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Antoon, Grace Oral History Interview:
Sesquicentennial of Holland, "150 Stories for 150 Years"

Larry Wagenaar
LW: Grace, just for the record, would you please tell me your full name and your date of birth?

GA: Grace Antoon. My maiden name is Bijsterveld, and I was born [date removed], 1929, in the city of Groningen, the Netherlands. Is that a good answer?

LW: That's a very good answer.

GA: Do you want the name of my parents and grandparents?

LW: Well, sure. What were your mother's and father's names?

GA: My mother's name was Anna Kloek and my father's name was Bernardus Bijsterveld. Bernardus is actually a Catholic name. Our forefathers in 1600s and 1700s lived in the province of Noord Brabant. How they ever came to the northern part of the Netherlands I don't know, but that's where his forefathers came from.

LW: Obviously a major event in your early life was the second World War. You were ten or eleven years old when the war broke out. Tell me about those years before the war.

GA: My father was working for the city, something like in the finance department, city of Groningen. We were five children--I was number four--and we had a quite nice, pleasant childhood. My father did bookkeeping at night. Now I realize he did this (for small firms) to earn a little extra and for that we went to the seashore every summer. Two weeks in a cottage. In those days we didn't have a car so the taxi
would come and pick us up, all seven of us, our suitcases and baskets, and bring us to the train, then we took the bus and the boat. That's how we ended up on the island of Schiermonnikoog every summer, near the North Sea. Fun! I have two brothers and a sister who are older and a sister that's younger.

LW: What are your siblings' names?

GA: My oldest brother is Albertus, next brother Reinder, my sister's name is Anna and the youngest, Johanna.

LW: Are they all still living?

GA: Yes, they are. And all their mates as well.

LW: So your father worked for the city. Did your mother work also or just in the home with all these children?

GA: She was a nurse but when the children came along she was home with us at all times.

LW: Five children. That's a handful. So tell me about the war. Tell me how it all began and especially how it impacted you in Groningen.

GA: Well, I was ten years old when the war started in May. I remember it very well because my brother was in the National Guard. My father who was quite active in politics predicted this war already two years before it started. On Sunday we spent quite a long time at the dinner table. We had soup and vegetables, potatoes and pudding and we'd say, "Oh soup again!" and my father would say, "Someday you'll lick your fingers when the Germans invade our country." And at night we three girls had one big bedroom and then we imitate our father, "Someday you'll lick your fingers, that delicious chicken soup." Well, the day came in May. My brother was in
the National Guard and I still remember his big black boots running... Those big black boots I would shine every Saturday night for him for a dime. And if they weren't good enough I had to do them over again for the same dime. But anyway there he came, "Father and mother, there's war!" I'll never forget it. "Vader and moeder, er is oorlog! I remember that so well. I was ten. And it was early in the morning and everybody went outside in their pajamas, and we thought that was exciting! We, as children, did not realize what was happening to us, and how things would change.

We saw the Germans march through the streets while singing, but they left us alone at first. But that slowly changed throughout the years when the Jews had to start wearing stars and could not go into restaurants and could not go into theaters and finally what they wanted from us was our tin, our pewter, copper, for their war. We had to give our radios and they would take our bicycles. The food was getting scarce. And the men were being picked up. "Razzia's" as we called them. They would just close up blocks and then go into every house and anybody between sixteen and sixty-five was picked up and sent to Germany to work in the factories. Then things were getting very scary, and we were bombed one night. It was claimed that the Germans had done that because nothing ever happened to our city as yet. But we were living near Germany, about maybe a hour's drive, and one bomb dropped on my girlfriend's house—she was almost twelve. She died and her sister was crippled for life. I remember my twelfth birthday very well. I had to attend her funeral, our whole class did. We sang. The Germans' leader had the nerve to be there to show sympathy.

And then war came home! My brother disappeared, I did not see him for years.
Sometimes he would come home in the middle of the night, get some clean clothes, money and food and find another address to hide.

LW: Was he working in the underground?

GA: Yes, he was, and later on I found out so was my dad. And meantime my oldest brother had married, and he and his wife were too. His wife especially was quite brave during the war—did a lot of tremendous things to help the underground. Steal things. She would even date Germans and get information. Got them a little tipsy and got information out of the Germans. She was quite a cool one, that lady!

LW: So this was relatively early in the war when that bombing must have happened. If you were twelve, then it was 1941.

GA: Yes. It was July...two years into the war, '42. The 31st of July was the funeral, on my birthday. The 26th was the bombing.

LW: And things just continued to deteriorate from there?

GA: Yes. Because we didn't have enough food. We didn't have clothes any more. Father's suits were being turned inside out and we had a seamstress come to the house every Wednesday morning to make a blouse out of sheets that had holes in them and repair things. It's amazing how frugal, but how smart, the Dutch were to still have candlelight when there were no candles; they used water, oil and a wick. That's how we sometimes did our homework at night. The Germans were getting very mean about things. And finally there were not enough teachers left so we had to merge our Christian school with the public school. They'd go in the morning. We'd go in the afternoon. There was no heat anymore. So that lasted maybe about six months. But
then about nine months before the Liberation we didn't go to school anymore. We
didn't have shoes to wear, coats or whatever. It was the coldest, snowiest winter, the
last winter of the war, the winter of '44-'45. Terrible! We had to stay in bed, the
three girls in one bed (because by that time we were running out of sheets and
pillowcases and blankets) just to stay warm. And there was no wood or coal for the
fireplace or the stove. And so about eleven o'clock we could get out of bed and then
we had a very meager meal and maybe go to bed again to stay warm.

LW: Just because you wanted to keep warm?

GA: There was no heat in the house. Very little. And sometimes six o'clock all of a
sudden the water was turned off, or the gas or the electricity by the enemy—just to be
nasty. That's what the Nazis did. Never warning us so some people had something
cooking on the stove and all of sudden no heat or no gas or electric. And then at
night sometimes the sirens would go off. I remember one night it went off twelve
times. So many planes came over, the American, the Canadian, the English to bomb
Germany. And they all came over our city. Of course, the city was completely
black. We had black curtains over the windows and lights—you hardly had any more
candles. The city had to be dark at night. Sometimes we hardly made it to school the
next day because we had to get up that often. So mother let us sleep. This was when
we were still going to school. It was a strange situation really. Looking back, it was
very difficult for my parents no just to clothe and feed us children but to worry about
my brothers being in the underground in the resistance movement. Of course, daily
you heard of people being picked up and getting shot for hiding Jews or their
belongings or working underground. It was kind of scary at times. But thank goodness our whole family made it. My parents and brothers all got through the war.

LW: For many families that was not true.

GA: Oh. A lot of them lost lives. In our neighborhood too. And then there was the black market. Sometimes you could buy a pound of butter for sixty guilders which would normally be maybe two guilders. And then finally our violin would disappear. We had a beautiful radio we traded for clothes. A Persian rug on the floor disappeared. We'd trade for food and clothes with whoever had a business or with the farmers. And that's how we survived.

LW: Can you tell me about the Liberation?

GA: It lasted about four or five days. There was a lot of fighting going on. We were liberated by the Canadians, and of course, we had no idea of what's going on. We didn't have a radio. There was of course no telephone or anything. But I remember we had a pond in front of our house and a Catholic church in the area behind. The Canadians actually liberated us house by house. This was a large city! I would say about two hundred thousand or a hundred and seventy thousand people. And we were bombed or shot and civilians were killed as well. And I'd say about one hundred and fifty soldiers, mostly Canadians, died. Some bodies went back to Canada and there's also a cemetery for the Canadians. We couldn't get out of the house, of course. It was kind of scary. But it all turned out okay. Our street was not damaged or anything like that. And then we had a big celebration because the Canadians came with tea, coffee, cigarettes and chocolate. All the neighbors took their chairs outside
and tables and everybody was dancing. It's amazing where the food came from! But we shared whatever we had, and it was wonderful! Yes! We celebrated for I think about a week. (Laughs)

LW: When did you have to go back to school?

GA: In fact, I don't think we did! We were liberated in May and now we had to come to school for exams. And that was my last year in high school. So once in a while we had to go to school--maybe once a month and bring lessons and pick others up and had of course no teachers to check us. So my mother helped us a lot. She didn't know German or she didn't know French or English, but she always listened to our lessons. I was always under the impression she knew all the languages! But in fact she made us believe that she knew it and we had to recite to her what we had learned. So thank goodness I did get my high school diploma.

LW: So tell me what happened after the war. You've been liberated and what is Grace Antoon, Grace Bijsterveld, do at that point?

GA: I finished school when I was sixteen, I think. I skipped a year, seventh grade I believe it was. I was quite young. So I worked in the library during the day—that was my very first job. Then I went to school part time as well. It was a business school. I would have liked to have gone on to college. I really wanted to be a kindergarten teacher. But my father said I could be a teacher if I was going to elementary, never mind kindergarten, the little ones. All you do is wipe noses he said. He was not in favor of that. I really wanted to be teacher just for the little ones, not grade school. So I went to work instead and I went to school part-time.
Then my father said (and he was right at that) "Take business courses" because everything has not worked in years and years. We need talent to build up this country. Of course, Rotterdam, the harbor, was flat, the big factories. A lot of people were killed and a lot of Jews never came back, so we had to rebuild the economy of the Netherlands. So I took English business correspondence, shorthand, typing (which they don't teach in the high school in the Netherlands) and bookkeeping. So I did that three days a week and the other days I worked for the library.

LW: So your job paid for your courses?

GA: No, I had to pay for my own courses. My dad did. I did that a year or so, then I got a nice job. My first one was in an insurance company, health insurance. The Noord Nederlanden it was called. And it was interesting. The director was a relative. I don't know if I got the job that way, but I stayed there two years. Then I worked in a bank for another two years. So by that time, my then boyfriend came home from Indonesia. He had been in the Army. It was in April and we were engaged the first of July and we were married the last day of July. We left for the United States in December.

LW: And your boyfriend's name?

GA: At that time? George Antoon. I met him when I was fourteen. It was quite a story. I went with my sister to the town of Winsum. I had an uncle there. He had machines to work the grain for oil...I really don't know what it is in the English language, but he had a business. So my dad would usually go on the bike, but then near the border
of the city of Groningen, the Germans would stop everybody on their bikes and frisk them. If they had food with them they would take it away and sometimes even make them pay for it. So it was not trusted for my father to go any more. And my mom was afraid he was going to be picked up by the Germans. So my sister and I, she was two years older, we went on the train to Winsum. My uncle was expecting us and my aunt had made bread, gave us apples and then we would go home on the train again. Well, we were about ready to leave Winsum again with all our goodies, but the train didn’t come. Well, it was shot at by the English because sometimes these were transporting soldiers. It came about an hour later. But in that hour meantime, I met George and a friend who were waiting for the train to come. Somebody was getting off and we had to get on. We started talking and started later on exchanging telephone numbers, or addresses, I guess. There was no telephone. This was in ’44 probably? Toward the end of the war, yes, it was. We started writing but then there was no delivery any more. But after the war we met again off and on and I said goodbye in ’47 when he left for Indonesia. We corresponded for three years. When he came back, I didn’t have a boyfriend at the time (laughs). So we were going to get married just before we left in November or December. But then, when we heard that if you were not married at least a half a year before departure, you were placed another two years on the waiting list. I was not on the waiting list. My then boyfriend was and his family as well. So we had two weeks to get married. It was really a rush to get everything ready. My sister was in the hospital when I got married. She had a baby. And my brother was in Luxembourg on vacation and
didn't know anything about it. But we were married! I lived with my folks and he lived with his folks because there was not a house available. Nothing had been built in years. Many homes were bombed and burned down while we were liberated. So then we left...

LW: So rather than you moving in together into one or the other houses, you lived with your folks and he lived with his folks?

GA: And on weekends we'd spend at his parents' house or my parents' house because we lived about twenty kilometers apart. And I had a job and he had a job. Oh, but my job! That was so silly! I worked at a bank at that time, and when I got married the thirty-first of July, I was done as of the first of August! And I asked, "Why?" They said, "The policy is no married ladies working in this bank." Married ladies could not teach. Two years later that was all changed. And I said, "Well, I'm leaving anyway in December. Couldn't you just keep me on for a little while?" "No, no. This was the policy." So, "Goodbye office."

LW: (Laughs) You shouldn't have told them!

GA: (Laughs) Well, they knew, because they came to the wedding reception. So then I was home a little while and I really would like to earn some money before I was leaving. There was an ad in the paper, the Hema, (something maybe like Target or Kmart). They needed sales ladies for Sinter Klaas, the fifth of December. So I put my application in and I was hired and I worked three or four days a week. I told them immediately that I was leaving the first of December again and that was okay. I worked three or four days selling perfume or lipstick, whatever was in that
department. I didn’t mind. But then, I had kind of a snobby manager at the bank when I went back to say goodbyes. I told him that I was leaving in a couple of days and he says, "Vat vos dat I hear, Mrs. Antoon. You worked in the Hema! You actually worked there, I hear? How could you do that?" (He was kind of a snob.) "What will my clients think!" And then I was just as smart and I said, "Well, your clients don't shop in the Hema now, do they?" So I thought, "I'll get you." I dared now, I was leaving anyway. (Laughs) Oh, gosh!

LW: Your wit started early in life, didn't it? (Laughs)

GA: Well, normally you say, "Yes sir, no sir," in those days when you were a young girl, but I was getting kind of mad at him. I thought you should have kept me for those couple of months.

LW: So you got on a boat. And this is what year?


LW: That's a cold time to be traveling across the ocean!

GA: A terrible time! We were so seasick it was unreal. And it took forever. It was seven days I believe.

LW: You left from Rotterdam?

GA: Yes. We went by train from Groningen to Rotterdam and there we took the boat. My husband's sister and her husband, Corry and Harry Hoekstra, went along with their two-year-old little girl. There were five of us traveling together. And it was a long trip.

LW: Tell me about the boat. Tell me what it was like. What did you encounter on the
boat?

GA: Seasick people, most of them! I was doing pretty good yet. In the beginning, I had kind of fun. We went dancing. The nice thing about it, we still needed ration coupons in the Netherlands to buy butter or sugar. Well, I thought you needed them on the boat. But we didn’t. So from England I sent them back to my mom so she could still use them for buying food. But I remember the food—lots of meat and ice cream! We hadn’t had ice cream for a long time so that was a nice dessert every day, as much as we wanted. And then we felt terrible because whatever food was left they threw overboard. After having so little food for many years, we thought that was such a dirty shame, but I guess they had to. The boat trip was kind of boring, it took a long time.

LW: It was a passenger ship, right?

GA: Oh yes it was. Quite nice. We had a nice cabin to ourselves. And then all the emigrants, mostly Dutch, some German, talking about the reason to emigrate and...

LW: What kind of reasons did you hear? Do you remember?

GA: Mostly for their children. But some of these people really left good jobs behind. And sad parents. "You deprive me of my grandchildren." Lots of tears when you left Rotterdam. All these people saying goodbye to their relatives. But they were mostly people who were a little adventurous but also hard working. I am still in touch with some of them. They all did well, worked hard and saved. Some of them have farms and they had three or four sons and they knew they could not expand in the Netherlands. They were leaving for various reasons and in various states. Many of
them went to Michigan, I remember. You had to have a sponsor in those days. You just could not just buy a ticket and leave. Somebody had to be sponsoring you for five years. So you go where your sponsor is. We landed in New York and there was a cousin of my mother waiting for us. He took all five of us home, and the little girl could take a nap and we had food there and some goodies, and they put us on the train that night. Well, this was not done very well arranged by our travel bureau in the Netherlands. It was what they called a "milk train." It stopped at every little town. It took sixteen hours from New York to Chicago. We were so sick of it! And then in Chicago there was this aunt we had never seen. The Hoekstras had, but George was in Indonesia when they were in the Netherlands. And they came to meet us at the train. And then we went on from Chicago to Fond du Lac by train. It was busy. It was just before Christmas and the Korean War was going on, so many soldiers were on leave. The train was not heated but we made it. Four o'clock in the morning we landed in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin. I had never seen so much snow in my life! And cold! That was the year, the coldest one in fifty-two years they told us. It was forty-two below. It was unreal! And we ended up on a farm, a small farm with an outside toilet and no running water. I couldn't believe it. I really thought America was all streamlined and modern, and here comes a city girl going to the country. Six miles out of Waupun, Wisconsin. But the people were so hospitable and made us feel welcome. There was a tree in the corner and there were packages for us under the tree. They all tried very hard to make us feel at home. But all I'd do is sit by this register all day. I was so cold. And as soon as we were done with dishes, I
sat by the register again. I remember that. It took a while to find a job. In Waupun were two shoe factories and a rivet factory, but they were not hiring in the middle of the winter. It took us about maybe two months or so because it was still winter. And our crate didn't come. I had shipped my boots and my slacks, and that came probably three months later. So we missed our clothes. But the cousins were very generous and helped us out. But I felt very awkward when I finally did get a job in the shoe factory. I was the only one in high heels and a skirt working behind a darned shoe machine.

LW: Where was George working?

GA: The same factory.

LW: You both worked in the same place?

Ga: Yeah. For 75 cents an hour. That's how we started. But the strangest thing was we were there maybe two or three months and suddenly on Friday, "Here's your check. Don't come back." And we didn't always understand it all although I had five years of English. I didn't always understand what they meant. But we could not come back. They had an order from the government and since we were foreigners, not American citizens, we could not work on those boots they were making for the Army. So we were told, "Don't call us. We'll call you." So we were laid off again.

LW: How long did you work before you were laid off?

GA: Oh, maybe three months at the most, not even I believe. And we drove with our neighbor who picked us up and we paid him fifty cents a day. He picked us up. He worked in the same factory. And my mother, of course, wrote how are you doing
and what are you doing? So I didn't dare tell her that I was putting soles on shoes for seventy-five cents an hour. I wrote her, "Oh, I've got a nice job in the shoe factory. Everything is fine." But sometimes I hardly had a quarter to buy a stamp to write a letter home. But they were very anxious to find out how things were. My aunt and uncle were very kind to us. They were kind people. She baked bread for us. She gave us a whole a big lunch along and on the way home I asked, "You want my sandwich? I got food left." "No," my husband said, "I have enough." "Well, there's some fruit here." "No." So not to hurt our aunt's feelings, we threw it out of the car window on the way home (Laughs). And the next day there was more lunch because "the kids ate it all. They must be hungry." (Laughs) Until I finally dared tell this dear, dear person, "Don't put so much in our lunch. We have enough." Then later on my husband found a better job at Shalers and more pay...

LW: What kind of place was that?

GA: They were making rivets, I think, for airplanes and it was sheet metal? I'm not sure anymore. By that time I was pregnant and we had our own apartment and I stayed home. But on Saturdays, my husband would get a car or a wagon behind his car and go out to the country. If he saw some machinery rusting away on the farm land he'd knock on the door of the farmer and say, "Can I buy that from you?" "No. No. You can have it. Just take it off my land." And he would take it apart and sort it and sell that. So that was his little extra income Saturdays. He worked for a Jew and that's how he learned the difference between nickel and copper and steel, whatever, and how much you'd get for a pound. He always had little extra jobs to do. So we were in
Waupun, Wisconsin, and we lived there for maybe three, almost four years. We knew we wouldn't make any headway in that small town with about five or six thousand people. There was not really much going on. We did have a dear family. The cousins were awfully good to us, seven of them, an aunt and uncle too. But we had friends visiting us from Chicago and they also came from the same home town as George in Winsum. He owned a bakery. He told us, "You'll make better wages and you won't get laid off. Come to Chicago." So we did. We moved to Chicago. Bought a house there. Must be the oldest house in Chicago. Didn't have a basement. But we bought it for $500 down and made payments on it, fixed it up and sold it again a couple of years later and made two thousand dollars on it. Fixed up another house and that's how we slowly on got ahead. He did work in the steel factory and we did great, marvelous, until the steel strike. Three months, no income! But we saw it coming. We had paid up three months of our house payment, our car payment. We had just bought a '57 Chevy, brand new. We were so proud of that! We paid Christian school. Paid it all up because he worked overtime for months. Six days a week, and if he wanted to, seven. Then we had a three months strike--no income. And after that, we were not that happy in Chicago any more.

LW: Because of the strike? Or...

GA: Because of the strike and the church, the people were moving out to the suburbs...

LW: Did you move into Roseland?

GA: Yes, Roseland. South side. And we could still sell our house at a reasonable price. I went to the real estate and I said, "We're thinking of moving to Michigan. Could you
place our house on the market?" Oh no, he didn't even want to sell our house.
"Lady, I have much nicer homes than yours. I can't sell in this neighborhood any
more." So I placed an ad in the paper myself. In the meantime, George had an
interview with the Hamilton School system for a custodian ad in the paper—we found
out through a sister. We went to live with his sister for a week in Michigan and I
placed an ad in the paper. And it was just like a Miss America contest. He called the
next day and he says, "There are 89 applications but I'm one of ten." And I said, "I
put an ad in the paper and one call came and the people are coming tonight." So the
next day he calls and says he was one of five. And I said, "Well, the lady is very
interested in the house but she wanted her brother to come and look at the furnace."
"Oh", he says, "Don't worry about the furnace. We got a new one three years ago
that's in perfect shape." So the next day he says, "I'm one of three." And I said, "I
got five hundred dollars down for the house. Now they want to make up their mind
and see if they can get a loan." The following day he called, "Guess what! I got the
job!" I said, "Guess what! I sold the house!" (Laughs) Within a week. We moved
and we bought a lot in Hamilton. In the meantime we moved into a little farmhouse
and that's how we ended up in Michigan.

LW: What year was that?

GA: That was in October, 1960. But before that, we had been visiting with friends here.
We usually rented a cottage in this area. Once near Tunnel Park and up north. We
liked this area. I was always teased because it's Holland you know, and "You guys
want to go to Holland, instead of Holland, Europe." But it always appealed to me,
this area. So we were quite happy. We made the move and we're not sorry. George made less wages, but we managed.

LW: Do you remember what he was being paid when he first came to Hamilton?

GA: One sixty an hour.


GA: Yes.

LW: How times have changed! Before we jump to Hamilton and to Holland, I want to ask you one question. How did your mom and dad take the fact that you were emigrating?

GA: You know, they never said much about it at all. Until later on I heard when we left my house, the taxi came to pick us up to bring us to the railroad station. We said, goodbye, it was five in the morning. I did not look back. But I understand that my mother ran after the taxi all the way to the corner, and that same morning they had to call the doctor for her. She was near a nervous breakdown. But I was so involved in my own wedding and getting ready to emigrate and what to pack that I really did not think about their feelings. After all, they were excited for me! I'm getting married and moving overseas! I did not write my aunt and uncle, "Is there a place for us? How is the climate?" I remember saying we each had a new bike. Should we take our bikes along? She said, "No, that was not necessary because the area was quite hilly." And I had a brand new bicycle which we sold for half price and bought two woolen blankets because we heard that Wisconsin was cold. Later on my parents came to visit when my dad retired, then my mom said, "You're at home here. Don't ever come back." They were pleased when they were here and saw how we lived and
they were content. But we did miss each other a lot. Of course, I could get along very well, especially with my mother. So I did miss her. You have your first baby, and I didn't know much about babies and there's no mother to call on, no mother to carry the baby at church when it is baptized as is done in the Netherlands. You come home from the hospital and mom isn't there. It was not an easy time.

LW: Your first child was born when?

GA: '52. Another one in '53 and '55, and then we had a stillborn baby in '58. Melissa was born in '62, the same year you were. Yes. January, '62.

LW: When did your parents first visit?

GA: The summer of '61.

LW: So they went a long time before seeing their grandchildren.

GA: Yes, that's true. And then again we went to Europe for their fiftieth wedding anniversary, the girls, George and I. Our son didn't go along at that time. He went to a young peoples' convention in Colorado. Melissa at that time was seven. They had never seen her. And I remember my dad pulling her on his lap and says, "Oh my honey, my dear, my sweet granddaughter." She looked at this man who was crying, "What the heck. Who is he? What does he want?" He kind of scared her. (Laughs) He was so emotional!

LW: Of course. She was only seven.

GA: Didn't know her aunts and uncles and her cousins and her grandparents. That's the sad part of it. You leave so much family behind. Your children, at least from my side, grew up without cousins and aunts and uncles.
LW: I know about that.

GA: Yes, I'm sure you do. But you don't think ahead of all these things. Looking back, I think I would have done the same thing over again. I don't know if we would have gone to Wisconsin. Although they were dear people, but the climate! If I were to do it over again I think I would go to California! (Laughs). Where it's warmer!

LW: So we're in Hamilton. We got you in 1960 moving into Hamilton just south of Holland.

GA: Yes.

LW: And your husband took a job at the Hamilton Public Schools.

GT: And loved it! Loved it! He was a much happier man. You know in Chicago right after the strike, he was the last one hired. He was seven years there and no one in that department had been hired since. But it used to be they'd rotate at these machines, ten or twelve of them. Some machinery you could just sit, it was piecework and it made a lot of money. And some of these machines would break down. Well, after the strike, whoever was there the longest could have his choice of machine. So guess who had the worst machine all the time? It was George. He'd come home and he worked two weeks day, two weeks evening and two weeks midnight and he says, "I've had it! I'm so sick of it!" I said, "You're so cranky. You're never that way. So do something. You either leave or I leave. (I was just threatening him. I didn't mean it, but...) He was such an easy man to live with and such an unhappy person there. So once in the middle of the night somebody crawls in bed next to me and I said, "What are you doing here?" It was two o'clock in the
morning. He said, "I'm sick." I asked, "You are?" "Not really", he says, but the nurse thinks so. She gave me two aspirins." And I said, "What did you do?" "I told her I just had it. That machine broke down for the tenth time that night and I thought 'no more of this.'" And we laughed and laughed. I said, "I don't know really what we're laughing about. We have three small children, a house to pay for and the Christian school." But would you believe it? This was all arranged upstairs, I guess, because that same day he came home at two in the morning, at nine in the morning the telephone rang and it was his sister from Holland, Michigan. "There was an ad in the paper last night, the Sentinel, and they're looking for a head custodian for the Hamilton School system.

LW: That's how it happened...

GA: It had to be. Answer to prayer! So that's how we moved to Michigan.

LW: Tell me about your church life. You mentioned Christian Schools several times, so I assume from that Christian Reformed Church membership.

GA: Yes.

LW: Did you join the Christian Reformed Church in Wisconsin because of family reasons or because of your background in the Netherlands? Tell me a little bit about that.

GA: Well, you know what? We didn't join the Christian Reformed Church. The family was all Reformed. We lived right across the street from the Reformed Church and there was an old minister there who knew Dutch as well and we felt really at home there. There was a Christian Reformed Church in Waupun and there was a Rev. Byker, I think--I'm not sure. But that was always a little strife in the church between
the Frisian and the Gelderland people. And we went there several times. But we decided to join the Immanuel Reformed Church instead. After that, Rev. Chester Postma came, who was later on here in Holland, and we were quite happy there. We were there three or four years. The members arranged a very warm welcome for us, they gave us a shower. I never heard of a grocery shower or whatever. But we were welcomed and they brought us dishes and food and sheets. They knew we were a young married couple who didn't have much, and we were quite happy there. I joined the choir and the ladies' society. Our two children were baptized in that church. I did write to George's mother in the Netherlands, who came a half a year later, that if we would ever move we would join the Christian Reformed Church. But in the meantime we were staying where we were. To us it didn't make much difference. And we did. When we moved to Chicago, we joined the First Christian Reformed Church, oh maybe six months. A large church, nobody noticed us. Nobody talked to us. One evening our car didn't start. It was quite cold. George walked to the Fourth Christian Reformed Church which was near our home anyway. But we joined the First because our friends, the Doesburgs, were members of that church. So one day we went to the Fourth Church. He went in the morning and then he says, "You don't know how pleasant the people are. They asked who I was and they welcomed me. You go at night." Well, they didn't know we were husband and wife, so I went at night and he stayed home with the children. I had the same experience. That's where we belong. So we joined. And we were not sorry. We were involved there as well, until we moved to Hamilton and then we joined the
Christian Reformed Church. Then later on when we moved to Holland, we joined the Park Christian Reformed Church in 1978.

LW: Let's go back to Hamilton. Tell me about Hamilton and your years there. I know you lived in that house until you moved here, right?

GA: No, in Holland we moved first to Twenty-fifth Street. We built three homes in Hamilton.

LW: You built three homes in Hamilton! Tell me about the first one.

GA: A ranch style. And that home cost just as much as the sixty-five year old home in Chicago that we sold. Prices were the same, groceries and clothes, but homes cost a lot more in Chicago. So we bought this ranch style and we were really quite proud of it. It was near the school. My mom and dad came there at that time, and we lived there maybe four years or so. Then Melissa was born and we thought we'd like another bathroom. We had four children at the time and needed a little larger place. So we built a split level. We moved in there in August, I forgot the year. Melissa was maybe about almost two years old? One and a half? So it was quite a pretty house. Big too. Four bedrooms and two bathrooms and quite out in the open. We loved it there. Very nice. But it was in August and the end of October I became ill. We were in Grand Rapids with my neighbor lady—we each had four children. On the way home we stopped for an ice cream cone and the man said, "Did you already have your sugar cube?" Sugar cube. Yeah, that's against polio. And you young mothers should get one too for protection. It's right down the street in the high school in Grandville. So the eight children and the two mothers went out there and we all took
the sugar cube against polio. And then we were home and we had to come back in six weeks for the second one and two weeks after that for the third one. Well, the six weeks in between I was home with Melissa. She was little, in diapers yet. And I had (Side A ends)

LW: (Side B) ...not imagining the sugar cube.

GA: I didn't think about the sugar cube. I had migraine headaches before but these were unbearable! Sometimes George had to come home and pick up Melissa and bring her to a girlfriend so I could crawl in bed. And then six weeks later we went back to Grandville, and I said to George, "Why don't you go along too and have a sugar cube against polio?" So we went with our children, the six of us, and on the way home we stopped at Meijer Thrifty Acres on the north side to exchange a shirt. I tried to get out of the car and my legs wouldn't move. It took a while to start walking. And then my tongue was numb...I talked strange and I did not have any feelings in my hands, but once I kept moving it was okay. And I said to George, "Stay right behind me, because I think I walk real funny, don't I?" And he says, "No, I don't think so." And I said, "Well, I don't feel anything." But once I started going it was okay, and on the way home I couldn't imagine it. Then I thought could it be the sugar cube that I feel so strange? Everybody was feeling fine, so I thought, "Well, maybe it's my imagination." So we came home, put the groceries away, fed the children, put them in the bathtub, everybody was in bed and we were watching TV. It was maybe about eight thirty and I said, "Would you like a cup of tea?" I got up, fell flat on my face and I couldn't walk any more. So I thought maybe this sugar cube has to work itself
out or whatever.

LW: You didn't call the doctor at that point?

GA: I didn't call the doctor. I felt so strange. On Sunday I remember we had unexpected company coming and I wanted to show them our new house. I went on my seater down the stairs. I could not walk. My friend said, "Grace, this is not right." I said, "No, I know" but I called the doctor, De Witt at the time. He didn't have a substitute whenever he was gone. There was no answer. I should've gone straight to the hospital but I thought, "Well, once it works out it will be okay." The next morning I kept Ann, my oldest daughter, home to take care of the baby, and I sat right by the telephone. I called the doctor and I told him, "I can't walk." And he says, "What do you mean 'I can't walk'?" I said, "I have no feeling in my legs." "Well, what happened?" So I told him. He says, "You better call an ambulance immediately and come to the hospital." "Oh," I said, "I don't want an ambulance here!" "Grace, you better listen!" So I called my husband and he dragged me down the stairs. My legs just banged on the stairs and that's how he got me in the car to the hospital. The doctor immediately knew what it was. They called it Guillian Barre Syndrome, also French polio.

LW: That's a result of the...?

GT: They never admitted that but it happened to other people. Maybe one in eleven million I think are the statistics. If they pump your stomach out immediately as soon as your feelings are gone, it will help. So I ended up in St. Mary's in the ambulance in my nightie wrapped in blankets and they put me in a separate room, because they
thought at first that it was contagious perhaps, polio. But it turned out to be Guillian Barre Syndrome. I was paralyzed up to my waist by then. I went to intensive care but I don’t remember anything but the paralysis went to my throat and I wasn’t breathing anymore. In fact, according to the nurse who found me, I was dead. She pounded on my chest, they called my husband and they operated (a tracheotomy). It was a terrible time in my life! I was such a sick person. And I remember the doctor saying to my husband, "You better not go home tonight because she's not going to make the night."

LW: This was...Melissa was only a year and a half old? About 1964?

GA: A year and a half. And the oldest one was ten. So, but then I remember fighting this. What is George going to do with four children and they need a mother and I want to raise them. I was struggling and fighting and then I prayed about it. "My Lord, if you have to take me it's okay but please look after George and the children." And that gave me peace. The next morning I woke up and opened my eyes and thought, "I'm still on this earth!" I was almost a little disappointed. I hadn't gone but I was ready. George stood next to my bed and I heard the doctor say, "Okay. So she made the night. But you have to be prepared for her to be in a wheelchair the rest of her life." And he said, "Doctor, if I have to carry her for the rest of my life on my back as long as she's going to make it!" Well, to make a long story short, I went through many illnesses. Double pneumonia, blood clots in my leg. It took a long time, but after a year, Grace is walking again! Had to learn to walk all over again.

LW: So gradually sensation returned?
GA: Yes, very slowly. But in the meantime we had reached the peak of our insurance so we were deep in debt. I think it took about fifteen to twenty years to pay off six doctors and the ambulance and three hospitals. Mary Free Bed is actually is not a free bed. Mary Free was her name. In January (this happened in October) there was a note at our door, "Sorry we didn't find you home. We're from the polio organization." (They come around and collect money every January), "and please would you give a donation." My husband who was not as good in the English language but he wrote a letter and he told them, "In Chicago, my wife always was the block captain to raise money for the Polio Foundation. Now she herself is down and nobody will help us." He had tried to get help with the children or whatever. The answer was, "Sell your home." We had just built this split level. Well, that was of course a ridiculous situation. Where were we going to go with four children? So he wrote a letter and then we got a call from the Polio Foundation and a gentleman said, "I'd like to meet you at a restaurant for coffee and let's discuss this." Well, then they came to the solution there was still five hundred dollars at the Mary Free Bed from the former patient who had not used it. In those days the rooms were twenty dollars a day. And by the time I had my five hundred dollars used up, I could go home for a weekend. First a day, then a weekend. And then slowly on, I was home to stay. I learned how to walk up and down the stairs with crutches. First in a wheelchair, later on on crutches. And I have completely recovered! Which is a miracle. Every time I go to the hospital, to the doctor for a check up, he would have a big smile on his face and says, "There comes a walking miracle!" And it was!
LW: Do most people never recover from this?

GA: Not all of them. I remember our former mayor Bosman had it too. When it was cold weather or rainy weather he had a tingling feeling, a prick in his legs and his arms. I never had anything. But I had it bad because I couldn't even close my eyes, they were always open. The nurses made them wet at night and placed a wash cloth on them. My eyes were paralyzed and that's where it stopped, near my eyes.

LW: So you could only look in one direction?

GA: Yeah, well, they closed my eyes most of the time for the dust. So there I laid in my little corner and I was six or eight weeks in intensive care and then in St. Mary's.

LW: And you couldn't speak either, right?

GA: No. My husband found a solution. He would come with a card with the alphabet on it. He would point to a letter in order to spell out words. The only noise I could make was tst, tst, tst, so he pointed to a letter and when he came to the correct one, I went tst. Then he'd start all over again with another letter. So he knew I was talking about "baby", that was Melissa. And I remember when President Kennedy was shot. We would go through the whole alphabet for one word. I heard nurses talk about that incident and he says, "What do you want to know?" So I spelled again, "Alive?" And he says, "Well, I don't know." But he knew that the president had died but he didn't want to tell me until the following day. But that's how we communicated. With this A,B,C thing.

LW: How long did you have to do that?

GA: Oh, I think for at least six weeks.
LW: Really? Then slowly you could make more noises?

GA: No, the feeling came back in my tongue. There were all men and women in the same intensive care. I often had curtains around me to that I could get more rest. And all of a sudden I felt something move, my thumb. I wasn't sure because I couldn't lift my eyes, my head. I couldn't see. And I went "tst, tst, tst, tst, tst, tst, tst, tst," so then the nurses would come flying. They knew that something was wrong. And again, "tst, tst, tst, tst, tst." And they said, "Yes! Yes! Your thumb is moving!" The next day maybe the fingers, and the next day maybe one toe or so, and very slowly on it all started coming back. It was amazing. And much later, years later, I was living in the other house. George already had died. Probably in the early eighties there was a lady in the hospital. I got a call from Dr. Derks and he says, "Could I ask you a favor? There's a lady in the hospital with Guillian Barre Syndrome. She's thirty-four like you were. She has four children. She is getting so depressed and she thinks she'll never walk again. And I told her about you and she doesn't believe it." So at night I went up there and I talked to her and I said, "I know exactly how you feel. But don't worry about the children." She had her parents and family. But she also got better and later on called me and told me that she was walking again. But it takes a while. It's really amazing what they can do now. You go in swimming pools—I could walk in a swimming pool before I could walk on land. But the cards you receive! When I was in Mary Free Bed a little girl would come around. She didn't have an arm and she only had two fingers sticking on the other side. "Mrs. Antoon, it must be your birthday today. You have so many cards
again!" The people from the church were really fantastic. Not just the church—all of Hamilton! They'd come and do the ironing and the washing and bring meals and it was Christmas time! The kids couldn't wait to get off the bus because there were always presents waiting for them by the back door. They caught on fast! (Laughs). I was very grateful when George would come. And word got around that our insurance had run out and the teachers helped out from the school, it was really amazing. Very, very kind. A lot of kind people. It taught me a lesson. After that I was much more aware of illness in families or young mothers that needed help with children or babies or whatever. To go through this is a learning experience.

LW: What an impact! Shortly after you were in Hamilton and then this sort of thing happens. So that's 1964, and you came home and slowly got all your feeling back. So by the next summer were you back?

GA: Well, in September I started working. I had a job before that for a whole year and then I got sick and then I really didn't want to work full time. And a part time job was not available. But Mr. Wichers says, "Well, (and by that time Netherlands Information Service) we'll hire you part-time for three days a week, but if we find someone full-time, you're done." I said, "That's fine." Well, this lasted twenty-nine years! (Laughs).

LW: This was in the fall of '64?

GA: I think so. Or '63 maybe. I'm not even sure. I started in '62...No, it was '64! Yes. Then I started part-time. The first year was full-time.

LW: You were barely just recovered.
GA: Yes, about a year later. Then when the children were all in school, I still worked three days. When George was disabled, I worked four days, and when he died I worked full-time.

LW: Tell me what you first did for the Netherlands Information Service or the Netherlands Museum, whichever one you worked for at that time. (Laughs)

GA: Many hats! Of course you know Mr. Wichers was involved in everything. There was a vault in the City Hall with archive material...original letters from Rev. Van Raalte to his sons. It was unbelievable! A pile of papers about a yard high. Mrs. Knooihuizen was working in the museum, but the museum closed in the winter time. She and I worked in that vault and sorted it out. Everything that was Dutch was my side and American her side. We sorted it all out by education and by history, etc. It was most interesting for me because in those three months I learned more about Holland, Michigan, and the Netherlands than I did all my school years. It took a while because I had to do a lot of reading, maybe more than I should have, but we kind of sorted it out. Later on it was refined by Dr. Elton Bruins and Dr. Gerrit ten Zythof, but at least it made some sense. And then we found a permanent place in City Hall for it. Later on it was all moved again to the Joint Archives at Hope College, but in the meantime we had a place in the finance office.

LW: It was the mayor's office. At least it was by that time.

GA: Yeah. First it was in the City Hall...It was Don Schipper's office. Later on it became the mayor's office. But we had a lot of cooperation from the City and we were allowed to use that spot whenever needed to have information on our forefathers
or local history. Pictures, photographs. So I really wasn't working for the Netherlands Museum. It was a Dutch government job, but I did help there as well.

LW: Were you doing a lot of correspondence? You worked with the archives. What else did you do?

GA: I translated. Every letter that came from the Netherlands for Mr. Wichers I had to translate. Also, when children or teachers wrote for information on the lowlands. When a new film arrived from the Embassy, I would go to local schools in Holland, Hamilton, Zeeland, and show the movie and then have the children ask questions afterwards if they were studying the lowlands. I liked that part very much. I guess I should have been a teacher after all. My father was right (laughs). But I remember, especially in Hamilton, there were so many questions afterwards from the children. Usually fourth and fifth graders. The teacher would say, "We have to stop. The buses are here. We can't go on." I usually went to the Dutch store before showing the film, bought some candy and handed that out. I asked the name of some of the children and I'd give them a Dutch name. I tried to make it interesting for the children. And I had a good time myself as well. We mailed out information material to twenty states, this included the midwest all the way south to Texas and east to Ohio. Also the Dakotas, Minnesota, Nebraska and Kansas were all in our territory. So were Indiana and Illinois.

LW: Now, did Bill do a lot of traveling too because of that?

GA: Yes, he did. And of course he was also involved in the Historical Society, and on the Board of Hope College. We always teased him about his many hats. He was gone
quite a bit. We were very busy and received lots of mail. We even circulated tapes from Dutch radio stations, polygram films and news reels to universities. Also, a kit, a box with a Dutch flag, wooden shoes and information material, on the royal family as well. We had visitors. So it was a variety. You never would know what the next day would bring. You come to work and you think you have it all lined up and one telephone call changes your whole program. Never a dull day!

LW: Why don't you tell me a little bit of what you encountered. Now we're not talking so much about your life, but tell me what Holland was like when you first arrived in the mid-sixties. What can you remember of Holland, Michigan during that time?

GA: I don't have the same impression. We talked about that the other day at some friends. They came straight from the Netherlands back in the early fifties. And how silly it was that to take a swing of the ropes and bicycles were locked up. "Stifling" they thought when they first came from the Netherlands. I couldn't really say that so much. I ended up in Hamilton. But my impressions were quite nice. I liked Holland. I liked the people, and the people I worked with were very pleasant. I cannot remember that I had a bad experience at all. Very pleasant. Working conditions. I don't think I can say anything bad about Holland to be very honest.

LW: Well, you don't need to say anything bad about Holland.

GA: Well, if I could I would say something, but my memories are very pleasant back in the sixties.

LW: Now when you first started in '64, that was about the time that the windmill came over. Were you working for Bill when the windmill came or was that...?
GA: Oh, yes!

LW: That was really at the height when you came, wasn't it?

GA: That's true. And I remember him leaving. In fact, a letter came when the Netherlands ministry got wind of it and wrote Mr. Wichers not to bother to come. It was wasting his money and their time. No mill was leaving the Netherlands. The last one had just left for the Antilles. So the headlines were, "A Mill for Bill" even in the Netherlands. The rest was in the Dutch language. (laughs) And they told Bill not to come but Bill went anyway and came back with a mill. (laughs)

LW: Now how did he pull it off? Do you remember?

GA: No, he did tell me once upon a time but I forgot the details. But he looked at several and he finally ended up with De Zwaan and of course it's in the movie on Windmill Island how it all worked. But it's amazing that he came back with the mill. That he was able to purchase one. So he must have persuaded them that Holland, Michigan, really needed a windmill. But then came all the work because many newspapers wrote articles about this Bill Wichers from Holland, Michigan, and I had to translate what was said. Then came the dimensions which were first in centimeters and millimeters and all that. So Jaap de Blecourt, the manager from Windmill Island and I set side by side and did a lot of translations.

LW: He had already been hired to run the Island by that time?

GA: He was already manager of the Island, yes.

LW: Even though it hadn't come yet.

GA: It hadn't come yet. And I remember that it came in by boat at Muskegon. The
Oranje Line I think brought it in. We had a little parade and a band to welcome our mill. A lot of worries but it worked out all right. It was quite an undertaking.

LW: What were the high points of working for the NIS/Museum as you remember them?

GA: Slash Holland Historical Trust? Slash Dutch Consulate for Cultural Affairs, huh?

LW: All of the various titles. And permutations.

GA: Well I think many visits of people. But the Dutch Royal visits from Queen Beatrix and her husband. We were quite involved in that, of course. And earlier when Princess Margriet was here in '72, I showed her around in the museum on the third floor. Also, Dutch orchestras came, and choirs, and we found housing for them. TV groups. TV and radio, Dutch radio especially. It was quite interesting. I can't remember really any highlights. Everything was most interesting I'll say. Sometimes a choir would come and I would put an ad in the paper or just an article. We had a lot of cooperation in that time from the Sentinel. The people would call in and we would try to match them up and find homes for the singers and people from the orchestra. That's very nice to hear the remarks about...people got to know each other. And what all the difference...the Holland. And the Holland people that come here are always most interested in looking through the telephone book and finding all these Dutch names—Vogelzang and Steketee and...And then of course every year we have exchange professors in Ann Arbor, and Mr. Wichers would also arrange housing for them. Where the children would go to school and then they would come and also teach a class at Hope College and Calvin. Got to know a lot of people. And they always received a warm reception. Our office was very hospitable. We had these
elderly people come in for a proof of life. They were issued a pension from the Netherlands. I always had these Wilhelmina peppermints on my desk, so they’d sit down and I would feed them peppermints while I did their typing for them. Chat with these elderly people and got to know a lot of them. Very enjoyable! Yes.

LW: Of course they had to climb three flights of stairs to get to you.

GA: Yes, I remember one elderly man from Saugatuck, his son would always bring him. He didn’t drive any more. But he had a stroke and he could not come up the steps. And the boy was built like a real football player and he was a little loud and "Well, pa is in the car. If you look out the window he’ll wave to you. So you know he’s still alive! And he’d surely like a Wilhelmina peppermint from you." (Laughs) That’s how he came in the office. And I’d go look out the window. So all kinds of characters.

LW: So you worked for Bill from 1962, and he officially retired. Tell me about those last seven years or so. He officially left in ’85, finally, but was sort of semi-retired in ’81...Actually, before we do that, tell me about the closing of the NIS office in 1972.

GA: The Netherlands Information Service closed. I really don’t know the reason. Later on I heard they were very sorry they did. They did not realize sitting behind their desk in the Hague, all of the activities going on in this town. But NIS closed and it all went to Chicago. I was invited to move along if I wanted to. But I had been living in Chicago for eight years. I had friends here. My husband had died meantime and I really didn’t care to go to the big city again. Then Mr. Wichers said, "Well, there’s a probability because in the Dutch foreign service I think you have to retire
when you're sixty-five. Of course he had to leave as well. Then they agreed to make it a Dutch office for press and culture affairs and keep one person who was fluent in two languages, the English and the Dutch. Of course, I was the lucky one to stay and the we could stay in the same office in City Hall. Again Mr. Wichers was persuasive and the embassy agreed that our office should stay open. We had an ambassador in Washington. His name was Tammenous Bakker, and they came here at Tulip Time. Mr. and Mrs. Wichers were a very gracious host and hostess and they entertained them. They came out of the City Hall and they saw the girls dance in Centennial Park. Every year in May they have festivities around the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C., and there is one embassy in charge. The German or the Chinese or the Japanese or the Polish, whatever. Well, that year it was the turn of the Dutch embassy. They fly in flowers, sell them, and make poffertjes and little pancakes and sell Dutch items. Then Mrs. Tammenous Bakker said, "Now if you really want to have a good Dutch day, there are Dutch groups in Holland, Michigan, the exhibition dancers. Now that would make it real charming." So it happened. The Zeeland School, Hamilton, Holland Christian and Holland Public take turns. Well, it was Holland Christian's turn. Twelve girls and their teacher and I, as a representative from our office, went to Washington, D.C. They flew us out there. We stayed with the local people, the ladies were supporters from the National Cathedral, of course, it is a fund raiser. It is for renovation and upkeep of the Cathedral. We stayed with the local people and they wined and dined us and the girls danced near the church and in a hospital for the children. It was a beautiful day. It
was opened with prayer by the minister of the Cathedral and it was the first day in many, many years that the sun was shining. It's a three-day festival. The girls made the front page of the Washington Post, and we had a wonderful time there. It was most interesting! And five years later, lo and behold we were invited again and then it was Holland Public High School's turn and we went again. So that was one of the highlights as well. It was really fun to be asked to go there and meet these people.

LW: I heard a story that when the NIS office was closed, they didn't see everything. Is that true? They didn't see all the material that the office had?

GA: No, we had a lot of information material. Banners and flags and posters and travel material—but whenever we expected the consul general to come or somebody from the embassy, things were hustled in the back and brought to the museum and hid in the basement (laughs), because Mr. Wichers wasn't very generous with what he had. I mean, "Well, now don't give it out." But it was information material to give out, but he couldn't part with it very well. So we always had a lot of extra material laying around. A week later we had to go back and pick it all up again. So we did have a lot of extra material. And we had these characters come, one was from Rotterdam from the Euromast and I showed him around, Mr. Wichers was busy at the time. I showed him the museum and then he saw these Dutch dolls and he says, "Oh, you should have more Dutch dolls in native costumes! I'll see to it. I'll send you some." Sure enough! About a month later a dozen more dolls came. His name was Van Raalte. He was a shirttail relation of Rev. Van Raalte. He was very intrigued by the museum and the history of the city.
LW: What happened in 1981? Is that when it became the present Cultural Affairs office?

That was beginning in '72. When the NIS closed?

GA: Was it in '72, I'm not sure.

LW: When the NIS closed. Did Bill Wichers retire then in '81? I'm trying to get a fix on those dates.

GA: No, he became the Netherlands honorary consul of the Press & Cultural Affairs. Yes. He stayed on until he was 70, I believe. And then it was a must that he had to disappear from the picture. So that was the end, and then I stayed on and worked for the Holland Historical Trust.

LW: That was in 1985.

GA: '85. Yes, that's correct.

LW: Because Reid Van Sluys also came at that time.

GA: Oh, yes.

LW: Tell me a little bit about that period. Reid coming and Bill retiring.

GA: It was quite a change for me. Because Reid Van Sluys was not familiar with the area, with the people. He was a good person, but as a director I really don't think he qualified for that. He was a little overwhelmed by it all, I had a feeling. I had a feeling he was working for me instead of I was working for him, because I had to lead him along from day to day what had to be done next. Of course, he had to learn a lot about what was available in our museum and what was in the archives. There were a lot of things that he wanted to change. So instead of hiring someone, he did it. He started working in the museum and pounding away. So he spent more time in
the museum than he did actually at the office. Knowing that I had been there so many
years, things would go on as they did before. We did get along quite well. He was a
good person. But a director? No, he would have been better as a curator, I think, or
even building exhibits. He was good at that. So it's kind of too bad how that turned
out. He finally left realizing he really couldn't handle the job. And of course we had
to go ahead. We needed to have a better museum, a larger museum. We didn't have
room to expand. And he didn't have the drive to do this, not the capabilities. So I
think after four years, he decided and the board decided it was time to split. So that
was the period of Reid Van Sluys.

LW: And then Ann Kiewel came.

GA: And then Ann Kiewel came. Yes. She was really quite a go getter. I kind of clued
her in who was who and people came in to get acquainted. She took the town by
storm I would say!

LW: She first came on as the advancement person for the capital campaign?

GA: Yes, that's how it all started. That's right. We had this gentleman in the back room
working on the capital campaign. Yes, that was an exciting time with that money
raising and she was good at that. And we had someone else working with us too,
another gal...I forgot...in the office. But that was quite amazing how generous the
people of Holland were and how it all started. How long did I work in there? When
did the campaign start? In eighty...

LW: I don't know. I don't remember the exact days.

GA: I should know but I forgot. So then I worked til, let's see, '91 or...'91 I retired in
July. Things were getting complicated with computers and moving too fast. It was still fun, but I could see the time coming when it was for me time to step down. Especially I remember I had surgery on my shoulder and I was sitting home and doing some bookkeeping, and there was another younger woman who took my place as a volunteer, but later on they hired her. Ann Kiewel was kind of sorry to see me go, but I said, "I'm not really interested in the computer." It should be a challenge for me, but I didn't feel like meeting the challenge. I was sixty-two years old and I had worked in the same office for twenty-nine years. I really wanted to do a little traveling and spend time with my children and grandchildren, and I saw that the time was ripe for me to leave.

LW: So you retired.

GA: So I retired on July 1, 1991.

LW: If you were to look at Holland in 1964 when you started working at the NIS office/all the other names, and when you retired in '91--how has Holland changed? Not thinking just of the Trust, but think of the community. How has it changed?

GA: Of course, we have expanded. I think the churches are more involved with the social planning of things. We get together and we get along better I think. We do more with the Salvation Army and the Holland City Mission. We have a lot of generous people in this town. I've seen it grown and the renovation of Eighth Street. We look much more prosperous, and we are. We care more about each other I think. We're not so stifled, so stiff Dutch any more. Was it the influence of other nationalities...I don't know what it is. But we have become a friendlier city, if that's possible.
LW: What about those other nationalities. How do you think that's had an impact on Holland?

GA: That too, of course. Yes. Of course when you have more people living and more outsiders coming in (telephone interruption).

LW: We were talking about other nationalities and ethnic groups in Holland...

GA: Oh, yes. And I think I said it happens in every city. When they grow, outsiders come in from other cities, other nationalities. The crime rate goes up too. I found that out in Bakersfield in California, we were just there, and the motel owner told us, "Nothing ever happened here until we had people from Los Angeles move in. Gangs. Unemployment. And we have problems." So now I would think we are a city that has had very little unemployment. Anyone who can work is able to find a job here. So we don't have to steal or whatever. There's food available for everybody. There's clothes available. Jobs. And that's a good feeling. So, I myself have never encountered anything. For example, no one ever broke in my house, or robbed me on the street, nor my car taken. I feel quite safe in this city. I really do. I wouldn't care to live anywhere else than Holland!

LW: That's quite a commentary!

GA: I've always felt that way for a long, long time. This is now...(it seems strange after being so homesick for so many years back in the fifties)...now this to me is home. Holland, Michigan. I wouldn't want to live anywhere else.

LW: And you feel that way when you go back to the Netherlands as well?

GA: Yes! It's nice to go back and see the family and then after oh, a couple of months,
it's getting to me. It's too crowded. And I miss my car. I don't dare drive there. It's too busy on the road. And then I'm sort of anxious to go back. Now since my retirement, I've really done quite a bit of traveling. Went to Florida three winters and South Africa and Zimbabwe and then last month the west coast around Oregon and the states of Washington and California. Man, we've got it good here! If you see some of those cities--the shacks and the old places and the run down downtowns, their main streets. We look very nice and prosperous here. There's always room for improvement. Of course there is. But I'm very happy here.

LW: Well, that's good! That's how it should be.

GA: I think that's a good end to the story! (Laughs)

LW: Well, thank you for your time today.

GA: Glad to do it. (Tape ends)