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Dykema, Caroline Oral History Interview: Parents of Baby Boomer Generation

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GR: Caroline, what were you doing when the war started in December 1941?

CD: I was working at First Michigan Bank, Zeeland.

GR: As a clerk?

CD: Well, I just worked in bookkeeping at first. We had to do a lot of posting, and we still had the old machines, you know. Nothing sophisticated.

GR: Now were you...

CD: I was living home.

GR: You had graduated obviously.

CD: And I went to business college for about a year, and then I first worked in Ottawa County Treasurer’s Office in Grand Haven. I was living here, you know, and I thought, well, God seems to get you this job in Zeeland. And so I came back home. I kind of like to be home.

GR: Were you currently dating your husband?

CD: No, I didn’t even know him until after the war was over. After he started Hope College that’s when I got acquainted with him.

GR: You met him at Hope College?

CD: Yes, through a friend of mine who was dating another fellow at Hope, and so we went on a blind date. That’s the way it started.

GR: What was life like during the war for a single woman living in Zeeland? Or Holland?
CD: I was living on the farm here in Holland, Holland Township, by my folks. We had gas rationing; we had coupons for everything—coffee, sugar. I worked at the bank and they would bring in these coupons, a company, a sugar company, and would bring it in and you’d have to put that on their account, and then they would buy sugar with that total, you know. Oh, I worked with that quite a bit. It was hard to get things, hard to get tires.

GR: Were there things that the churches did for men overseas?

CD: I can’t remember our church doing anything. I was at Second Reformed. I don’t remember anything like that.

GR: In Zeeland?

CD: In Zeeland.

GR: Do you remember family members?

CD: My brother was in the service—I think he went to Hawaii—and he wasn’t fighting on the front line.

GR: Did you get letters home from him?

CD: Oh, yes. First he was at University of Wisconsin, some program for college. We went to visit him there. And we had a lot of friends that were in service.

GR: Did you know anyone that didn’t come home?

CD: Just one person. It was a Lampen from Zeeland. He got shot down in an airplane. His wife owns the antique store in the Tulip City Mall. Lester Lampen, I knew him because he was from our church. I knew his mother and his grandmother.

GR: Do you remember what it was like in the church after they found out he had passed away?

CD: It was really sad because his body never came home.
GR: So they never had a funeral?

CD: I don’t know. It was a sad thing, I remember that. I don’t remember too many other fellows losing their lives from our church. But in Holland there were quite a few, I imagine.

GR: So, working in the mailroom at the post office, you probably saw quite a bit of V-Mail come through?

CD: Well, I worked at the bank.

GR: Oh, the bank, I’m sorry.

CD: No, not at the bank.

GR: So how did you and your husband Nelson come to meet?

CD: Through a friend of mine. She was going with a fellow from Hope and knew this fellow, so we just double-dated. Started that way, and it wasn’t long and we were going steady. I was twenty-four when I was married. I got married on my birthday. So we weren’t that young anymore, but it seems like nowadays, they’re marrying later again. We got engaged in March, March 13 my husband tells me, of ’48, and we got married on October 7 of ’48.

GR: Was he there on the GI Bill?

CD: Yes, he was on the GI Bill. I wonder how we dared to do it.

GR: Because of the money?

CD: Yes, we got a hundred dollars a month from the government. Then I changed jobs and went to work at Silverward Hatchery in Zeeland. I put in a lot of hours, and I worked Saturdays. My husband, after we were married, he worked there too on days that he
could get away from college. Then he rode with some other fellows from Zeeland to
Hope. We lived in Zeeland.

GR: So you were working while he went to college?

CD: I worked full-time.

GR: You were the breadwinner?

CD: Yes, I was the breadwinner for two years. I don't know how we dared do it. I think now,
I see kids getting married you know, still in college, and I wonder how they manage.

GR: Was that hard for you as a...?

CD: Well, I don't know. That's the way it was, you know. We just lived pretty cheap; we
didn't do much.

GR: Nelson didn't have any problem with his wife supporting the family?

CD: No, he didn't seem to have any problem with that. Because I was glad he was going to
school. I wanted him to get an education. He said he never would have if he hadn't had
the GI Bill. Because most of the kids there were on GI Bill in his class, a lot of guys.

GR: Did you socialize quite a bit with other GIs because you were married or not?

CD: No, not really. He had a brother, Ed, who had been in the service too, and we did a lot
with them because they were close in age. So we did a lot with his brother and his wife.
And family. Dykemas have a big bunch, he came from ten children, so we'd have get-
togethers at Kollen Park. One brother would bring a volleyball net and they had games
for the kids. We did have reunions a lot, every year.

GR: Were there lots of other young couples getting married now that the war was over?

CD: I think so, I think there were quite a few.

GR: Did you see a surge in babies being born?
CD: Probably, but we didn’t have any children for... we waited until Nelson was out of college. Mary was born in 1951, and he graduated from Hope in 1950, so we didn’t really start a family right away, we thought we couldn’t afford it.

GR: So you had planned on doing it that way?

CD: Yes, we planned on doing it that way.

GR: Once Mary was born, did you stay at work or did you become a homemaker?

CD: I became a homemaker because by that time my husband had a teaching job. Then he worked on my father’s farm in the summertime. Even before school was out sometimes he’d help my dad because they had a big produce farm—potatoes and strawberries and melon—so he spent his summers working there. I probably was helping out too a little bit now and then.

GR: Did you ever return to work?

CD: I returned to work when the children... Larry, our youngest, was about five. Then I went to work part-time at First Michigan Bank. We had a friend who worked there and he said there was an opening, so I got the job. So Nelson would get home from school about four o’clock, and I’d leave at about five, and I worked till nine or ten. We had posting at night, running a machine with ticker tape, when you feed the tape into the machine and then it would post the checks and deposits. I did that for quite a few years. Nels could stay with the children, I usually had supper ready, or partly ready. It wasn’t easy for him though to be with four children.

GR: Because he had been gone all day?

CD: Yes, he’d teach all day, and then you know, he was working on his master’s degree, and he couldn’t get much done till they were all in bed.
GR: You said he started his master's program relatively soon after graduating? So that the education continued...

CD: It took him a long time. It seemed like quite a few years.

GR: Because of the kids?

CD: Because of the kids, and we didn’t have the money. I remember one time my dad gave us enough for tuition so he could keep going at this.

GR: So even your parents really saw education as a value?

CD: Oh yes. My brother graduated from Michigan State and he’s an engineer. He worked for Consumers Power for forty years maybe.

GR: Of your family members, are you the only one that didn’t go to college?

CD: Yes, I guess I am the only one.

GR: But you went to business college.

CD: Business College, but my brother went to Michigan State.

GR: So there was just two of you?

CD: Yes, well then I have a half-brother. My dad remarried when I was ten years old. He didn’t go to college. He kind of worked on the farm, and kind of took over the farm. Then he was a trucker, he drove a truck. It’s different now. All of our grandchildren, I hope will go to college. There will be three there this year, and then we have one that just graduated from the University of Southern Indiana. She just got a teaching job, so I’m happy for that. Well, you think there are plenty of jobs out there, but there are a lot of people looking around for them too.

GR: Are you ever a little bit sad that you didn’t go back into another career other than working at the bank?
CD: Yes, sometimes I am, because Nels said, “You could have easily gone to school too, and then on to become a teacher.” But then we had Mary, and then it would be four years later before John was born. I wasn’t feeling too well, and then sixteen months later Bill was born. So I had two close together, and Larry came three years later. So they ranged from five to nine. When Larry was five, Mary was fourteen. There was nine years between the two.

GR: Were there some days when you left at five o’clock to go to the bank that you were kind of relieved?

CD: Yes, well it’s nice to get away. (laughs) Three boys—boys are a handful.

GR: But they had been at school all day, right?

CD: Yes, they had been at school all day.

GR: So you got to see them a little bit, then off to work.

CD: They had studying to do, and Nels was here to help. Then they would play out with lots of their friends. In the back field they’d play ball, before any houses were there.

GR: So the transition every day at four was pretty good?

CD: It was real good. The kids didn’t seem to mind. I don’t think they suffered for it. And as they grew up they were in sports. After school they would just come home a minute to eat, and maybe they had football practice after school, or basketball, and get on the bus. Quick feed them a little bit, can’t eat too much when you’re playing sports.

GR: You said your dad had remarried. Did you receive any advice from your stepmother once you started having children?

CD: She just had that one son, the only children they had. But it wasn’t easy at first, when you’re ten years old. Of course, I never knew my mother and then you…it was kind of
hard for me. I wasn’t probably old enough to accept it real well and wasn’t little enough
to…you know what I mean?

GR: So your mother had passed away relatively soon in your life?

CD: I was two years old, so I never knew my mother. She died in ’26, and I was born in ‘24.
My little brother, he was only six months old. He went to live with his grandma and 
grandpa in Holland, and I went to live with my grandma and grandpa here. We used to 
live in that house across the street. Then we moved, and we went to live with grandma 
and grandpa.

GR: So you didn’t grow up with your father?

CD: I was with my dad, but then those ten years we lived with grandma and grandpa before 
my dad remarried.

GR: Because he worked all the time?

CD: Yes, well, he ran the farm. He worked in the sugar beet factory in Holland too. During 
the war that was kind of good. We could get some…I don’t know if it was real sugar 
but…anyway we had it.

GR: In a way, yeah, it’s sugar.

CD: Yes, it’s sugar. That’s where he worked.

GR: He’d bring it home in his pockets?

CD: I guess they could just take a little bit, I don’t know. I remember having sugar from 
there.

GR: You grew up with your grandparents, which was a good situation probably, was that hard 
for you to become a mother, not really knowing yours?
CD: It was hard. I just really wish that I’d known my mother. Of course, I had two aunts that were her sisters, one was a teacher at Holland. They really kind of took me under their arms. They just helped me, and I really just adored them. They were like mothers to me. The one had six children of her own. My Aunt Gertrude was a teacher, and we did a lot of things with them. We’d have picnics and...

GR: So you got to see your dad once in a while?

CD: I lived with my dad all the time, with my grandma and grandpa. We all lived together on the farm.

GR: So your grandma and grandpa kind of said, “Okay, we’ll take care of you”?

CD: Yes, and my brother was there too, Harvey. So we had five of us—my grandma and grandpa, my dad, Harvey and I until my dad remarried. So ten years went by before he remarried.

GR: And then you guys found another home?

CD: Well, no. They built on to the house, so they had their own kitchen and living room, and I think we shared the bathroom. I think that’s the way it went. We slept upstairs, and we had our own house. Then my grandma and grandpa had their own but it was attached. Then later on they tore some of that down after my grandma and grandpa died. My grandma and grandpa were just... I mean my grandma especially, I really loved her.

GR: That’s good that you had someone to do that for you.

CD: Yes, it’s pretty hard, but what do you do? Children have to be raised somewhere, so, that or day care.

GR: Did your father know your children?
CD: Yes, my father knew all the children. They were all born; he lived till he was eighty-four, so he knew them. And my stepmother lived yet a few years, she was a little younger, she lived too about till that age. So yes, the kids loved to go to grandma and grandpa’s house. When they got old enough, they could pick up potatoes for fifty cents a bushel or something like that, and work there on the farm. The children worked on the farm.

GR: Did your children know about your mom dying so early in life?

CD: Oh yes. I used to tell them they better be nice to their mom. (laughs)

GR: Did they ever wonder how that worked, that you lost your mother so early and you seemed to come out pretty good.

CD: We tried everything, I think I did pretty well. They really loved my stepmother. It was grandma to them, because they didn’t know any other grandma. She was real good to the children and to us. There was no problem at all. The kids really loved to go to grandma’s house.

GR: We know that obviously your family life is a little bit different than your parents, and I think Nelson also had quite a turbulent young life, losing his mother so young. Because of you and him having such hard early years, do you think that that drew you together in some way?

CD: I think so, I think that we talked about that a lot—how come both of us had to lose our mothers so young. We were trying to the best we could.

GR: Was that discussed before you were married?

CD: Probably, before we were married.

GR: Has that affected anything you’ve done with your own kids?

CD: No, I don’t think so. They all turned out real well, I think. Pretty happy with them.
GR: You’re just thankful that you were able to, well you still are, enjoy them and their grandchildren.

CD: Grandchildren, yes. That’s the fun part right now.

GR: You said your aunts helped raise you in some ways?

CD: Well, not really living at our house, but just going to... I’d always go to grandma and grandpa in Holland too... in the summertime, we’d always maybe spend a week in June or July, and then spend another week. They always had us for a week.

GR: Those are your maternal grandparents?

CD: My mother’s folks. They lived on 19th street in Holland, West 19th. My aunt wasn’t married, she was home; and I had an uncle that was only about a year older than me, still home. And so that was really vacation. We could either go separate, just Harvey and I would go, or I’d go alone, and then they’d have things planned and we’d go here and there.

GR: When you started raising your children did you call upon them or did they offer help?

CD: By that time, my grandma and grandpa had died.

GR: How about the aunts?

CD: Oh yes, especially Aunt Gertrude. She really took an interest in our children. My daughter would go over there with me. I would always try to learn to knit, and she would help me. Anytime I had a mistake, we’d run over to aunt Gertrude. (laughs) She lived on Lakewood.

GR: So your extended family was there for you obviously.

CD: Oh yes, they sure were. I really don’t think I could have made it without them.
GR: In interviewing Nelson, I knew that you'd gone on vacations as a family and stuff. What did you do, as an individual, when you had time that was just your own time?

CD: I don't think we had too much time.

GR: You didn't have any crafts or anything that you were really interested in?

CD: Well, just knitting. But, working part-time and then summers...we were in south Higgins Lake for twelve years. Nels probably told you he worked there. So, when school got finished, we packed the car and the kids and loaded it up. We had a trailer, over there and a tent where the kids slept, and so that's were we spent twelve years in the summertime.

GR: So you spent a lot of intensive time with your kids and your husband?

CD: Yes, we weren't too far apart most of the time.

GR: And you really never wanted to just say, "I need a day to myself"?

CD: Not really. But he had two days off a week—it was in the middle of the week. And we always planned something for one day. We'd take them up to Mackinaw City, because we were only a hundred miles from the bridge. I remember going one time to Mackinac Island. This is one day we planned to take the kids _______. It was cold and it was raining, foggy, you could hardly see to drive. But we went, and I remember seeing them in the buggy all bundled up with blankets. So we tried to do something with them. But when they got old enough they were working. Our daughter started when she was 14; the first year we were there she worked in the park store.

GR: So about every summer you were up at Higgins Lake?

CD: Every summer, twelve years. I can't wonder how we ever did it. Kids outgrew one tent, rotting in the ground, you know, standing for the whole summer. Buy another tent and
then finally bought them a camper. Then we had an add a room, add cots, next their friends would come. When they were in high school...everybody was coming on the weekend. We had a lot of friends.

GR: So they really took to that?

CD: Oh they loved it. We often wonder if it was the right thing to do. We really exposed them to a different area than Holland. Very different. They got to see how the rest of the world lived. They really did.

GR: Are you glad…?

CD: Oh, I'm glad we did it. They talk about it all the time. Those were the good years. They just loved it. John and his wife, when the children were younger, even now if they go north they get off the road and stop over at South Higgins Lake and look around. John will remember Willow Road we lived on, and he wanted to show his children this, and so he's been taking them there a number of years. They loved it. Bill too, he just thinks that was great. He bought himself a boat, had three jobs to pay for it, one of the fellows loaned him a little money. I didn't want him to get a boat, but it was the best thing we really did I think. The kids all learned to water ski.

GR: So he bought a boat while he was up there?

CD: He bought a boat when he was about fifteen years old. He didn't have too much money but he worked all these jobs. Worked at the gas station, the ice cream shop, he worked at delivering newspapers all through the park. He had his customers who wanted papers. The kids, they were all busy. None of them sat around.

GR: What did you do while in the park?
CD: I just kept feeding everyone. I went to a laundromat five miles down the road to do laundry, twice a week. I worked at the park store a little bit too, once in a while.

GR: What did Nelson do?

CD: He was a park ranger. He worked for the department of natural resources, under civil service. It was a good job because on holidays he’d get triple pay.

GR: And there were quite a few of those I bet.

CD: Yes, that was nice. By that time we had kids in college already. Mary has started and then a few years later John...ten years we had somebody at Hope.

GR: Did you find that hard as a couple just trying to make that happen?

CD: That was hard. We really went without some things to put the kids through college.

GR: But you think it’s worth it?

CD: Oh, it’s worth it. I would do it again if I had to.

GR: Where there lots of other families making those kind of sacrifices?

CD: I think so. We had friends that had the same problem, they weren’t making a fortune. It’s just getting so expensive, I feel sorry for people who have to put kids through college... I got a granddaughter going to San Diego State instead of going to Hope. She didn’t want to go to Hope. She called, “Sorry, Grandma, I know you’re disappointed.” Well, I still got three other grandchildren—maybe they’ll come to Hope. They talk about Michigan, so who knows.

GR: Did you have a tendency to spend your leisure time with others that had similar size families and were putting kids through college?

CD: Yes. My cousin and her husband, and we’d go out and we’d go on picnics and go to Deer Forest in Coloma. I remember going there and some of the children were quite
small yet, and pushing them in a stroller. We did a lot of things with my family, probably more so than with my friends. Friends I had were all girls I went to high school with, and when they got married we did things together.

GR: Did any of them talk about the fact that they wished they had a little extra time on their hands to do things?

CD: Well, you know, they had four children too, most of them. Three or four children. So, everybody's busy with their families, really. We'd get together different times, for birthdays or a party for this or that. We loved parties, birthday parties.

GR: It a welcome break?

CD: Yes, a welcome break. Pack a picnic lunch and go to Ottawa Beach, we used to do that too with the children. Bag a lunch and let them play and swim. By that time they all knew how to swim. We sent them all through the YMCA, I think it was, and they all had swimming lessons. So that was another thing that kept me busy. Saturdays I remember sitting at that hot West Ottawa swimming pool, all the kids there having lessons.

GR: As the kids all went off to college and eventually graduated, and you finally saw more leisure time, more money, more room, did that change anything in your life?

CD: No, I don't think so.

GR: Did you have more time to do other things?

CD: Yes, we probably could, but we didn't go on a lot of vacations because we spent all those years up at Higgins Lake. We still have a vacation... a little trip. Outside of that...

GR: Did you and Nelson have to reacquaint each other with...now that he was home after retirement?
CD: No, it went real easy. I had my heart surgery and I was sick, and so it was really a welcome thing to have him around every day. Because he retired really early at sixty-two when he could have gone on to sixty-five or more. But that was his decision. We talked about it, and I wasn’t in too good of health, and he thought we better spend a few years together and do a few things. So we did. We have traveled a lot. As far as some couples have, I know how fortunate we have been.

GR: You spend quite a bit of time away from the house now?

CD: Well, now we do, yes.

GR: What are some of the things you do, besides a vacation here and there? Where do you end up going?

CD: We always go up to Silver Lake, to our trailer quite a bit. Then we have friends that we usually take a trip with every summer—a short trip, five days. We’ll go to Wisconsin to the Dells, or to Dorr County; we’ve been to Niagara Falls, we go to Mackinaw City, out to the Island, I’ve been there many times. In ’78 we went to Europe. Nels was working at Herman Miller, and they had a deal going that you could go, and so we signed up for that, and we went. Austria, that was our home base, and then we went around Germany and...

GR: Did you visit any of the places that Nelson had been during the war?

CD: No, we didn’t. We could see Italy, we rode and we could see the border. He had no desire to go.

GR: Did he talk a little about the war when you were there?

CD: Yes, he kind of mentioned that because he said, “That’s where I, you know, I went passed Rome and went passed the Coliseum and helped free Rome.” But he didn’t want to go
across Italy. Then we went back in '84, and we went to seven countries. We toured Germany, Switzerland and Austria, France, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, and I think there’s on other one—Belgium, I don’t know. So that was quite something. We went to Hawaii once, and I’d love to go back there. But I don’t know if we can afford it anymore. We did it then. I loved it. We went to four islands.

GR: Hit them all.

CD: Hit them all.

GR: Do you spend any time with your grandchildren now?

CD: Oh, yes, every chance we get. The girls are getting older—they’re twenty and they’re twins. Jan is already in California. In fact, I tried to reach her last night. And Kristin is working, the other twin, and Kari is working for the government right now in Battle Creek. So they’re all busy. They’ve got their own friends and lives, but they do come. At the end of July, the two that haven’t been at the trailer yet this summer are coming for a long weekend. They’re bringing each a friend, and so I’ll have four extra. I talked to Kari last night, “Grandma, I’m counting the days till we come.” She enjoys that.

GR: Do they call you periodically about things that they’re dealing with?

CD: Oh yes, they call. We keep in touch about every week. All three of them. Then the younger grandchildren, not as much, the ones in Hudsonville. But we see them, we’ve been going to all their games. In fact, tonight we have to be in Georgetown at six-o’clock.

[End of side one]
CD: [continuing] ...Our son John and his wife Margie went to see them play on Friday, because they knew we couldn’t be there—we were up north. So I knew if they won—they beat 11-nothing—so they won. So tonight they play again. So we’ll go down.

GR: Your family has gone through a divorce, you’ve mentioned before. Probably in your day and time, that probably wasn’t as common as today. Was that a struggle for you?

CD: That was a real struggle, we just really took that hard. Did a lot of crying, it was hard to accept first, but it all turned out. The Lord must have had a plan.

GR: Your son, I believe the one that was divorced, did he come to you with questions about...?

CD: We spent quite a bit of time with him when he told us he was going to...Of course they were living in Arkansas at the time. We didn’t see them a lot. But he did come to Florida on business and that’s when he told us. Because I thought they were going to move to Indiana. We had offered to help, you know, moving the children. And then all this happened, and they both moved to Indiana so they could be close together yet. Then Bill could see them every weekend, or every other weekend. Yes, it was hard, but it’s working out pretty well.

GR: Oh, that’s good. And the children seem to have adjusted?

CD: Dave, the oldest one, is a little quiet sometimes. But when I talked to his dad last night, he said David is talking to us, he just doesn’t talk much when grandma and grandpa are around.

GR: How old is David?
CD: He’s fourteen. So he’s going to start high school. He went with his younger sister Kelly for a week, they just got back yesterday. Bill had them a whole week, but Scott couldn’t go. He had to make a choice whether to play ball or go to his dad’s.

GR: So for the most time they live with their mother?

CD: They live with their mother. Now they get to see their dad a weekend, once a month.

GR: Is that hard on him, knowing that family he came from....?

CD: I think so, yes. He doesn’t talk about it, but I can tell. Just talking to him on the phone you can tell he had to bring them back again yesterday.

GR: Did he remarry?

CD: Yes, he remarried. So we have three step-grandchildren there.

GR: Oh, from his second wife?

CD: Yes, second wife. She had a son and two daughters.

GR: So did she bring children to the marriage too?

CD: Yes.

GR: And those children have become part of your family also?

CD: Part of our family, extended family. But they’re all so great. They call us grandma and grandpa when we call. We have a step grandson who has three little boys so we have three step-great-grandchildren. And you know they’re just as precious. Every birthday, you know, I don’t ever forget. I talk to my daughter and she says, “Mom, I’ll get what they need, I know their sizes.” So I say okay, and she gets them the gifts and I just pay her. So we’ve got a real extended family now. We got six extra—but it’s great.

CD: They were here different times, they’d come for things that go on here, anniversaries for us, fiftieth anniversary the two girls were here. Of course, Dave and Scott and Kelly. So
we all went out to eat and that was fun. We had all the grandkids at one table and the
grown-ups at the other. And they were as good as gold.

GR: Now all of your four children, or the three that survived, went to college. Was that
something they did on their own?

CD: Oh, yes. They wanted to have an education. They chose to, that’s what they wanted to
do.

GR: And you’re happy with how their occupations?

CD: Oh yes. Two of them are teachers you know. Of course Bill is in business.

GR: Do they ever talk about the fact that what you and Nelson had done for them really put
them on the right track?

CD: Oh yes. They are so thankful. They can’t thank us enough. Larry, the younger one that
died, was going to West Point because he had told us, “I know how you struggled to send
the three kids to Hope” (his two brothers and a sister). He first talked about going to
ROTC or something. Nelson talked to him about that. Then he chose West Point and he
was accepted. He would have left in June; he died in March. He wanted to kind of save
us that. He was a bright kid; he wanted to be an engineer.

GR: That’s an interesting concept that he...

CD: Free education anyway.

GR: Yes, he was looking that direction for your sake.

CD: Yes, he was. He mentioned that often.

GR: To lose a child, of course, is horrible. How did your other children react to that?

CD: They were devastated. John was just married. He had been married in ‘77. He lived in
South Haven. Bill was still at Hope, and Mary was teaching. It was horrible.
GR: Did the whole family come together?

CD: Oh yes, we’ve been so close since then. We always were close, but this really changed…

When we get together, the boys will talk about Larry and the little things that they did at Higgins Lake. Things that we didn’t even know, you know, and now we know. And they laugh. You know, it took a long time, though. It took me five years at least to cope with it, to actually cope. You just kind of live your life. You don’t really care to live first.

GR: Was Nelson still working at that time?

CD: Yes, he was still working.

GR: So you were home quite a bit, just trying to deal with that.

CD: Yes, trying to deal with that. Then later on, I had my heart surgery in ’84. Well, I was still working when Larry died. I was working full-time. Then to go back, you know, it took me a little bit. But I had lots of friends there that really helped me, pulling me through. Just kind of was working on you, you don’t even realize…you’re just kind of…

It’s hard to explain.

GR: I imagine.

CD: It’s hard to explain. We talk about Larry a lot.

GR: Still part of the family?

CD: Still part of the family. John has pictures of him. He told his children when they were little, “This is your Uncle Larry.” So they have grown up not knowing him, but knowing who he is by his picture. I think they’re just really close to us. I can’t explain how close. Sometimes you’re so glad, but then again you go, maybe we shouldn’t...You know, we don’t tell them what to do. We don’t butt in, we try not to. They’ll call for advice for
something, “What do you think dad, mom?” We don’t…it’s their lives, and they’ve done a good job. Excellent.

GR: After all you’ve told me today, is there anything that strikes you as...you know, you reflect on it periodically, that what you did was the best you could do, and was there anything you really missed in all those years?

CD: No, I don’t think so. We were a sport family. Everybody played sports and that kept us really busy. We loved that. I’d sit at those football games in the rain, snow or whatever. I had a friend and we’d be under plastic just trying to keep dry. (laughs) The children really were just wonderful. High school years were the best. They were the best for us. When they got off to college, Mary played basketball at Hope, and Bill played football two years, but outside of that... John was teaching by that time, and he was married. He got married the same year he graduated. He didn’t even have a job yet.

GR: Was the contact between the older and younger siblings pretty consistent even though some were working and some were still at college?

CD: Yes, very close. The boys love their sister. They call her Sis. They call her up for a lot of things that I don’t even know about, and she don’t even tell me. They’ll call up about this and that. They’re always talking. They love their sister, ask her for lots of advice.

GR: As the kids got older, were there things that were expected of them to do around the house?

CD: Well, they probably had a few chores. I remember they had to take turns doing dishes. We didn’t have a dishwasher at first. But they were so busy after school playing sports. In the summertime they worked on the farm and the rest of the year they were in sports from football to basketball to tennis. And they would get home late at night sometimes.
GR: Did they ever get caught up in some of the more crazy parts of the ‘60s and ‘70s?

CD: No, I don’t think so.

GR: Did they have long, short hair?

CD: Well they kind of had bangs long. We had a picture of Bill the other day I found and I thought, boy, if he saw that, and of course he’s pretty near bald. (laughs) But yes, they probably went with the style. Larry, too. He had his hair longer. I probably didn’t like it, but...because when they were little they kind of had a crew cut, you know.

GR: How did television affect your life?

CD: I don’t know. We’re not big television people, our family isn’t, to sit there. I watch it in the morning for the news, and it isn’t on until tonight at six. I don’t think they spent much time in front of the television. Saturdays, they’d watch cartoons when they were little. I suppose the children still do that. I remember Saturday mornings; they were all quiet sitting on the floor.

GR: They weren’t fighting over what channel to watch?

CD: No. They had no problem as long as there were cartoons on.