Stevens have money. Just when she came in I just noticed her. And either myself or Claudette Caravaggi was my AP, one of us went over and just said, "Hey we're from ABC are you American?" Either they joined our table or we joined their table and found out what they were doing. I think they had just gotten there. We'd been there a little bit. And they were going to be meeting with her attorney/cousin, again, I'm using the term cousin loosely, he was a relative of some kind, supposed to meet with him the next day. He had a couple places lined up for them to go. And I said, "Can we go too?" The cousin was not happy at all.

Sigman: Ohh.

Tomlin: A lot of Romanians were so paranoid and so afraid, but we filmed their whole process, following them you know into the orphanage, finding their first little girl that they did adopt. And then they found a little boy who was maybe 18 months. He was toddling. They wanted two kids.

Tomlin: And so the plan was, they were doing paperwork on both of those children who were at the same orphanage. And meanwhile, the Scotts kinda got out of dodge. I mean they got the baby, they went to the U.S. Embassy, they got the U.S. passports and they left. One thing was, they didn't leave the country. They left to go to a little skiing village. They wanted to get out of Bucharest though. They went up to kinda chill in a little area about an hour by train north of Bucharest.

Tomlin: And so at that point, they had their paperwork, happy ever after and now we were following the Stevens. In time we were there, we were starting to find out that some of the kids were infected with AIDS

Sigman: Oh.

Tomlin: Because of the fact that they were reusing the same needles over and over again. They had this crazy-ass medical practice that they believed if you gave an injection like a little transfusion to babies, it would boost their immunity.

Sigman: Mmm.

Tomlin: So they did that and you had a contaminated blood supply because they got their blood donations from merchant marines

Sigman: Ugh.

Tomlin: And so these kids started being identified. To make a very long story short, Joe had to go back to work, he left Carol while she was processing the two kids and then the next time I talked to Carol they had found out that the little boy was in fact HIV infected.

Sigman: Ugh.

Tomlin: At that time, U.S. law did not allow you to bring in an adopted child who was HIV positive. It's since changed, but at the time you couldn't. So they weren't able to bring in Joey.

Sigman: Wow.

Sigman: So who made it back to the States first? Did you guys and they were still kinda sorting that out with Joey?

Tomlin: Uh, I'm trying to think. Big Joe, Joe the dad went back to Bloomfield Hills. Carol was still there. We interviewed Carol in Romania and when she got home. We were there when the baby was being tested. I don't think she had the news when we left. Because she was going to be staying, because, you know, it took some time to process the paperwork. So the next time we saw her was we flew to Detroit and we were there when she got off the plane with the baby Susan... and Joe was waiting there with flowers.

Tomlin: We left, I believe, while she was still in the process of waiting for the tests. The medical – everything was so backwards there. It wasn't a quick turn around on the results. And the next I heard was they had gotten the results back and he had tested positive. And they were trying to find a way to bring him anyway. I know we made some calls trying to see. There was just, the law didn't allow it at the time. I think she was trying to find another couple because I think you could bring a child with HIV to France. So they were trying to see if someone else could take him. And ultimately they did find a French couple who took him.

Sigman: Well, okay, so you were there in January of 1990, I guess the first week. You came back. What was the turnaround time before it aired?

Tomlin: I think it aired in April.

Sigman: And you said the first one was a two-part, was Shame of a Nation the second part that aired the very first night of this series?

Tomlin: No, the first two-part program was “Nobody’s Children.” Aired in – let’s call it April. Then we did a follow-up piece on. I may have to do a timeline for you and send it to you. We did several follow up pieces because we were – I literally had to stop working, we were just being inundated with calls from couples who wanted to adopt, who wanted information. And at a certain point I went to my bosses and said I can’t even answer the phone. There’s always someone crying on the other end or someone wanting to know how they can adopt.

Sigman: Wow.

Tomlin: So I put together kind-of a fact sheet. The switchboard was just being inundated with calls. If I answered the phone I could say, “Hey, give me your address and we’ll send you this fact sheet, then call me back.” That was a way instead of forwarding the calls to me, they could send out something.

Tomlin: People also wanted to help, it was not just to adopt. NGOs would make a call to donate food, clothing, medical supplies. People wanted to adopt. People wanted to volunteer and work in the orphanages. It was kinda a multi-part of ‘here’s some NGOs who are working there and here’s their contact information, some major adoption agencies, but first before you get on the plane you need to have all sorts of paperwork through immigration, INS. And here’s who to call and you need to fill out the forms. You need to have a home study, please don’t get on a plane, please, please don’t get on a plane.’ People are very impulsive.

Tomlin: I think Ilona Scott, who I mentioned was an architect, she called me and said a guy she knew who was also an architect who was also from Romania but lived in Boston - that she had heard through a mutual friend that he had gone over there to try to set up a foundation to help and that he had discovered this other tier of institutions that weren’t like orphanages. That were for handicapped children and the conditions were horrific. And she thought that he was back, but that she had heard that he’d been over there with a group of doctors.

Tomlin: And so I got in touch with Ion Berindei, who was the architect in Boston. And he had just gotten back. And I was like, “tell me” and he was like, “actually I got some video, I took my little camera.” I think he came to New York. We brought him to New York. And he showed me what he had shot just in the place that he had been in with his camera and I said, “I want to go, I want to go back with you, I want you to get in touch with –these were Romanian doctors – I want you to get back in touch with them and find out what other places do they know about.”

Sigman: Yeah

Tomlin: And so he started calling. I started getting in touch with some of the contacts I had. These places were not even – they were totally off the beaten path. You would go into a town and you would ask “where is the children’s home and where is the children’s hospital?” and people would just shrug. People across the street from these places, when we would know that we were kinda close, we would have a general idea, people across the street didn’t even know that they were across the street from, you know, these very unmarked very nondescript cinder block type buildings. No sign on the outside. In some places in a big city, you would have a big sign that said “hospital for irrecupable children.”

Sigman: Hmm.

Tomlin: Irrecupable was the word they used for unsalvageable.

Sigman: Wow.

Tomlin: Other than the people who worked there, nobody knew much about them. And that was “Shame of a Nation” and that was also a two-part piece, but also the same night. And that aired in October of 1990.

Sigman: When you got back in January, were you just waiting to find out how the Stevens’ adoption with Joey ended up? Why did that air in April?

Tomlin: Well, first we had to screen all the footage and put it together. It was also unfolding. I mean part of it was letting the Stevens’ story unfold. And you’re going to ask me when they came back and I don’t know. She was there a few weeks.

Sigman: That’s ok.

Tomlin: Oh you know what, I know one reason it didn’t air right away. I had just gotten back from Mozambique. I just was at home for Christmas when I saw that little story about the French couples going to Romania. And so the only way I got to go was if I knocked out a really quick rough script and left it for my editor on the Mozambique story. And so when I got back I had to finish editing the Mozambique story. And so I had my associate producer on the Romania story start screening footage for that story. But I had to start and finish another piece before I could start the Romania story. That’s part of the delay.

Sigman: Was there talk of it airing during sweeps at all?

Tomlin: Uh, it didn’t air during sweeps. Because April wouldn’t have been sweeps, May would have been sweeps.

Sigman: Okay, yeah I just wondered. Did they foresee how big of a story this would become? I mean, do you think if they had, would they have wanted it to air during sweeps?

Tomlin: Um, I don't think they did quite honestly. I mean, I don't think they did know that it would have the outpouring that it had. And then, to just be blunt honest with you, when I did the story on Shame of a Nation, the reaction of the executive producer at the time was, "We can't air this it's too disturbing."

Sigman: Hmm.

Tomlin: And I said, "Well it's supposed to be disturbing." And the whole room full of people who were in the screening disagreed with him but he basically stood up and said I don't feel we can put this on the air, it's just too hard to watch. And that show has probably – of everything I've ever done, has won more awards than any other show I've ever done. And it did air, I changed two shots in it. And it did air, what he had seen in the edit room.

Tomlin: That piece he definitely wouldn't have put in sweeps. There was just a perception, I think probably still somewhat of a perception, you know, people don't want to watch dying children. People don't want to watch Rwanda. Ethiopia.

Sigman: Yeah.

Tomlin: They just don't. And so those were always really hard –me pitching Mozambique, children of war in Africa who didn't speak English. The only way I pitched it successfully was there was an American doctor from Save the Children who was leaving his lovely wife and two little blonde children behind to go over and it was kinda the doctor in hell story which allowed me to tell the story of what was happening to the children in Mozambique. I had pitched Ethiopia and the famine unsuccessfully. I had pitched Mozambique every which way unsuccessfully. And it wasn't until I was able to get in an American element that I was able to get the green light to go ahead and do it. Romania, I had going into it - I had the American couple, I had the sure thing. And Romania is Europe not Africa.

Tomlin: When we went to do "Shame of a Nation," now that I'm actually kinda thinking about it, I think that they were very resistant to send us. 20/20 was very resistant to send us. And then Tom and I said, "Well if you don't want it, we'll do it with Nightline."

Sigman: Hmm.

Tomlin: "We're going. We're going to go do this, even if you don't want it." And in the end, we did get the green light to go. But as I said, the footage was just so hard to

watch, the executive producer at the time, not the current executive producer, didn't want to air it.

Sigman: You said that one aired in October. Do you remember when you went back to shoot it?

Tomlin: Let me think.

Sigman: And it's okay if you don't.

Tomlin: I think that's the shoot I found my oldest daughter on. We would have been shooting it in October, not that it aired in October. That may have been a different story. I've been over there, you know, a dozen times and I may be confusing it.

Sigman: Sure.

Tomlin: I found Marisa on a shoot in November and went back to get her in December; that I'm sure of. I'm just trying to remember if that was what I was shooting. Because at one point we had done the institutions and we wanted to just update what was happening in the orphanages and we went to an orphanage to see what had changed since we'd been there. But that may have been a different show. I can get the airdates off the Emmys and put together a timeline for you based on when it aired, when I went over. It's just been twenty years.

Sigman: Thank you. Oh, I know.

Tomlin: I remember the facts, the doing of the stories. The actual dates are a little bit...

Sigman: Understandable

Sigman: When you went back to the institutions, I know we have the video, but what was going through your head? And how did you get in?

Tomlin: We went in with Ion Berindei, a Boston architect who was born in Romania. He had gone in before with a humanitarian group, because he's Romanian. He and Ilona Scott had both lived in Romania and fled, years before. Romanians aren't suspicious of other Romanians. They don't like western TV crews showing up but they didn't have any issues with allowing a Romanian in. And whether he sought out these doctors or medical groups or he already knew them, he had wanted to help with humanitarian aid.

Tomlin: Somehow, in his contacts on that trip he made on his own, he got a piece of paper from a government official that basically said, I'm paraphrasing, "This is Ion Berindei, he's from this organization, please assist him in his efforts to bring relief aid to the Child Protective Services system." And that's all in Romanian so

I don't really know what it says. He had an approved letter of introduction that said 'we approve of this guy, let him into your facility.'

Tomlin: We went up to the facility, Ion got out of the van with his piece of paper. He'd go up to the gate if there was a gate – and most of the time in the institutions there was a locked gate. The security guard would open the gate and as soon as it was open we were right around the corner and we just came in, cameras rolling right behind him.

Tomlin: Sometimes he would go up and just knock on the door and when they opened it – some of these were like large houses. Some looked more like reclaimed hospitals and some were almost like a group home type thing. So it was just whether it was a locked gate or if it was just a shut door and a big fence. We didn't do the dramatic entrance if it wasn't necessary, if we could just walk in. And I will say, most of the people that were working there, there wasn't... It would be like going into a nursing home where the people in charge weren't around. For the people who worked there it's just like, "what's going on" but none of them had the authority to stop us. It was just like, "wow, there's a bunch of cameras coming in – or a camera coming in." Keep in mind, we're only a two-person crew. So it's one camera, a sound guy, and a producer and a correspondent. I mean there are four of us.

Tomlin: But Ion, the one that we got into that was the worst, Sighetu Marmatiei which was the one where kids just literally, I've seen footage of Auschwitz and this is like that. Kids with their head shaved, in a cage, tied-tethered to radiators, tied up in straight jackets, I mean just horrible, horrible, horrible images. Freezing. I mean I'm dressed in Polartec jacket and it's freezing.

Sigman: Wow

Tomlin: That one was the one that did have a big locked gate. And Ion had heard through one of his doctor friends that it was supposed to be one of the worst ones. So that one we got into using his piece of paper. And the other ones, when they would try to kick us out, Ion would wave his piece of paper. And they were sorta like, "well he's got permission and they're with him, so okay." You know, "our ass is covered, he's got permission. Someone other than us gave him permission to be here."

Sigman: Yeah

Tomlin: But that's the way that that worked. But in terms of what it's like to go in there, in a weird way, I think when you cover children in crisis of any kind, you do what you can in the moment, but ultimately the way you're going to help them the most is to get the footage out to tell the story of what's happening to them. And you just kinda have to put on blinders. I'm guessing it would be like what it would be

like to be an oncologist that has to tell people their kids are dying. Or to tell someone they're dying.

Sigman: Yeah.

Tomlin: If you're a basket case you're not going to be able to do your job. So I don't know. You cry after you get home. You don't cry when you're there.

Sigman: Uh huh.

Tomlin: You just get through it. You just capture what – you capture the images. Just a second, my battery is dying.

Sigman: I don't have as many questions left, but I do have a few, what are the chances you might be free at 8?

Tomlin: Sure I'll be home and both the kids will be here but I've actually already made dinner but yeah try me back at 8.

Sigman: I think kinda where we left off, you were talking about – you'd just made it into the institution and kinda like what you were seeing. I wondered at what point – what went through your head, when did you decide, “hey I think I might want to adopt a child from Romania?”

Tomlin: I didn't make that choice exactly. When we were doing the – when we went back, we had been on trip one. We went to an orphanage in Iasi – which you'll never spell, it's Iasi but it's pronounced “yosh.” And it's a university town and it's as north and east as you can go and still be in Romania. Way up and way over. So a long way from Bucharest but it's where the university is, considered kind-of a college town, a university town.

Sigman: Uh huh

Tomlin: We had been there because the pediatrician –she's like a behavioral psychologist pediatrician with World Vision that we worked with on one of our trips. She had a program there in one of the orphanages, so we had an entrée to get in because a number of staff that worked there.

Tomlin: We had been there on our first or second, one of the early trips and then went back like two years later to see had things improved? What the situation was like? And you know, this was not an institution, this was an orphanage. There was a waiting list of kids to get in. They had more parents trying to put their kids there then they had beds. I just remember that, Barbara Bascom was traveling with us, we were using her as kind of a consultant to evaluate the kids

Tomlin: “Is there anything wrong with this kid, is there any reason this kid should be in an institution? Would surgery fix this? What’s wrong with this kid?” We used her as kind-of our traveling expert with us.

Tomlin: So this was an orphanage and I just remember... Oh, so that night, we were interviewing her and in the middle of the interview – I don’t know if they still do this anymore but back then particularly on international stories we’d only have one camera. So you take the camera and you face it on the interview subject and I scribbled down verbatim all the questions. And I star when I think the answer won’t make sense without the question. Then we go back and I parrot the verbatim questions back to the correspondent and we turn the camera around and he does what we used to call ‘re-asks’ or ‘reverse questions’.

Sigman: Hmm.

Tomlin: So in the middle of doing – you know, the interview was done now. Tom is asking the questions so we can intercut it back in the edit room and a baby starts to cry. Well that screws up my sound, I can’t have a crying baby on the questions and then cut to the answer and there’s no crying baby. So I kinda gesture to the person in the room – she’s not a nurse, like an aide – “it’s ok, go get the baby.”

Tomlin: Well she doesn’t do anything. So I get the baby and I’m holding the baby and I’m holding my notebook. I’m parroting the questions and I’m off camera, obviously, and the baby’s quiet and so we do the re-asks. And I go back to the little crib, try to put the baby down and the baby starts to cry. So I put the baby back on my hip. And we’re doing b-roll in the orphanage and Tom laughs at me at one point.

Tomlin: And I also had my still camera because I was doing still shots of the production shoot. At some point he takes the camera away from me and turns it on me and says ‘smile’ and takes a picture of me holding this kid. We’re only there like an hour so I sit the baby down, the baby cries. But so I get home and get back to New York. Get my film developed, because you still had to get your film developed back then [laughs].

Sigman: Uh huh!

Tomlin: Picked up the pictures and there’s me holding this kid. And oh, sorry, I’m out of sequence. So that night we’re back at wherever we were staying and I said to Barbara, Dr. Barbara Bascom, I said, “You know, this makes me crazy. We’re back two years later. They can’t blame this on Ceausescu. I mean this is like another generation of kids.”

Sigman: Yeah.

Tomlin: “That are just being thrown away here. You know that little girl this morning in the orphanage? In two years, she’s going to need your developmental delay program. I know you can’t change the world but I can’t believe there’s actually a waiting list to get into Orphanage #1, I mean what is going on?” And I used this kinda as my metaphor over wine, you know, “that little girl is symbolic of...” And we commiserated. So that was that. And I got back home and the picture got developed. And I looked at it and said to my then boyfriend, “I’m gonna see what the deal is on this little girl. And I’m just gonna...”

Tomlin: And he was like “why?” [laughing]

Tomlin: And I just said, “well I just wanna know what the story is. Like if she’s available for adoption or you know, I don’t know anything about her.” But there was just something about this kid that just stuck with me. So I called Barbara who was in Iasi. And said, “you know, this kid?” I had written the baby’s name because I didn’t know if it was a boy or girl quite honestly when I picked it up, but I remembered the name, remembered enough of the name. And so I called Barbara.

Tomlin: I said, “I don’t know if I’ve lost my mind or what but I said you know the baby that I picked up during the interview when we were interviewing you at Orphanage #1? Can you find out what the story is on her?” And She said “well she’s abandoned, what do you mean what’s the story?”

Tomlin: And I said, “Well you know what I mean. Has anybody come to...” Because some people – one of the things that people don’t understand, in a crazy way, some people really do hope that their situation will get better. Especially during Ceausescu’s time, when every woman was forced to have five children and were taxed if they didn’t and they monitored their periods at the factory.

Sigman: Oh my gosh

Tomlin: And the feeling was that the first couple of children were wanted and then it was, ‘well this one is for the state or this is Ceausescu’s child,’ that’s what you would hear, “Ceausescu’s children” a lot, let him raise it. And this is in a country where, you know, there’s no heat, no food and if you didn’t have a goat you didn’t have milk.

Tomlin: Even in 1990, I’d be in people’s homes and they would take a light bulb and we would move it from room to room. So the first room, they would unscrew the light bulb and take it to the next room.

Sigman: Wow

Tomlin: And they just couldn't - they really just didn't have the ability, particularly to take care of a baby because they had to go to work. Until the baby was a couple years old and could take care of the next.

Sigman: Uh huh.

Tomlin: So people would put their children in –like we might take a child to day care and pick it up every day?

Sigman: Yeah.

Tomlin: So some families will take a child and put it in the orphanage and think, “alright, when the baby's a year or two then surely our situation will be better.” And you know there are some families that go and visit, it just depends on the logistics. You know, they'd go in on the weekends and go and see the baby. Some actually did retrieve their children. That's clearly the exception but a lot of this just came down to the economy. So it was like, “has anyone come and seen this baby?”

Tomlin: And she's like well I'll have the social worker, who was also American who was working over there, 'I'll have Tina check on it and see what the deal is.' But she said I'm sure she's just a gypsy baby, that no one's come to see this baby. And she asked “why?” [laughing] And I said, “I don't know Barbara, just check, just check.”

Tomlin: At a certain point, I don't know why, I really don't. I mean, I had been over there and over there and over there, I had picked up I don't know how many babies. The very first trip, my associate producer - we each had one and we're like, 'let's just run, take them and run'. And one's more cute than the next and you just want to rescue all of them and load up a truck and drive off. And I don't know what it was. I think it was partly just this idea that nothing had changed and it was just this sense of yet another generation of kids. For some reason this just stuck with me. I was a couple years older, I was not married, I was traveling all over the world and I don't really know except I guess it was just the right time.

Tomlin: I called Barbara after nothing happened after a couple of weeks. And I said, 'if I came back over there would this jump start all of this?' And she said, 'oh yeah, if you came back we could find out all of it.' So a week later, I got on a plane and told my parents I might be coming back home with a baby. I looked around my non-baby proof co-op in New York and went in the bathroom and threw up.

Sigman: Oh.

Tomlin: Got on a plane and went to Romania and about two weeks later I had a baby. It was really not planned. And when I left on that trip, there was no – my second child I actually went to Romania with the idea of getting a sister for Marisa, who

is my older child. And that was an actual plan to go and find a child to adopt. So there wasn't a plan until I came back and looked at the picture.

Sigman: Huh. How old was she when you got her?

Tomlin: She was almost eight months and weighed seven pounds.

Sigman: Oh, wow.

Tomlin: Even though she was eight months old, she was like an infant but just wasn't maybe quite as floppy as a newborn. I remember when we took her to the doctor, and like when you go to the doctor with a baby, they have a chart and they put a dot, a percentile of where your kid is, based on the weight and stuff. Marisa's dot was so far below the chart, we weren't even in the chart. It was down way below. I remember the first day that we were actually were in. "Oh the five percentile...we're in the chart!"

Sigman: [laughing]

Tomlin: Once we started actually feeding her, she gained weight really fast. She was 13 or 14 pounds by - we got her a week before Christmas and doubled her weight in the first two weeks.

Sigman: Was this '92?

Tomlin: She was born in May of '92 and got her in December of '92. At the time we were at the orphanage, which was one of those nicer orphanages. And they told us while we were there, that they feed the babies this really sweet powdered milk. It's not formula really, it's powdered milk, but it's got a lot of sugar in it. When we were there, they said they were out of it. We went out and actually purchased milk for the orphanage and brought it back. We purchased the same thing they were giving them which was just powdered milk. They also gave 'em tea a bit of tea in the bottle because in China, 50 years ago, they used to think that giving babies tea - I forgot what they thought it did, but they thought it was a good thing. And then I got Katie, my second child, who was almost eight months when I got her, although she was born at seven pounds. I actually don't know what she weighed when I brought her home, but she weighed whatever an eight-month-old should weigh.

Sigman: When was Katie born?

Tomlin: '98. I actually found Katie when she was seven days old and this teenage mother had gone in and signed the paperwork for adoption before she had the baby. It took me with all of my connections - with the new improved adoption laws it took me seven-and-a-half months to get her out.

Sigman: Wow. Did you ever think “this might not happen?”

Tomlin: Oh I for sure thought it wouldn’t happen because there was a moratorium, I mean they’ve since stopped adoptions completely.

Sigman: Uh huh

Tomlin: Katie was within - I don’t exactly know the last wave. She was ’98... I got her out in November on my birthday, so the end of my birthday in ’98. They started being more and more difficult in ‘99 and I think the very last one was either in ‘99 or 2000. There was a moratorium for a good part of ‘99. They had some kids that were in the pipeline, you know, in the process and some finalized but they wouldn’t let anyone new start the process. She wasn’t the last kid out but it had just gotten way complicated. I didn’t want to call any favors because I didn’t want there to be any appearance that I wasn’t going through the process. I was afraid to ask for a favor but I was afraid not to ask for a favor.

Sigman: Hm

Tomlin: I was always afraid if I flagged it, that maybe – because the government wasn’t thrilled with any of the pieces I’ve done – that if anyone in the government knew I was trying to adopt and connected the dots and that Janice Tomlin was *that* Janice Tomlin that they might stop it. I was really afraid to ask the people who actually could have made it happen.

Sigman: I don’t know if you had to fill out documents about where you worked, but did you actually put your real job on those?

Tomlin: Yeah I did. I did a home study and everything else. I probably said journalist as opposed to producer for ABC *20/20*. I didn’t lie but I may have left out a couple details. I’m sure I didn’t put that I had done an exposé on the conditions in the institutions of Romania. You do a home study here but you don’t actually interview with anyone there.

Sigman: I think I read online that there were a total of nine stories between 1990 and 2001, does that seem about right?

Tomlin: Let me count. “Nobody’s Children,” then there was “Everybody’s Children,” that was kind-of a Christmas show. “A Home for Michael,” that was a story about a boy with clubbed feet who got adopted and we did a profile on him, there was “Take me to America,” there was “What Happened to the Children,” “Babies for Sale,” “Shame of a Nation,” there were others. That sounds about right.

Tomlin: The last piece I did for ABC was – it had a double title- “Return to Romania: Babies for Sale.” And that was a 12-year retrospective where we went back and tried to update some of the things we’d done, checked out some of the kids we’d

seen and the places we'd been to. There was a lot of talk about corruption. We basically showed how easy it would be to buy a baby. We didn't actually buy one. We negotiated for it and then just didn't go back to pick it up. We found a couple that had 12 children and just showing how the whole thing had – instead of the government making it transparent and making it about the kids, it had all become what do we get out of it? Everybody had their hands out.

Sigman: You mentioned when you went back two years later that there were just as many babies in the orphanages. What was your impression of that? Why was that?

Tomlin: The economy. The country was still in disarray. Ceausescu was dead but the country was poor. There was the haves and all of the have-nots. It just had not recovered from what Ceausescu had done to the economy. It's a country that does not embrace birth control. The men won't do it. And they call birth control pills cancer pills. Again, medical thinking was so backwards. There's just a lot of reluctance so abortion was really the primary form of birth control. The other thing that happened was people had babies and then they couldn't take care of them.

Sigman: How did you get connected with Dr. Barbara Bascom?

Tomlin: When I did the first piece, "Nobody's Children", so many people reached out. I was sort of the patron saint of Romanian orphans. There were so many organizations who were doing relief aid who had volunteered and were working there. I don't know if I heard about her. I was always looking for people who were dedicating themselves over there. And Barbara was one of the people that – an American working full time in Romania.

Tomlin: It may have been that World Vision may have called, or someone may have told me about her. There weren't that many people working full time over there. And after the first couple of years, a lot of the parents who had adopted were dealing with different issues that come up with institutionalized children, particularly people who had adopted older kids, attachment disorder and auditory processing issues. And so they were searching for answers. I did that story with her and she became one of my go-to people for years after that. Her husband's a doctor, she's a doctor and they're back in the states now and she's retired, but she was there for a long, long time and ran this developmental delay program at Orphanage #2 or #4, one of the orphanages in Iasi. You tend to go where you've got connections and where you've got access and people can get you in and people know people. As I made connections over there, I tended to rely on them as I would go back.

Sigman: And then what about John Upton, was he ever in any of your stories?

Tomlin: John was in "Take Me to America." John saw "Shame of a Nation" and basically got on a plane and went over there not to adopt but to try to help. And he took his camera and he went to the worst place Sighetu Marmatiei and he took

video of some of the kids and took it back to his church near San Diego. Some of the people at church said they were interested in adopting. I know two women after seeing his little film, they did the paperwork then they got on a plane together and adopted two children.

Tomlin: And then John called and said he had commitments from like 20 families who were willing to take children from his church and a church in Virginia Beach. So "Take me to America" was in part, about this guy from San Diego who, propelled by watching our show, lined up these families. And we followed his trip. And he brought the kids back and we went to Virginia Beach and San Diego. The story kind-of ended when the kids got placed but we followed the journey back. Richard Branson of Virgin Air, donated all of their airfare free.

Sigman: Aw

Tomlin: We had a bunch of profoundly impacted kids on a Virgin Air flight. London to L.A. You know he (John Upton) is dead?

Sigman: Yeah I did, I read about that.

Tomlin: Okay.

Sigman: And I've read something that maybe he did a tour with his video and your video and he would take it to churches and show it?

Tomlin: If he showed my video it wasn't with our permission because we don't do that, but John probably wouldn't have gotten permission from us, he had video he took with his camera. He was making rounds. One San Diego family saw his video and that propelled them to go over and adopt. He actually lined the kids up - you know how they do an adoption parade? He lined them up and had them one at a time say their name and parade past the camera and that's not the kind of shooting we did when we were there.

Sigman: Right, yeah

Tomlin: Right at the beginning, because we did talk to so many people, when we did Everybody's Children, which was a Christmas thing, we put out the word: if you adopted a child, send us your Christmas card or send us your video. And we had been covering a lot of people arriving, even if they don't live in New York, their first entry point is JFK and so we got lots of people arriving with their children. Both there and some arriving in Dallas, there was a family that adopted five. I would call our affiliate and I would say, "hey this is a great story, there's this family in your area. Could you shoot it then send me the video too?" This was before 9/11 so you had all the families and all the friends waiting with balloons at the gate when the family would come off the plane. Or maybe mom would be

coming off the plane with the baby and her husband and their biological kids would be waiting to meet the new baby sister or brother.

Tomlin: They used to send us Christmas cards and send me Christmas cards and I got graduation pictures from some of these kids. One of them just got married a year ago. I went to the reunions; they had national reunions for a number of years. Parents who'd gotten together and they wanted to share cultural things. They would have Romanian food and it was also a way to network with other parents, the issues they were dealing with, share recipes.

Sigman: Well, when you, I guess this will be different for every year, every story you did, I'm just curious what the response was. I read some reviews before your story aired that were in the newspaper, a Baltimore newspaper and they said make sure you watch it. What kind of reviews did you get and did you get what you expected? What do you remember about that?

Tomlin: All of the Romanian stories were critically reviewed in a good way. I don't think we ever got any negative stories about the Romanian series. With the first one, because I didn't have kids, I don't know how old I was but I guess I didn't really realize how huge the infertility problem was in the United States. I didn't know really how expensive it was to adopt. I was doing a story about abandoned kids, I wasn't doing a story about adoption so I was a little bit stunned –at the just overwhelming number of calls that we got. I know 20/20 says they never got more. I don't know if anybody actually knows the number but it's always said that this was an unprecedented response to any piece that we've ever done. In addition to people wanting to help, these were babies. There was just like a warehouse of babies. And if you had had adoptions that had fallen through, birth mothers that had changed their minds, a number of miscarriages, this was like your dream place to go to. This really gave people hope that they might be able to have a family.

Tomlin: We were just besieged with calls. And then with Shame of a Nation, surprisingly, we had people who wanted to adopt those children too. Not in the same way, because most of these kids at least appeared to be profoundly either neurologically or physically impaired but we did have and in fact there were a surprising number of these kids – and surprising in the sense that I don't think anybody would be surprised that people would want adopt cute healthy children versus people wanting to adopt children who had physical and mental disabilities.

Tomlin: The main outcry with Shame of a Nation, it really was just an international outcry about the conditions and just a flood of relief aid and volunteers. People would call and say we're from a foundation in Ireland and we're going over. Danish nurses going over. There just was a real, huge outpouring – international. Which wasn't the case with Nobody's Children. But I really heard from lots and lots of people around the world on Shame of a Nation. The video was just shocking. It got a lot of attention. It won a lot of awards, I mean I think every

single show I did on Romania won an Emmy but Shame of the Nation won the Overseas Press Club Award and a Christopher. That's not why you do it, but after the fact it's nice to have your work recognized.

Sigman: How did those stories impact your career do you think?

Tomlin: It wasn't my first Emmy and it wasn't my first international story. I think that I use it sometimes to identify myself just because most people remember those stories. You can say you were a producer for *20/20*. But if I had to name a story people would remember, odds are pretty good they saw one or more of the Romanian pieces and if they didn't see them they heard about them. I think my colleagues really respected the work and knew what went into it.

Tomlin: I'm sure it probably helped my career, I guess. You have to remember though, I was really at the end of *20/20* when I started doing those. Two out of the 13 years, was Romania and then I was management. I don't think that was because of the Romania pieces, I think it was for the whole body of work and what I had done. I moved over to create *Turning Point*, which was our one-hour documentary unit. I was Senior Editorial Producer then Executive Producer of that show. Bottom line, I was at ABC over 20 years. I think it was just a body of work. But I'm sure that the Romanian pieces were - they helped my reputation rather than hurt it. Everyone at ABC knew who produced them. It's a series I'm really proud of.

Tomlin: I don't know that things have necessarily changed, but there is a bit of a "we already did that story" mentality out there. And you know when you go back and shoot stories a second time and they said, "well, that was a great story but you already did that story, let's do something else." And you'd go, "well, here's kinda the deal: there's still hundreds of thousands of children in warehouses and state-run institutions and so in my book, that's still a story." "Yeah, but you know, we did that. It's a great story but we already did that." And you're like, "ok well here's a new angle." Even though the pieces were really well received, it wasn't like - I had to fight and threaten to take the show somewhere else to do "Shame of a Nation." It wasn't like they were saying give us more, you know?

Sigman: Really.

Tomlin: That's just not the way they think.

Sigman: Did it bother you - I know people in the news business understand what a producer's role is. But did it ever bother you, maybe for people who weren't in the news business, they might have given more credit to the correspondent than to you, when in actuality you were the one doing all the work?

Tomlin: It never bothered me. Everyone in the news business knows what a producer does. Everyone in the TV news business knows what a producer does.

Interestingly, when you talk to people on the film side, a lot of times the producer just gets the money and the title really is director. A director does what I do if you're on the movie side.

Tomlin: I always felt like Tom and I – or when I worked with Mike Wallace or anyone else, I always felt like the correspondent and I were a team. And I don't know that I'd be very good on camera. You know I never wanted to be the one sitting in the chair. I do plenty of interviews where you don't see me. I liked the interview process but I didn't ever need to be on camera. And I didn't really want to be a correspondent. I wanted to be the producer. I wanted to be the one that knew the answers. I was the one that wrote the piece, I was the one that crafted the piece I was the one that edited the piece, I was the one that created the piece that I wanted. The correspondent – they're the fresh eyes that come in. And they stylize it maybe or they see things that you didn't see, and they're able to finesse it and make it better.

Tomlin: If a correspondent doesn't have your vision and wants to take it in a direction that maybe you didn't see it, and then I guess, maybe you resent that. *Wait a minute*, you know, *my piece, my vision, I pitched it*. And you feel like there's this interloper coming in. And they feel like *it's my face and my name and I want it to be...* But I've been pretty lucky, certainly with the Romanian series, I didn't have... Tom and I were a team and we didn't have any issues on the Romanian stories or anything he and I did. Working with Mike was maybe a little bit more contentious.

Tomlin: People would ask me on the plane what a producer does and you start ticking off what you do, you pitch the story, you set it up, you do the budget, you line everything up, you hire the crew, you edit it, you do this, you do that and they kinda look at you and they go "oh, well what does the correspondent do?" I liked the role I played. Never felt like an unsung hero. I liked being the one that, in my estimation, had control over piece.

Sigman: I know you're proud of your entire body of work, do you think you are most proud of these stories?

Tomlin: Probably so. I mean, I'm proud of other pieces. I'm proud that I was able to revisit this and continue to report on it. I've done other stories that had good things happen. I did an hour on the famine in Ethiopia. Save the Children raised millions of dollars as a result of our show and I'm sure lives were changed and good things happened as a result. On this story there are so many personal stories that I know of families who did see our report and went to Romania and adopted one or two or three kids and it changed the adoptive families' lives as well as the kids' lives.

Tomlin: Izidor Ruckel, who is 30 something years old now, I mean he calls me maybe every other day. I've known him since he was 11. We filmed him at Sighetu.

He's become a grown up. I've got Facebook friends who are adopted Romanian kids. And I've become really close friends with some of the adopted parents. There's probably not a week that goes by that I don't talk to somebody that is in some way connected to the story that I first did 20 years ago – aside from the fact that I live with two of them [laughing].

Sigman: [laughing] Right, right.

Tomlin: I just feel like it is - even though there are still kids trapped in orphanages and group homes in Romania and it still makes me crazy and they just voted last week not to reopen adoptions. So I still got a story in me to do. This isn't a story that has a happy ending with a bow wrapped up. You start out and you kind-of know you can't change the world but you know you want to make a difference with the pieces that you do. And it would be nice if after you do, that they fix the problem. This has been just one kid at a time. Unfortunately, the problem is still – but there aren't as many kids. Right now some charity hospitals are jammed full of kids they just don't call them orphanages.

Sigman: It sounds like you and your oldest have definitely had conversations about it, what do your kids know about the situation in Romania?

Tomlin: I didn't show them the video when they were little. Marisa was in a preschool with other internationally adopted kids. We celebrated the culture, she had a little Romanian flag and she had a map. She's always known.

Tomlin: Katie when she was about two or three, we taught her the pledge of allegiance and she became a U.S. citizen. They've both been back. We went back two years ago or three years ago.

Sigman: Really.

Tomlin: We went back to partly vacation, partly me working and partly they wanted to look for family connections. We found Katie's mom actually lives in Italy. She'd moved to Italy the year before but we didn't know that. But we found her grandmother and her uncle and found the mother, Katie just didn't meet her. But she and her twin sister, the mom's twin sister – and we had no idea the mom was a twin. In her genetic pool she very well could have twins. We knew some information about mom but we didn't know she was a twin. She and Katie are on Facebook, they keep up and we will meet. She wants to meet, Katie wants to meet, it's just she's in Italy. Marisa's parents are both dead. We knew her dad had died we didn't know her mom had died. We found her extended family in a crazy gypsy village and they were very open and receptive to her, very curious.

Tomlin: They've now seen the pieces. They're not in any of those pieces. But I do have video of Marisa that was shot by the crew but didn't fit in the piece. Then I have

home movies of Katie that I took in the orphanage, so they've seen video of themselves in the orphanage, when I first met them.

Sigman: The first video you have of Marissa was shot by ABC then?

Tomlin: Yeah. It wasn't until after I'd gone back, we went back through it to see if we could find her. The only picture I had was the one Tom Jarriel had taken of me holding her.

Sigman: Because of your stories and then when you adopted, did any of your co-workers adopt children from Romania?

Tomlin: Not from Romania. Several people that I know have gone and adopted and some of them have said that they – they tried to adopt first from Romania but because of moratoriums and stuff, one ended up adopting from Russia, one went to China.

Sigman: When you went back so often, what was it like with clearances to get in? Did they have any idea that this was the same person doing these stories?

Tomlin: When we went into to do “Shame of a Nation,” and this may have been John Upton's paranoia for lack of another word. There was concern about - honestly I'm not remembering the specific details whether he was concerned that we might be busted because of us - because of ABC or because of the inquiries that he had made. He thought maybe his name might be on a list. We actually flew into Budapest in Hungary and drove across the border because Sighetu isn't that far a drive. We did it to come under the radar. We went in legally, we went through a checkpoint. You didn't have to have a visa as long as you had a passport. It wasn't like anyone in the government was – it's just the guy stamping your passport at customs. I always wondered if when they checked the computer some flashing light would come on and it would say, ‘under no circumstances let this woman in.’ But it didn't.

Sigman: Were you ever scared during any of these trips?

Tomlin: The only time I was really scared, we were flying to Sighetu. Not the first trip. When we took Izidor back – that's one of the stories I left out - to meet his birth parents and to go to Sighetu. We were in a helicopter and you have to fly over the mountains to get from Bucharest to get to Sighetu and there's certain places the pilot was like “I can't see”. And we're flying visually; we're not flying on instruments. It was winter and it was snowy and there was fog. He said I don't know where the mountain is and I can't see.

Sigman: Wow.

Tomlin: “Turn around! Go in the direction you can see.” We obviously didn't hit the mountain, but at the time I was a little afraid.

Tomlin: Oh another time – it’s always being in the air, the times I’m afraid. When we were leaving after Shame of a Nation, there were three times that I was afraid. After we got the footage I was just terrified that they knew and they were going to confiscate the footage and they wouldn’t let us on the plane and something would happen and somehow we’d be ordered to turn over all the footage and I had what I knew was just killer, killer footage. We couldn’t any of us believe what we’d seen. The way you leave Romania at the time, you go out to the tarmac, and then Tarom Air was the only way out at the time. It’s the national state-run airline, government-owned airline and that’s how you get out. You put your stuff down and go out to the tarmac and then you claim what’s yours and they load what’s yours onto the plane. And then you get on. And so they only load on what people point to. And at the end they make an announcement and people look out at the stuff that’s still on the tarmac and they basically tell you to kiss it goodbye because if you didn’t point to it they’re not touching it.

Tomlin: So we were all watching. We traveled with these big metal cases. And we had the tapes in a metal case. And they’re numbered – so we’ve got like 20 cases with the gear. We flew from Bucharest to Timisoara? The last stop before you leave Romania, just puddle hopping.

Tomlin: I still just want to get out of the country with our stuff. We landed in Timisoara and they came on with some announcement in Romanian. And we didn’t know what it meant but everyone got off the plane. They took this big ladder over. What we gathered from talking to someone is that they were sending another plane. And that plane would take us to Frankfurt. And so we’re waiting and they’ve got this ladder up to the engine and this guy’s pounding on it with this huge mallet.

Sigman: [laughing]

Tomlin: And the cameraman and I are going, “poor schmucks who get on that plane. Oh man, can you imagine?” And this thing is making this high whiny noise and clanky noise. It’s a pretty day, I’m just laying out wondering how much longer it’s gonna be. It had just been non-stop and we hadn’t slept and everyone was exhausted. We all had our backpacks just laying out on the concrete waiting for the plane to come.

Tomlin: And they made some announcement and we didn’t know what they said but everybody got up and got back on *that* plane. And Tony the cameraman looks at me and says, “Jan” and I’m like, “you know, Tony, nobody wants out of this country more than me, but I will not make anyone get on that plane. If you don’t want to get on it, we’ll figure it out.” And they’re like, “yeah we want out of here.” So we all got back on that plane. And as it’s taxiing and in my peripheral vision and everyone in front of me, it’s like collectively everyone’s making the sign of the cross.

Sigman: Oh! [laughing]

Tomlin: I'm thinking this is as bad as it gets. And we landed in Frankfurt and we had to collect our stuff and had to go through customs to change airlines to go to America. And go to get gear and half is missing.

Sigman: Oh.

Tomlin: And of course one of the things missing is the box with the tapes. And I am just frantic. We are going everywhere. Frankfurt is a huge airport. And we were trying to talk to Tarom, we were trying to talk to American, the airline we were connecting to. We were going everywhere and we can't find these four missing cases. And the one that really matters has all the shot tapes. We waited hours. We were just frantic.

Tomlin: I was going to one more help desk, one more way to check, way on the other side of the airport. As I was going to somewhere I'd been directed to go to talk to one other person, just out of the side of my eye I just spot this silver sitting on some carousel nowhere near where it should have been.

Tomlin: Now we had the stuff but we had to rebook the flight and get out of there. Again, on no sleep. So I met the crew to the gate with the stuff and I went back to customs – this was before cell phones. Go back to customs to make a call to New York because we needed to be met by – we had people who met our flight to clear our stuff through customs. And we weren't on the flight we were supposed to be on and didn't have a way to e-mail anybody or cell phone to call anyone. So I gave Tony all my stuff and I went back out to make a phone call on my international calling card. So I made the call really quick. You have to give them your passport before you go to the booth to talk to them. So I come back out to get my passport and they say you owe \$22 and I said no, no I put it on my credit card and held it up and they're shaking their heads no it didn't go on my card. And they won't give me my passport. I don't have any money. I didn't have time to go back all the way through to get to Tony. I hadn't brought my purse. This is when I started to cry and the man behind me paid whatever it was. I got his business card and was like thank you so much. He probably just wanted to pay for his shit and get on the way. I sent him money afterwards; he was some nice businessman in Germany. So I was scared then too.

Tomlin: The only time I was afraid of anything was something not being what we thought or spending a lot of time trying to get to a place and then not being able to get in or wouldn't get the footage that we needed.

Sigman: You mentioned you guys were sleep deprived by the time you made it to the airport, can you talk a little bit about the shooting schedule when you got there? Did you shoot from sun up to sun down?

Tomlin: For “Shame of a Nation?”

Sigman: The airport stories – do you know which television stories the stories you just mentioned were connected to?

Tomlin: “Shame of a Nation” was Timisoara, the mechanical problem then losing the footage. The mountain was when we took Izidor back, because Izidor was on the helicopter. I don’t know what the hell the name of that one was. That was after “Take Me to America” and before “Babies for Sale.” “Long Journey Home” maybe? I don’t remember that one.

Sigman: For “Shame of a Nation,” for example.

Tomlin: For “Shame of a Nation,” we chartered a government plane - keep in mind, there wasn’t any such thing as a private plane at that point. Everything was through the government. We chartered a plane for a week and then we had drivers that were private drivers. We tried to make friends with these government pilots but we were really suspicious that they might tip off where we were going. So we never told them where other than the airstrip or airport we were going to. They would stay and drink –which was another leap of faith, but they would stay and drink and smoke while we would get in a van that we had prearranged for. It would take us by ground to the institution we were going to.

Tomlin: And then we would have a rendezvous time back to the plane and it would fly us to the next city or airport. We were there seven days on the ground and in 11 institutions. And these were in God-forsaken, off the beaten path places. So we had a lot of travel time and the reason we took the plane was to try to cut some of that out. We had specific places we wanted to go to, so we would get as close as we could on the plane and then take the van the rest of the distance. In hindsight, I don’t think they gave a shit about what we were doing but we were just not sure. We thought they might get in trouble or maybe worse that they were spying on us, that part of their job was to find out what we were doing. But either they weren’t good at it or they didn’t, because nothing happened.

Tomlin: We basically would get up at dawn’s early light and get on the plane. I don’t think we checked in to the hotel and I use hotel very loosely, wherever we were staying. We weren’t eating. We were landing at midnight and we would get to whatever place we were staying between midnight and one. I remember drinking a lot of wine, I don’t remember eating much. When you’re in these places, aside from the fact it’s just filthy and everything smells like urine and feces, you’re certainly not going to eat anything there. I think we had some cold cuts and bread and crackers and things and we would eat in the van when we were driving from place to place. I don’t remember actually eating in a restaurant. I’m sure we must have at some point but we were really just running and gunning. Get up, fly, get

in the van, go to place one, get what we need there, go back to the plane, get to place two. I think we pretty much did two places a day.

Tomlin: Sighetu was a full day, and probably the most difficult one to get to because it's in a very remote area. We couldn't land close. And it was on the other side of the country where we were. The weather was not a problem. "Shame of a Nation," which I think was shot in April but I could be wrong, wasn't too hot or too cold. We were just going nonstop because of all the places we had to travel.

Tomlin: And then "Nobody's Children," as I said before, I do not remember in my whole life ever being colder. It was wet, it was snow, it was freezing, it was windy. Even though we were covering the orphanages, we were also covering the revolution as the backdrop and trying to get a sense of this country in turmoil. We were out there during the protests. They were burying people. It was the immediate aftermath of the revolution. I just remember being cold and wet and freezing and then we'd go to the orphanages and it'd be freezing in there too.

Sigman: Did you mention there was no heat or hot water at any of your hotels?

Tomlin: I don't really know why everything shut down. I wouldn't say there was no heat or hot water ever but it was very sporadic. You didn't know and again we were hardly at the hotel, but you didn't know when you go there. They weren't open and that may have been part of it too. All the restaurants were closed. There were just people running around. Government soldiers were running around, everybody had a gun. Restaurants would cook your food if you brought it but they weren't serving.

Sigman: Hmm.

Tomlin: We were cooking in our rooms. I know we didn't eat in a restaurant that first trip, there was not a restaurant open. We did get our hotel to make us spaghetti the last night. Maybe they had their own food because I do sort-of remember pork chops and french fries. It might have been that trip. Wait we did go over to the Intercontinental, I take that back. They were serving food, it wasn't good food. It wasn't our hotel but that's where I met Carol Stevens.

Sigman: Did any of the guys carrying guns around, did that ever scare you or concern you?

Tomlin: They weren't point at me, I've had guns pointed at me, I've been shot at but not in Romania.

Sigman: Where?

Tomlin: Uh Ethiopia, he initially pointed it at me, then he pointed it at the cameraman and Hank was like, "uh Janice, should I make a call on this?" [laughing.] We had

a misunderstanding. We had permission to shoot in a document and we had a plane landing and it was like the money shot. This was a plane filled with grain from the children of New York City who had raised the money to buy it and it was only going to land once. And it was getting ready to land. And we had permission to shoot, but somehow no one clued in the security guy at the tarmac,

Sigman: Ugh

Tomlin: who didn't speak English. And really, really didn't want us to shoot it. And literally had his gun pointed at my camera guy and I don't know how I was able to convey in some way. Turns out he didn't so much care about us shooting the plane but he didn't want us to show some sort of radar that you could follow this plane where it would be taxiing. Somehow, through a walkie-talkie and me gesturing and him gesturing, he agreed not to shoot the camera man and we could shoot the plane and the plane would land and we would sort it out.

Tomlin: I was probably more scared in Mozambique because when we were landing on airstrips there, we didn't know if it was government controlled or rebel controlled. You couldn't really tell 'til you were getting ready to land and see if it was government uniforms or not. We were on a private plane and whether we were going to abort the landing or not was...

Sigman: Wow.

Tomlin: So Romania, no, I've been way more scared with little child soldiers carrying guns. I never thought anybody in Romania would shoot me.

Sigman: Hmm.

Tomlin: I thought I might die more from [laughing] incompetence and mechanical issues on planes or food poisoning.

Sigman: [laughing]

Tomlin: Or I'd have appendicitis and they'd kill me in the hospital cause they didn't know how to treat it. I was much more concerned with lack of infrastructure than I was of anyone trying to intentionally hurt me.

Sigman: Yeah. What was the budget you were given for each of those stories – approximate?

Tomlin: I'm gonna guess but they were tricky because of the way our budgets were set up. It would have been probably under \$100,00 on all of them. But then my salary was paid because I was staff. Camera crew I would have had to pay for because we didn't have staff crews.

Sigman: Hmm.

Tomlin: Editors, there was a kind of complicated charge. We were billed within the show for the editor's time but it didn't come out of my direct budget but it kind-of did. My budget had to go for paying for crew and equipment, paying for the airfare, charter flight, paying for fixers and translators and per diem. They might have gone up to \$125,000 because on Shame of a Nation, we did have a chartered flight.

Sigman: Was it difficult to stay in budget for those?

Tomlin: Yeah, it's always difficult to stay on budget. I don't remember there being any issues with any of those. As long as you're coming back with a great story and it's not some sort of enormous money that you can't explain. You come back with a receipt or you say hey we got stuck and we had to charter. If you can justify where that money went, I don't remember ever having any issues.

Sigman: And so are you a native Texan?

Tomlin: I was born in Arkansas

Sigman: Where in Arkansas?

Tomlin: Little Rock, are you from Arkansas?

Sigman: I was born in Fayetteville, yes.

Tomlin: Oh yeah? My parents went to the University of Arkansas. I can call the hogs. My oldest nephew went there. My mom was from Camden and my dad was from Fairview, which is a little town near Camden. Then we moved, we left when I was seven and went to New Jersey. My dad worked for AT&T in New York. And then when we moved to Houston and he worked for Southwestern Bell and then we moved to Dallas.

Sigman: Huh. Very interesting. What did your family think of your career choice?

Tomlin: Well, they're proud of me. My mom, more than my dad was always nervous about the international travel. I sort-of never really shared a lot of the details. [Laughing] even now I don't share the stories. She's like, "what are you doing there?" When I was in Mozambique she was like, "Oh a few of my friends have been there, I think that's a beautiful beach!" She was thinking of Martinique.

Sigman: [Laughing]

Tomlin: And I'm like, how do I gently say, "well mom, the beaches in Mozambique have land mines in them."

Sigman: [laughing]

Tomlin: Kind of more just like “be careful.” And “why do they make you do those stories? Why don’t you get to do celebrities? Do you pick your stories or do they make you do those?” And I’d say, “Mom.” And she’d say, “Well I don’t know why you’d want to go to those places. Are they fighting there? What country are you staying in, are they fighting there?”

Sigman: [Laughing]

Tomlin: “No mom, they’re not fighting there.” “Well I thought they were fighting in Vietnam.” “Well not anymore, Mom.”

Sigman: [Laughing]

Tomlin: They liked saying, “Oh my daughter works at ABC, oh my daughter works at *20/20*.”

Sigman: The media is so fragmented today, do you think it’s possible that even a show like *20/20* today, could do a story on Romanian orphanages and have the same impact that your stories did?

Tomlin: Um, I think they could. For reasons they would have to explain to you, that’s not what they do anymore. They don’t believe that they can. I would love the opportunity to prove them wrong. I think things are different. But just last week, they did a story on Bat Boy, the little boy from Make-A-Wish

Sigman: Oh I remember hearing about that.

Tomlin: It kind-of just erupted where instead of being a small thing, the whole city got involved, where he got picked up in a bat mobile and got to rescue a damsel in distress and got a key to the city. He’s going to be on GMA on Monday. And I think 15 or 20,000 people came out just to be the cheering crowd. It went viral.

Tomlin: I think that people still care. I think I could put those stories on now and you still would get a - I don’t know cause they don’t do it anymore, so I can’t say.

Sigman: Yeah. Now that DVR exists now, and the internet and it seems like not as many people have cable now.

Tomlin: But I think the thing is, if you - a lot of the stuff I see, I don’t necessarily see it at the same time. Or on my television or at the same time but I see it. Or someone links it on my Facebook. In some ways, with the internet and YouTube and everything, you can actually reach more people. Just because they don’t see it on the medium that you initially put it on. Not necessarily at Friday night on *20/20*.

But I don't know, because you know, none of the magazine shows really do – well *Frontline* does. *Dateline* does crime. *20/20* does - nightmare weddings, nightmare neighbors, nightmare houses, nightmare hotels, nightmare relationships.

Sigman: And those weird what would you do scenarios.

Tomlin: Right, well that's not *20/20* now, that's a whole new show. But *20/20*, right now, they're in kinda in a theme thing. Last week was disaster houses.

Sigman: What do you foresee or what are your thoughts about the future of documentary news shows? Like you said, *Dateline* does crime or they were doing the sexual predators for a while. You were doing a lot of current events at *20/20*.

Tomlin: It's funny because when I worked at *20/20* and even when I worked at *Turning Point*, the D word was to be avoided at all costs. We would not use the D word, because the D word, documentary, meant PBS and the perception was nobody watched documentaries. They didn't call any of our shows documentaries. And when we did *Turning Point*, which were documentaries, we called them single subject long form hours. Which just rolls off the tongue [laughing]. The perception from my bosses that trickled down to us, was that nobody would want to watch a documentary so we did not promote them that way. Then it seems to me, certainly over the last five years – cause like now on my resume, I've claimed everything to be a documentary, documentary unit. *Turning Point* is a documentary unit. Because now being a documentary is cool. With Sundance and with feature documentaries and there's a documentary category at the Oscars now. It's interesting to me how at least within the media, people have embraced the word documentary.

Tomlin: But they don't still tend to air on ABC, CBS but now HBO, HBO has a whole documentary unit and series, Showtime has a whole documentary series.

Tomlin: I don't remember when HBO started to - Sheila Nevins, who I think is brilliant, she was at award shows with me, so they must have been doing things with me, I just can't peg it to a year. With so many cable channels to choose from, even though there's a lot more out there to watch, I think when there's a buzz about something that people do watch it. And based on the Romanian series, people – I used to say each time, when I would go in there to pitch yet another story, you know, “when we do these pieces we get an enormous response so you can't tell me people don't care. They've proven time and time again they do care.”

Sigman: Hm

Tomlin: *Frontline* does great work. *Frontline* won a ton of Emmys this last...

Sigman: Yeah, concussions and football seems to be getting some play.

Tomlin: Yeah they're doing a lot of great stuff. Part of it with PBS, if you ask people they'll say, "yeah I watch PBS." But they don't [laughing]. They say they do because it sounds good instead of saying I watch the housewives of Atlanta. It just sounds better. But still they do great work and they win awards.

Sigman: So sounds like you're somewhat optimistic because the word documentary is trendy because there are lots of channels and options.

Tomlin: I am. Because that's what I like to do [laughing].

Sigman: [Laughing] right

Tomlin: And I would like to not be ringing death knell's bell here. I do believe that, it just seems like there are lots of people who are going to Kickstarter to get money for documentaries. Over and over people who are doing documentaries are getting them picked up for some kind of feature distribution. Gideon's Army, a friend of mine produced that for HBO. It won Sundance. It's been on, a month or two ago, they were playing it on HBO. How many people saw it? I don't know. I feel like now people are proud of the word. Back in the '90s, when we would have the British producers come over because they'd be pitching things to us - and they run like three documentaries a night, that's just part of the culture there. We used to laugh at the idea that we could run even one a night and call it a documentary because it wasn't the buzz word that my bosses thought anybody would respond to.

Tomlin: I'd say if you're writing a paper and majoring in it, you've got to hope there will be documentaries in the future.

Sigman: Yeah, I went back to grad school for it! But I just wondered what your opinion is.