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Cooper, Dale Oral History Interview: Polio Survivors in Holland

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MN: If I could ask you the story of how your mother contracted polio?

DC: You have to understand that I was only 3 and a half years old when she did contract polio. So I don’t know exactly how she contracted it. From what I understand, the medical doctors think that my brother may have had it—some strand of polio. He was born in late June of 1945, and they think that maybe my mother contracted it from him and she came down with it in November of 1945. But that is about all I know, Matt, about how she may have contracted it. It was kind of a mystery, she came down with a headache, so they said, it was on a Wednesday and it just got worse and worse and worse over the next several days. They had called the doctor, and he just decided it was a headache. Then by that Sunday the 4th of November she was becoming paralyzed. Then at my dad’s encouragement, it was kind of an unusual thing, my dad a little 8th grade educated guy asked the doctor if they could call in a specialist. The specialist from Grand Rapids came, took one look at her, and said, “Marjorie, you have polio.” Then she went to Blodgett Hospital. But I really don’t know how she got it; they think that is probably how she contracted it.

MN: So what was your family structure like, brothers, sisters?

DC: I have a brother Jerry, he is younger by three years than I; he was born in June of ’45. So we have two boys in the family and then my dad and my mom.

MN: Could you talk about what your family was like growing up, perhaps what influence your mother’s life in the iron lung had?
DC: Let me just record a few of the facts. My dad was an onion farmer in Grant, Michigan. He had his roots in Hudsonville. Then bought ten acres of muck land in Grant. He married my mother in 1945, he bought that land in 1938, and then cleared it with his John Deere tractor and he cleared it of brush, it was basically swamp land. He put his first crop of onions in, as I understand it, in 1941, till 1945, then my mom got sick in '45. Well, when my mom did get sick and then was put into Blodgett Hospital, my brother Jerry and I went to live with my Grandpa and Grandma on 19th Street in Holland, Michigan—47 East 19th Street. My mother was told she might have to be there for six weeks, it ended up being about two years in Blodgett. So during those two years, Jerry and I lived with Grandpa and Grandma Mast, and they would daily go from Holland to Grand Rapids, of course there were no expressways back then. They would go from Holland to Grand Rapids, down Chicago Drive, to Blodgett. As I said, they would go every afternoon. They would take Jerry and me along. Because polio was so contagious, neither Jerry nor I nor any family members were allowed into her room. But they would prop us up on the window of Blodgett Hospital. She was on the first floor, they would prop us up on the window, and she could see us through the window. In terms of growing up, Matt, we were reared by Grandpa and Grandma. We came to live with them and my Grandpa was in his early 60s and my Grandma was in her late 50s when we came to it. Then mom was in Blodgett Hospital for two years, and then she was able to come closer to home and lived in Holland Hospital for another two years. After that, when my dad talked to Dr. Bill Winter whose offices were right near the Hope College campus—right behind Ottawa Savings and Loan, if you know where that is. He talked to Dr. Bill, he said, “Now doctor, what would you think about the idea I have of taking Margie
home?" Dr. Bill said, "John, how is that going to work?" "Well, I would take her home in the iron lung." The doctor said, "How can you do that, the hospital owns that iron lung." "Well," said my dad, "If Margie is in it, nobody else can use it anyway." So the doctor said, "Yeah, that's right, you just try it for a couple of weeks." That is how it happened. Then when my mom was able to come home, then she and my dad moved in with Grandma and Grandpa. So we all lived together there on 19th Street. So that was our home, we lived on 19th between College and Central.

MN: Did you ever think about differences between your family and families of friends?

DC: I will answer that very candidly and forthrightly. I thought zero about that. I will tell you exactly why, because while my mother was ill, and while she was confined to an iron lung, and while she was totally paralyzed from the neck down, neither she nor my dad ever called attention to it. I can tell you that categorically and forthrightly. So I had a perfectly normal growing up childhood. I played ball with everybody else on 19th Street, we went sledding down the Holland Hospital hill. And it is only in retrospect, years later, it came to dawn on me that maybe our family circumstances were unusual. I'll tell you exactly how that came to my memory. I was 28 years old, Matthew, and I was teaching at Calvin Christian High School. First year of teaching, and one of my students said to me, "Mr. Cooper, how would you like to come over to my house, we are having a pool party, and a bunch of students from Calvin Christian coming," and so forth and so on. I said, "Pool, swimming? You couldn't invite me to something less inviting. I can't swim." She said to me, "Do you mean you grew up in Holland Michigan, and you can't swim?" All of a sudden it dawned on me that my family rarely, if at all, went to the lake, and we never went on vacations. I'll be honest with you. I was aware that my mom was
sick, but they never called attention to it. She was a perfectly ordinary mom. She was a perfectly marvelous ordinary mom. If I said, “Awww, where’s my baseball glove?” She’d say, “Well, did you check here?” and she did it from the confines of the iron lung. She memorized shopping lists, she knew telephone numbers, she could encourage us, which she did. She could reprimand us if we needed it, without ever lifting a finger. So, did I think our family was unusual? Zero. No. Not really.

MN: Could you talk about your dad? He sounds like he was an amazingly dedicated person. Could you talk about their relationship?

DC: Yes. I’ll say some words about that. My dad was a farmer, and he was good farmer. He loved green things and he loved green tractors, John Deeres. He was just starting out his career. Of course he had bought that ten acres of muck, and then my mom got sick. My dad went with her in the ambulance to Blodgett. And the doctor came to him late that Sunday evening and said, “Marjorie is going to be here for a while, maybe about six weeks. So you can go home.” He said, “Well, I have got my onions in and I don’t have to go to work tomorrow. I can just stay here.” My dad stayed right there in the waiting room, he stayed there daily, for two and a half or maybe three weeks—something like that. He wasn’t able to get in to see her, since polio was a contagious disease. But when it appeared as though my mother was going to be dying, then the doctor invited my dad in, he said, “You can say goodbye to Marjorie.” So they put a gown on him, and a mask, and he went in. Once again, so they told me, my dad came in and just put his hand on her forehead, and said, “It is going to be okay, kiddo.” Then my mom kind of perked up. The doctor saw that and said “John, you may come in here whenever you want.” So my dad stayed all winter at Blodgett Hospital. He would come home on the weekend to be
with his boys in Holland. But he stayed at night by my Grandpa and Grandma Cooper who lived on Naylor Street in Grand Rapids. As he recalled to me later, “I would usually get there to Blodgett about six or seven o’clock in the morning and maybe I would go home at 11 o’clock at night.” He was with my mom all the time. He ended up staying with my mom for two years at Blodgett. He gave up his job, he gave up his career as a farmer, and then when she was able to come home, closer to home—to Holland Hospital, he came with her there, and stayed with her in Holland Hospital. And then when she was able to come home, as I told you earlier, he went home with her and he cared for her for the next 35 years and 10 months at home. His daily routine was just to feed her meals, give her a bath, tend to her bodily needs, all of those kinds of things. He did it, for a total of nearly 40 years. And he did it absolutely uncomplainingly. No big deal. In fact, my dad died a year and a half ago; he died on December 24th, 2001. He was in Holland Hospital for a week or so before he died in Hospice there in Holland. He was looking back over the trajectory of his life, and he and I had a chance to be with each other on that Saturday morning. But what he said was “She could get sick there once and a while. But she took it good, she took it really good.” (My dad was quite ungrammatical.) He said she took it really good. [Tape stopped for phone call]. I said to him, “Dad, I want you to know that you were good to mom.” “Och, ja, boy, I guess so, I don’t know. I guess so.” He next words were, “Ja, just thankful for everything.” That is the way he lived, that was kind of the charter of his life. There was only one time in 40 years I ever heard him say, “You know, I wish I could have worked like other guys too, but no, that is fine,” he said. He was just a little guy; he was 5’5” or something like that. In my book, he was a giant.
So I come from very special parents. I come from a mother who was anything but a victim of polio. She was clearly a victor over it. By God’s help. She was pretty clear about that. She said she thought that she never would have been able to endure this. She said, “When they told me you might have to be here for six weeks,” she said, “oh, I don’t think so.” She said, “Another polio patient said you might as well bring me to Pilgrim Home Cemetery.” And she said, “I kind of thought maybe that too, but she said, ‘God gave me the strength to do it.’” The only thing that was weak was her body. She was in her spirit very joy-filled and life-affirming, and so forth. And my dad, he was the same way. That is the way was. I could say a lot about it, Matt, but more than you care to understand and know.

MN: This brings me to a question about spirituality. Did polio affect your spirituality in any way?

DC: Unquestionably. My folks, simply by the way they lived that stuff out, have shaped a lot of people, but they shaped me. When I sing the song Jesus Loves Me this I know, I usually say, “Jesus loves me, this I know, because my dad and mom showed me so.” I suppose you could claim that religion is a projection of the human imagination. I suppose you could sit there for a week or two weeks, or three weeks, or maybe even five weeks and think that way. But to be able to affirm that God is with me in it, and he is giving me extraordinary strength amid these extraordinary difficulties, to be able to say that and live life affirmingly and with joy for forty years, you don’t come to little Dale J. Cooper to say that religion is merely a projection of the human spirit. No, I have seen it, and I have seen it being lived out. My folks have preached more sermons than this little squirt will ever have preached. Far more.
I’ll just give you a little example. It was my folks’ 35th wedding anniversary on March 13, in whatever year that was. It was my mom’s about 30th in the iron lung. So Jerry and Judy and Marcia and I said we would give them a little open house. By this time my dad and my mom had moved toward Ottawa Beach between, I don’t know if you know where Van Wieren’s Hardware store is and Ottawa Beach Road.

MN: Yes.

DC: That’s Division Avenue. My dad had a few acres of muck after my mom got sick, and he said, “Boy, you know, Margie, I think it would be nice if we built a house out there that I could get you around with the iron lung and I could pull it from room to room.” So they moved out there, and we threw that open house out there. The Holland Sentinel got a hold of that story that there was going to be an open house, so they asked if they could do a little story on that. My folks are not really publicity shy, but neither were they “big deal” people eager for publicity. They said look, maybe if we can help others we’d be willing to do this. Well Matt, it got over the UPI wire and, gosh, it went all over the place. So my folks during that time got letters from people all over the United States with clippings from, say the Cleveland Plain Dealer, the San Francisco Examiner, the Denver Post, all over the place. It was Saturday morning, it was an open house, and a guy called from Chicago and it was some TV station and I answered the telephone. He said to me, “Is John Cooper there?” I said, “Sure, okay here dad, it is for you.” I only heard, of course, my dad’s end of the conversation, but then he said, that guy asked me, “Is this story true, not has your wife been sick? But is it true that you stuck with her?” And my dad said, “Yeah.” The guy said, “I’d like to come down and do a story on you because I cannot imagine any guy sticking with his wife when she has got nothing she
can reasonably to contribute to the marriage.” I heard it, I heard my dad say it, “Well, I
am a Christian and we just try to keep our promises.”

If you came to me and asked me, “What’s God like in terms of being trustworthy
and faithful?” I’d say he is something like my dad. I know that it should be vice versa
and I know my dad is a little imitator of God, but I’d say God is something like my dad.
So I see trustworthiness and faithfulness being lived out. As I’ve said, they have
preached a lot more sermons than I will ever think about preaching.

MN: Was there ever a point when there was ever a fear of polio for you and your brother?

DC: I never thought much about it. No. My folks just never called much attention to it. I
know that when the Salk vaccine came out in ’57, they wanted us to get vaccinated, so
we took those little sugar cubes with medicine on it. No, I never thought, “Oh, I could
get sick too.”

MN: What were particular challenges that your family faced because of polio?

DC: Well, I know that my mom, as my dad said, could get really sick. Boy, I am telling you
she got really sick. If colds would settle onto her chest and into her throat, I had to, I
have some pretty vivid memories of her near choking. Growing up I can still see her
fighting for her breath, shallow breathing, and oh boy. My dad would say, “You have
had this before, it is going to be okay.” “Oh, John, I don’t think I can, I just can’t keep
my breath.” Now I have got those kinds of memories and I can see her. One particular
time in which she was semi-comatose. She mouthed the words of “Blessed assurance,
Jesus is mine, oh what a foretaste of glory divine, heir of salvation, purchased of God,
born of his Spirit and washed in his blood.” And then there was that one verse, “visions
of rapture now burst in my sight, angels descending…” I thought she was going to die.
But amazingly, she recovered all of those times. I recall those kinds of things, but for the most part my folks just didn’t, they didn’t call obvious attention to the fact that we were anything but a normal family.

MN: It didn’t stop you from living at all.

DC: Quite the contrary! My mom said, “Boy, you know I never thought I would live to see the day that my sons grew up or would even graduate from high school, and now,” she said, “I have seen them graduate from high school, from college.” “I never thought,” she said, “I would live to see my grandchildren. And I have.” If you were to ask me, what was probably the most difficult moment I ever saw my mother go through, then I would answer, it would be somewhere after [date removed], 1971. That was the date of our daughter Karen’s birth. She was grandpa and grandma’s first grandchild. Marcia and I were living in Sheboygan, Wisconsin, and my dad flew across the lake to see his grandchild, but we drove back several weeks later to show grandma. And she was on the stretcher, totally paralyzed, and we propped little Karen up onto her lap, and I will never forget it, she said, “Oh little one, if I could just hold you.” That was probably the hardest I have ever seen.

MN: It seems that with all the challenges, it could be looked at in your family there were a lot of positives that came out of the way your parents lived, their lifestyle, could you talk about the positive experiences?

DC: Sure. There were a lot of positives. My folks were visited continually by people of Holland, Michigan, and way beyond Holland. There was one year that on no day of that year did they ever fail to have visitors. So 365 days in succession they had people come out. My dad, he served coffee to them and he’d serve cookies and whatever, so he did
those kinds of things. His domestic vocation. That became his vocation. My mom, and
caring for her and welcoming visitors was his calling. So that is one of the things. Some
people would come and say, “Gosh, what are we supposed to say to Margie?” I’d
respond, “You won’t find any problem talking to her, because she will ask, hey how are
your kids, tell me about your vacations,” that was her lifeline to the world. Those were
great gifts, they were huge accomplices of God, keeping my folks fully human and fully
alive. I have an exalted view of the church, because of my mother’s illness, and I will tell
you why. Ninth Street Church, right in the shadow of Hope College, Pillar Church now,
when my mom got sick at age 26, they got sick with her. They did all kinds of things for
our family. One of the great questions people often ask is “How did your folks support
themselves?” I don’t know, Matt. I have no idea how they supported themselves. I can
tell you this, that at Christmas time, my brother Jerry and I would love to open the mail.
We preferred to open the three-cent rather than the two-cent stamps because in the three
centers there was possibly some money. And my folks got a dollar, or two dollars or five
dollars; the biggest one I ever opened was 25 dollars, back in the late ‘40s. That was big
money. So I know that the town and particularly the church rallied behind my folks. I’ll
give you another reason why I have an exalted view of the church, particularly of that
church. Its pastor, Rev. George Gritter, visited my mom every day. He drove from
Holland to Grand Rapids with his old De Soto, and sometimes he could be there for just
thirty seconds. See, we have tried to take my mom out of the iron lung to help her to
breathe on her own, to wean her from the iron lung, then she turned blue and they’d rush
her back in. Reverend Gritter saw that and said, “John, John, that ain’t good. How
would it be if I came and before they would try to take Margie out, we would say a little
prayer together?" So he would be there for thirty seconds, but every day he did that. I will give you another example. Then he moved on to Kalamazoo in 1947, I think. He kept visiting them every other day. So it just, that is another plus, I am who I am in a very large part because I have seen this. You understand, of course, Matthew, that, and you are a young person, we live in a post-modern age in which arguments for a certain faith or whatever, probably have less than compelling power than stories do. All you have do is tell a story with the concreteness and candor. And I stand on the shoulders of my folks. That is another obvious benefit. My folks as I said were no big deal people, but when asked to reflect upon their experience, I don’t know, maybe I can find it for you. My mom, she was asked to comment for Holland Christian, about her life in the iron lung, and somebody found this for me in Zeeland, Michigan. Here it is, it is an alumni letter, I think in 1947 and here is what my mom wrote. Maybe I will just read this for your tape: Dear Friends, when the person who contacted me asked if I would be willing to write a few lines I felt highly honored to think that I would be considered a worthy recipient of such a privilege. The more I thought, the more difficult too the task. Every one of us is daily occupied by impressions that we have some sort of thought texture. At the moment, I am thinking of the rich heritage to which we as alumni possess. Our covenant God in his good providence has bestowed on many if not all of us the blessing of Christian training in the home church and school where we might not only learn to know, but learn to know more about God who is the creator and sustainer of not only of our lives, but of the entire universe. It was particularly interested in and concerned about the well being of us, his children. The precious truth that God rules, governs and controls our lives, and that nothing happens by chance is a source of real
comfort and inspiration especially in time of diversity. Is it not true, that in a time of distressing circumstances we feel particularly close and near to our Savior. And when our way seems especially rough and steep and the demands of life are heavy upon us, is it not consoling to know that God who has a plan and a purpose in every detail of our life is continually watching over us and invites us to “cast all of our care upon the lord for he cares for us.” Quoting the words of Psalm 27, I too had fainted unless I had believed to see the goodness of God in the land of the living. But the knowledge that the eternal God is my refuge and underneath are his everlasting arms gives me new courage and strength of heart to wait on the Lord, and God sustaining grace is so abundantly supplied during my illness for which I have been chosen. [End Side A] Though his wise and loving purpose clearly now I may not see, still I believe, by grace through faith, all shall work for good to me. And then the final paragraph is: Regardless of our position or station in life, whether our course be rough or smooth, may we all experience that God’s mercies are new every morning, that his grace is sufficient for each step of the way. Let us then as Christian alumni go forward and onward, looking upward, adorning ourselves with the doctrine of Christ at all times, and with much prayer serve the author and finisher of our faith in the beauty of holiness. That was two years after she had gotten sick and that was for the alumni of Holland Christian, so yeah that was just a little snippet.

MN: It sounds like they were part of a strong community in Holland.

DC: Well, they clearly were. You understand, of course, the town in which I grew up, Matthew, is no more. It simply is no more. The Holland, Michigan, in which I grew up, you never return to the same place which you have come from. You certainly cannot return to the same town that Holland once was, I am not saying it is better or poorer, I am
saying it is different. Back then the sinews of a community were strong, it happened to my folks but it happened to the town.

MN: What do you think made the community so strong that your parents were a part of?

DC: Oh, I think it is a whole series of things. I think what held it together was ethnic identity. Economic similarity. Clearly there was a spiritual core to the whole thing. I'd have to think about that. I don't know what made Holland Michigan Holland Michigan back when I grew up. But I know that it was there. It wasn't just a group of disparate individuals, it was a community of people. I have not thought about that.

MN: What do you remember your neighborhood like as a boy?

DC: 19th Street in Holland Michigan, we were right next to what was then the ball park, so the neighborhood was primarily, I guess the whole town was kind of blue collar, clearly blue collar, Holland Furnace had its big plant on the corner of Columbia Ave. and 19th Street and that was in Holland Furnace's heyday. And all of the big trucks, beautiful, beautiful semi trucks because Holland Furnace had a fleet that was comparable to Steelcase's today. These trucks would come down 19th Street heading toward Michigan Ave. and that was the way to Chicago, of course. It was a busy street. My best buddy lived across the street. Roger Baas. We played an awful lot of baseball and an awful lot of basketball. When it rained, the rains came from down 22nd Street hill, 21st Street and quickly flooded 19th Street. So I have strong memories of sloshing through the well-flooded 19th Street. I walked from 19th Street to my elementary school on 15th and Central Ave. And eventually for me high school was right at the 5 corners on 19th Street and River Avenue. It was a perfectly normal neighborhood, I guess.

MN: Could you describe your mom's personality?
DC: Want me to use some adjectives about Marjorie Cooper? Okay. Joy-filled. Life affirming. Amazingly content. Extrovert. Ability to memorize. Kind. Thoughtful. For every gift that my folks received at Christmas time, there came a thank you note and my dad would write it, of course, and my mom would be the one to compose it. So thoughtful, birthdays she remembered. Those would be some of the adjectives that would come to mind. I have just been a blessed person. That is all I will say.

MN: What kinds of particular lessons or blessings do you feel you have received from your mother?

DC: I have said a good part about that already. This is the way I will shape it. It is particularly my experience with my parents, but it is probably also in the ongoing trajectory of my life, and my work as a pastor observing other peoples' lives and stories. More and more, if people want to live well, then there are two things you have got to be able to handle, you have got to be able to handle your past, and you ought to be able to handle your future. Now, our past is a series of good things and bad things, it is a mixture of wonderfully life-affirming and good things. There are also some difficult things and some frustrating things and some hurtful things and some sad things, alright. Now to look at your past and its good parts with gratitude. And to look at the sad parts of your past with an acknowledgment of them, but a kind of contentment and not vain regrets; how come this had to happen to me? Or, "what if this..." and so forth. To be able to put your past to a proper kind of good rest, at least in it's difficult parts while at the same time affirming the good parts of it. Then, projecting towards your future, to be able to anticipate, not with fear, but with trust. Your tomorrows, even though you don't know what is going to happen. Putting those two things, you'd be able to live with a
good deal of joy in the present. I saw that first with my mom and my dad. She taught me this. She said, “You know, Dale, when I first got sick and the doctor said you might have to be here for some considerable time I went ‘Oh my.’” And she said, “The Lord came to me and said, Marjorie, don’t look back with vain regrets or ‘only if I hadn’t gotten sick. And try not to look way ahead with an oh, what if this should happen? But if you trust me just for today, then I will give you enough strength to get through it.’” So she said, “Dale, I have tried to do that.” And Matthew, that is the way she lived. And that is exactly the way she died and you are going to ask me the question, “tell me how your mother died.” And I will tell you. My mother died on August 29, 1985. She was 66 years old. Thus she had spent nearly 40 years in an iron lung. Marcia, my wife, and I were at the Conference Grounds. My mother had had a cold and we knew that, but I was leading the morning study out there at conference grounds there along Lake Michigan. They called us about 10 o’clock. They said, “Mom is not feeling very well. She is just pretty weak, pretty sick, so could you come?” Marcia and I went to their home on Division Avenue and she was coughing, just could not get her breath. Well, our little daughter Betsy, she was our youngest, I think she was maybe 2 years old, I saw my mother in the iron lung. She didn’t have the strength to speak, so she mouthed the words of Psalm 16: “Keep me safe oh God for in you I take refuge, I say to the Lord my God apart from you I have no good thing.” She came to the end of that psalm, “Therefore my heart is glad, my tongue rejoices, my body will also rest secure because you will not abandon me to the grave. You have made known to me the path of life, you fill me with joy in your presence.” And she mouthed the words of “When at last my race is run, the Savior’s work in me is done. Even death’s cold wave I will not flee, since God through
Jordan is leading me.” And then shortly after that she died. And my dad was right there, next to the iron lung, he was trying to get that phlegm out of her throat yet and so forth. And I shut the iron lung off after she had died, and his first words were, “I think she died. Margie was a wonderful wife.” So, yeah, that is how she died.

MN: Are there any other stories?

DC: I could give you a gazillion; you have enough of that. You have to understand, Matthew, you have to understand this. My folks were unusually ordinary people, but they would always say that though we were just perfectly ordinary people, we have been helped by an extraordinary God. I did my dad’s funeral. I think I entitled my little meditation. I just used my dad’s words, “No, yeah, Thankful for Everything.” That is what I called it. But I said, what I would like you to hear, I would like to make two little claims. Number one, it is extraordinary, how extraordinary ordinary people can be. That is one of them. The second one is, and this comes out in my experience here, I live and work at Calvin College, they have got a lot of smart people who live around here. They are no less smart at Hope College [laughter] they are all filled with smart folks around here. But I want to say this, as Ralph Woods once said, “The intellectual life is important,” and I don’t want to discount it. “But I am going to tell you that it is supremely unimportant when set beside the task of ordinary living.” Sometimes we can get so caught up in our own little worlds and our own little “I have got to get this,” but just pay attention to common ordinary people and watch how these “no big deal” people go at life. If you watch them you can catch a lot of wisdom. So that is why I applaud the kind of project you are doing. Sure, I suppose maybe researchers or scholars will pick, if at all some of this stuff up, but the central wisdom of a community of people and individuals with persons within,
that is far more important than all that stuff. So to pay attention, watch the old timers, okay? Enough.

MN: Thank you so much.

[DC requested tape on again]

DC: I just finished a long, pretty wrong tractor ride.

MN: That’s right.

DC: I did that because I needed a way, because it is fun to ride tractors, but I needed a way to say thanks to the good Lord for the gift of my dad’s and my mom’s life. I couldn’t think of any better or fun way to do it than that. But you know, along the way, we went from Michigan to Northwest Iowa. That was where my wife was born. Along the way the 650-700 miles. In fact someone asked me yesterday. Along the way did people mention, acknowledge that they knew Calvin College? The number of people whom I met who knew Calvin College was zero. Zero. But when they asked, why are you doing this? I had a little chance to tell them I am doing it to remember my dad. That could connect. I am going to tell you something. Nobody is going to much care how scholarly Matt Nickel becomes. Nobody is going to much care how many books he produces. But I tell you, to live life well, and have a story that will connect with people. Because at heart, and now I am speaking as a pastor, every one of our stories is utterly unique. One of a kind. There has been nobody who has been quite like Marjorie Cooper, or John Cooper or Matt Nickel or whoever. Our tears and our smiles are uniquely shaped, but the other side of it is, every person’s story has a kind of remarkable similarity to it. We have all got smiles and we’ve all got tears and we have all got messed up dimensions of our lives. So, as Frederick Buechner says, if you listen to another person’s story as she or he tells it
with concreteness and candor, you can say oh, you too huh? And it will connect because we all travel through things like that. Now, my folks had a unique one, but no more or less unique than anybody else. Hey, I am not diminishing Calvin College, and it’s hard for me to diminish Hope College. I am just saying, to me, stories are the biggies nowadays. Now you can shut the tape off.