



The Shepherd of Wal-Mart



If you have ever been to the Wal-Mart in Belleville, you might have seen a man wearing bright red clogs on his feet, with matching miniatures holding together the bolo tie around his neck. He sits at a corner table closest in the McDonald's with the closest seat to the entrance. He smiles and says hello to anyone who comes through the doors. He offers advice on Christianity and life problems.

Tom Visser, also known as "Brother Tom" and the "Singing Dutchman," lives in Yarker, Ont. for about five years now with his wife of seven-and-half-years, Patricia. He is a retired schoolteacher, pastor and musical entertainer and he is often recognized when he goes out because of his large white beard and jolly demeanour.

He has prayed for people in jails, hospitals, and senior homes and even talked someone out of a hostage situation once in Hamilton, Ont. These experiences have rewarded him with a "wonderful life," says Visser. His experiences have altered his life towards giving other people happiness and a better life.

He and his late previous wife Tina lived in London where he taught at a private Christian school. He also owned and operated a second-hand/antique store and would donate some of the proceeds to various people in need. Most of them he met himself while walking around London.

When Visser is not ministering, he entertains people through music. He can play over 14 instruments and has even played his accordion on the CBC show "country hoedown" with Gordie Tap. He now plays music mostly at church events around Hastings County and sometimes plays in front of Wal-Mart.

"Music has always come naturally to me," says Tom.

Up until the triple by-pass surgery he had three years ago, Visser was quite an active guy. He has since become quite immobile with the surgery and recent diagnosis of shingles. Tom has been walking everywhere with a cane and spends much less time outside. They were planning on making their annual wintertime migration to Florida where he plays a singing Santa at his local church, but instead are staying home this year due to Tom's diminishing health.

But he still keeps a positive outlook on life and always stays positive. As he says to Wal-Mart shoppers: "Keep smiling."



Top: Tom Visser waves goodbye to a lady in Wal-Mart after handing her a book.

Middle left: A cross stands in the backyard of Tom's home.

Middle right: A wall in his office is covered with various certificates acknowledging his work in the Christian community and certifying his ordination with in the church.

Centre: Tom sits alone in his corner seat at the Wal-Mart McDonald's. He spends a lot of time speaking with shoppers and handing out his books that talk about his Christian values and life experiences.

Second from bottom: Tom with his signature yellow clog bolo-tie, red bandana, and big white beard.

Bottom right: Tom gives a copy of his book entitled: "Brother Tom - The Peoples Preacher", to a Wal-Mart customer whom he sees periodically while drinking his coffee at McDonald's.

