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## Deventer, Case and Elsa Oral History Interview: Dutch Immigrants who Emigrated to the United States after WW II

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Interview with  
Case and Elsa Deventer

Conducted July 28, 1992  
by Donna M. Rottier

1992 Summer Oral History Project  
Subject: Post-WWII Dutch Immigrants to Holland, Michigan

DR: Could you both please state your full names?

CD: I'm Case Deventer. Officially Cornelius Deventer. Born [date removed], 1921.

ED: My name is Elsa Janni Deventer. My maiden name is Tijssen, and I was born [date removed], 1924.

DR: Thank you. And your current address?

CD: It's 14 West Twenty-eighth Street in Holland, Michigan.

DR: What date did you emigrate from the Netherlands?

CD: That must have been around the tenth of May, for I think we arrived here the nineteenth, in 1953.

DR: What part of the Netherlands are you from?

CD: The civilized part [laughter]. From the western part of the Netherlands.

DR: What city?

CD: IJmuiden. IJmuiden is a sea port of Amsterdam. It's about twenty miles from Amsterdam. Amsterdam is connected to the North Sea by a canal, the North Sea Canal. IJmuiden is a sea port. It's a city of about sixty thousand right now.

DR: Can you describe a little bit about what it was like to live there?

CD: It was just wonderful to live there for that's where both of us grew up. Being a sea port, it was always interesting because ships from all over the world came in there. It had locks, at one time they were the biggest locks in the world. Since then I think there have been locks built that are bigger than that. The largest sea-going vessels came through there. As children there was always something to see. Besides, it was a port for cruises, so there were cruise

ships coming in from other countries. That again gave a lot of activity. It also was the main port for the sea-going tugs which bring all kinds of equipment and rescue ships in trouble, which was also very exciting, especially in stormy weather. Besides that it was a fishing harbor at one time also the largest fishing port in Europe, which again brought in a lot of activity for fishing trawlers from England, Scotland, Ireland, and wherever also came into port. It was especially for children a very interesting town to live in. Besides the fact that it also had beaches, being a sea port, dunes, and forests. There was always something to do there.

DR: What was it like to live there during the war years?

CD: That's an entirely different story. That would fill a book if you really would want to know details about that. It was one of the first points attacked by the Germans in 1940 because of the fact that the locks were there and it was a sea port. They came over with their bombers and threw mines in the harbor entrances and tried to get the locks and other things disabled so that no Allied forces, who came to help, like the English, could use those port facilities. That's where it begins and from there on I'd better not start for that would make too long a story.

DR: What made you decide to leave the Netherlands?

CD: That was mainly economical reasons. In 1945 the Netherlands came out of the war impoverished you could say for industry was destroyed or hauled away to Germany. Cities were bombed out or were razed for military purposes. Business was regulated for the Netherlands not having any raw materials itself. Dependent on import of materials

which was all done on a ration basis which made it very difficult. Whenever you did business you had to go through an enormous bureaucracy in order to get anywhere. In 1951 we decided that we'd better look for some other place to live, and there were many opportunities. Canada was real easy to get into. So was South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand. Those were the main immigrant countries. Besides, our government at that time promoted emigration. They had a surplus of people, and just as soon got rid of some for the Netherlands was already one of the most densely populated countries at that time. After long deliberations and looking at our possibilities, we decided that the best for us would be the United States. The only ability I have is the ability to talk. I don't have any trades or any further knowledge. The drawback of the United States that there was, and there still is, a quota system in order to get into the United States. At that time the quota for the United States was two thousand per year. After we applied and were approved, (for you have to go through rigorous interviewing before you are approved), we still had to wait two years before our turn came up. We had plenty of time to think it over and see if we were making the right decision. You also need a sponsor.

DR: How did you go about finding a sponsor?

ED: His folks had friends in the same hometown who had a son who was living here in Holland, Michigan. We wrote him, but they couldn't be sponsors because they weren't citizens themselves. They found some friends who were willing to do that without knowing us at all.

DR: Is that how you decided to come to Holland?

ED: Right.

DR: Did you come directly here?

ED: Yes.

DR: What was the journey from the Netherlands to Holland like?

ED: Wonderful. It was like a cruise. On the ship it was just like going on a cruise. Seven days. And you're waited on hand and foot. This was not like a century ago when you sit in steerage and have to bring your own food. This is just wonderful. We were picked up in New York by the son of the people who lived in the hometown. Then we made it a little vacation. We toured New York right away and then traveled by car over here.

DR: What were some of your first impressions of the United States?

ED: Big, stretched out, lots of room, all the houses are white. I just a couple days ago went through pictures of that time, trying to straighten out some old pictures, and came across some old pictures. I don't know if you want to hear some little tidbits, but I remember going for breakfast when we were there. We stayed in a motel outside the city. They served potatoes for breakfast? Who ever heard of such a thing, fried potatoes for breakfast. Now on a trip I could eat those, too, I still don't eat them at home. That's a little something I remember. I don't know what else off hand. It was just great. It was like vacation. The reality came when we were here.

DR: Do you have impressions yourself?

CD: No, they're basically the same as my wife's.

DR: How difficult was it to leave your family in the Netherlands and come to the United States?

ED: Difficult. To tell you the truth, I didn't really want to go at all, but he wanted to go, so I didn't have much choice, did I? The first two years I would have just as soon gone back. It's easier usually for men than for women, even though we both got a job right away. It wasn't that I was sitting home. I hated it. That's what it amounts to. I hated it. It was just being so alone. Even though we met very nice people right away. They took us in right away. We went to church right away with these people. In fact, we lived for six weeks with the people who picked us up before we got our own apartment. They were wonderful to us, but everything was strange. What was real strange, picnics. That I remember, too. Sitting outside and swatting flies. Trying to eat. And these weird watermelons we had never seen before. If you give me enough time, I'll come up with a lot of these little things that I remember. And it was so hot. I thought it was so terribly hot here. It was awful; you couldn't stand it. Of course the apartment we had had no air conditioning. I sat in the bathtub half the time in lukewarm water. But we met wonderful people at church. I remember distinctly people coming by in the evening and saying, "Come on, we'll take you for a ride." Then we met other people and they took us to the beach and things like that.

DR: Were most the people that you met other Dutch immigrants or not?

ED: No, just the ones who picked us up. The other ones were all third generation. Still the Dutch names. They were all from the same

church. We went to Central Avenue Christian Reformed Church with our sponsor. The people who picked us up were not our sponsors. It was logical that we met the people there. There was a big circle of friends, and that's the circle we were connected with for quite a while. Another thing which they don't do anymore nowadays, but at that time you visited on Sunday night. You got nothing all night until eleven o'clock and then they spread a big table with food. That's fortunately not done anymore, but it was done then. That scared me to pieces because I wasn't used to that at all. I didn't know how to make Jell-o salad. I'd never heard of Jell-o salad. I didn't know how to make all these cakes and all this homemade stuff. In the Netherlands people don't bake near as much themselves as they do here because of the beautiful pastry shops. Who needs it? This was much more rural, too, to us. In fact we thought we ended up in the country here. We thought that was pretty small country. We lived in the big city.

DR: What kind of adjustment was that to make?

CD: We had a lot of laughs. Most of the immigrants here are also from rural areas. We were even in their eyes, city slickers. We had never lived in anything else but bigger cities. Actually we emigrated from the city where I worked last which was Utrecht, which is in the central part of the Netherlands, and that is quite a big city. I've also lived in Amsterdam, and in Haarlem, my wife also lived in Haarlem. Bigger cities, so we were used to city life, and not used to having a yard or anything of that sort. Living upstairs, people underneath and people above us. All the amenities



of city living, like going to concerts, and being able to go here and there quick. Public transportation, which was non-existent here. Another thing which we didn't find here was swimming pools. That was an unknown thing here in Holland, Michigan in 1953. You didn't need that people said, we have the lake. Now the fact that you couldn't go there in the winter didn't seem to make any difference.

ED: In fact, we thought they were backward here. Then another thing maybe is interesting, unless other people have mentioned that, too, they ask us the dumbest questions: "Do you have cars in the Netherlands?" "Do you have refrigerators in the Netherlands?"

CD: "Do you have telephone in the Netherlands?" Now coming from big cities where we had automated telephones where you could just pick up the telephone and dial any place in the United States without having to call an operator was unknown of in Holland, Michigan. If you wanted to call Grand Rapids in 1953, you had to go through an operator. And those people asked us, "Do you have telephone in the Netherlands?" "Does everybody wear wooden shoes?"

ED: The ignorance of people about other countries. I think over the years it has gotten somewhat better, although I just read in the paper about some foreign students, I forget where, they loved it here, but they said, people ask us such dumb questions.

CD: It still happens, all the time. Although television has done a lot of good. Because of television people seeing what's going on in other countries, travelogues and documentaries, have a little bit better idea about what life is like. Besides nowadays people travel

to Europe a lot easier than they used to in 1953. Then there's the thing of the people settled here earlier, so the second and the third generation, they still thought that the Netherlands was like it was when their parents left in 1896.

DR: How much English did you know when you came here?

ED: Enough. We both had high school. In high school is a little more strict as to what you take. There are no electives; you take what's on the curriculum. I had three years of English, four years of German, and five years of French. Within a week, we were both working. I was working in an office at the Holland Furnace Company, which is out of business now.

DR: Did you every have any problems communicating?

ED: No. We used some words that they don't use here. I still remember that I once said "fortnight," which means two weeks. That's in English; they don't use that here.

CD: My first job was at Montgomery Ward in the men's department. Montgomery Ward still had a downtown store at that time. I ran into such problems as people asking for a union suit. I didn't know what a union suit was. I'd never heard of it. This is sort of a one piece of long underwear from top to bottom with an emergency exit in the back.

ED: No, no problem whatsoever.

DR: You said you were both working within a week. Did you have any problem finding a job?

ED: No. We got the jobs through a couple of other people. Somebody knew that they needed somebody in accounts receivable at Holland

Furnace. They knew the person who hires people and I was interviewed. The nice thing was there was another Dutch girl working there who had lived here much longer, but she spoke fluent Dutch. They assigned her to work me in. It didn't take me long. I did office work in the Netherlands, so I had experience in that.

DR: Did you have children when you came over?

ED: No, they were born here. We have two daughters now. One in 1955 and one in 1957.

DR: How long was it until you found a house?

ED: To rent didn't take very long. Within a year we moved to a little house. We had lived in two apartments before that. Within six weeks we were in an apartment downtown, in a building that's still there. Then we moved one time to Fifteenth Street in another apartment, upstairs. Friends of ours from the church we were attending, they said the little house next door to us is empty and is for rent—it was a little cottage on the lake. We moved there and we lived there for five years. In those days it was sixty dollars a month rent, on the water, on Southshore Drive. Those were nice times. We had wonderful neighbors. We had Dutch speaking neighbors on each side, older folks that had come a long time ago but were still speaking Dutch.

DR: Did that help your adjustment?

ED: It was great, yes. For our children, too, because they called them Grandpa and Grandma for instance. Sunday afternoon, Mrs. Groot would call around, open the door on the porch, "Come on over for tea." They made us feel really, because that was still a problem

being lonesome, especially after the kids were born, I stopped working. I got lonely.

DR: How long did it take you to start feeling better about living here?

ED: I think it was a gradual process.

CD: I must say that I never had that problem. I always said I should have come ten years earlier. There is a difference there.

DR: Why do you think you felt differently?

CD: That's hard to explain.

ED: You [Case] were right away in contact with people all the time, and you liked it.

CD: I liked it, although it wasn't always easy.

ED: We had hard times, very hard times.

DR: What were some of the hardest things that you had to go through your first few years?

CD: Not making enough money. Being laid off from work and finding another job. Those kinds of things. But they were never long periods or decisive periods. There was always something else to do.

ED: The real bad time was in 1957. There was a recession. He lost his job and he was collecting unemployment for a while. Lack of money was a big problem at first.

DR: Did you ever consider moving back to the Netherlands?

CD: Never.

ED: No, never. Not even me. We were lucky that my folks could come already in 1957. Four years after we were here my mom and dad came for a whole summer. That was wonderful. I think in 1956 we already traveled to see your [Case's] folks who were in Nova Scotia. We

took our old station wagon and drove all the way up there just to see them because he has a sister living there in Nova Scotia. We're not the only ones in the family that emigrated.

DR: Were you the first ones to emigrate?

CD: No, my brother Peter was the first one. He went to Orillia in Ontario. We saw him off at Schiphol. We still have pictures of that, too.

ED: What about Elly, did she go after us?

CD: After us, yes, very shortly after us.

DR: How many of your family live here as opposed to how many still live in the Netherlands?

ED: Just these two. Case's brother and sister live in Canada. I don't have any family here at all; they all stayed over there. I went back to the Netherlands for the first time in 1961, so that is eight years later. He stayed back to work two jobs, and the children and I went on the fly now, pay later plan. Money was still pretty tight. I stayed three months, and when I came back, I believe I cried for six weeks. Every morning, only in the morning, not the whole day long. Because I had such a wonderful time while I was there. Coming back and doing without all these family again. It was very tough.

DR: What was it that you missed most about the Netherlands?

ED: Not so much about the country. I think it was just the family. Don't you think, Case?

CD: Yes, that's the main thing.

ED: The country itself, it's wonderful to visit but I can't say I missed

anything particular about that. It's great, but it's crowded.

CD: There were certain cultural things that we missed. Historic things, the large cathedrals, the beautiful organs. For a long time I didn't think that they knew how to build an organ here. But later on you find out that there are nice organs and good organ builders here, too. But that took a little while. Those were some of the things that we missed. Fortunately, living here in Holland, Michigan, with Hope College, and Grand Rapids, Calvin College, we picked up a lot of cultural entertainment, thanks to the colleges.

ED: If that wasn't here, we would move. We couldn't do without good music and things like that.

DR: What has kept you in Holland all these years?

ED: It's a nice town. It's a wonderful town, and the water of course. Even the foghorn sounds the same as the one back home. Of course we can't hear it very much here. I thought of that the other night when we were at the beach. It's just a wonderful location here. One time he had a chance to move.

CD: I had two chances. I applied for a job once because I didn't like the one I was working. Then I could get a job in St. Louis, Missouri. That was with Muskegon Piston Ring. I was interviewed there for three days straight, and they offered me what was for them a beautiful job, a high-paying job, but in St. Louis, Missouri. She [Elsa] said, "I don't want to immigrate again."

ED: Moving to St. Louis, Missouri, way too hot.

CD: After a while I told them, no my wife doesn't want to move to St. Louis, Missouri, so I turned them down. After a while they came

back and said they had an opening in Chicago. That was the same story; she didn't want to move to Chicago, either. In the meantime I found another job with a company in Chicago, but working out of here. That's the company I've been with for the last twenty-six, twenty-seven, twenty-eight years, since 1963. Just after I had accepted that job, the same people in Muskegon said now we have the Michigan territory open for you, and then I would have had the Michigan job. I just had started with the outfit in Chicago that had trained me for the job. That was Union Chemical and Oil Company in Chicago. I traveled Michigan as a sales representative.

DR: You said that you went to Central Avenue Christian Reformed Church. Do you still go to that church?

ED: No. I would like to mention, too, that we were members of the Reformed Church in the Netherlands. But we ended up, because the people we stayed with went there and we didn't have any problem with it. We changed once, and we go to Faith Christian Reformed Church now. One reason that we stayed with the Christian Reformed Church is that we found out that the Christian schools are mostly populated by Christian Reformed students, which is totally different again than the Netherlands. I went to Christian school there, too, but it was a Reformed Church school. All the schools there are equal anyway; they all get the same state aid there. It doesn't matter where you go. It's a little bit like what they're talking about now about the voucher system so everybody can send their children where they want to. When we found out that it was mostly Christian Reformed Churches that were in favor of the Christian schools, we



supported them. We definitely wanted our children to go to a Christian school. Then we decided we'd stay with the Christian Reformed Church.

DR: What sort of differences were there between the church you went to in the Netherlands and the churches you went to here?

ED: A great difference. We were worshipping in a big cathedral in the town where we lived after we were married. We became friends with the organist, and then he would play after the church service for us. It's a little different here. At the time, Central Avenue Church had an organist, I don't know how to describe her, but she ran her fingers from one end to the other like this.

CD: She would have been good on the mighty Wurlitzer in the Fox downtown theatre.

ED: Skating rink music. That was hard to adjust to. The rest of the services at that time were very much the same. It was the music that really got to us.

CD: There were a few minor differences. I remember the late Reverend Haverkamp delivering a sermon about how bad it was to go to the theatre, the Holland downtown theatre, now the Knickerbocker. "There was a movie being shown, Pick up on Tenth Street, and how it was possible that something like that could happen in the good town of Holland, Michigan." Now, in order to escape the heat in our apartment, we frequently went to the theatre because it was air conditioned. We knew what Pick up on Tenth Street was. That was a spy film and the "Pick up" was the intermediary who picked up the secrets from the spy or delivered them to the spy. After the sermon



was over, and the Reverend Haverkamp stood there shaking hands, I asked him if he had seen the film. He said no. Well then you shouldn't preach about it either, for it doesn't have anything to do with "Pick up." He had the idea that it was something like prostitution or something like that. Another thing is that as Christian Reformed people, you are not allowed to see or go to the beach on Sunday. For on Saturday night at 12:01, the devil. . .

ED: We were not supposed to go to movies at all. If they did, they'd go to Chicago or Grand Rapids to see a movie, so that they wouldn't be seen. We thought that was really stupid.

CD: And not being able to go to the beach on Sunday we thought was strange, unrealistic either. Those were little things that were different. In the meantime that has mellowed, too, even in the Christian Reformed Church.

DR: Why did you switch from Central Avenue to Faith?

ED: There was a change in ministers. We didn't like the next one so much. Another reason was just practicality. We can walk to Faith. It's only two streets away from here, and of course, kids in catechism, choir, all these things. They could go on their own, we didn't have to cart them around. We still enjoy the fact that, especially in the summer, we can just walk down there.

DR: What other ways have you been involved in the Holland community?

CD: What did I do? After we were here for a while, and since I also in the Netherlands had been working part time in the radio. My schooling actually was college-like schooling in a lyceum. My majors were literature, or Dutch language you could actually say,

this connected with journalism and languages. I had always wanted to become a famous journalist, but at the time I came out of school, they didn't need any famous journalists. I was editor of the school paper, and I wrote pieces in the paper and the magazines once in a while. This of course was over as soon as I came here. I thought there must be an opportunity here to come up with some Dutch programming. I went to one of the local stations, WHTC, first and said, can I do a Dutch language program here, there are so many immigrants here and people speaking Dutch and being taught in the colleges. They said, we'll try it out; we'll give you half an hour. I started with half an hour with material that I had myself brought over from the Netherlands, records that I had taken along. Then I contacted my old friends in the Netherlands and said, can you supply me with material, which they did. Here came a long connection with Radio Netherlands World Broadcasting System in Hilversum in the Netherlands. They supplied me with records and tapes and news and everything. I had a weekly program which started with half an hour, then became an hour, then became an hour and a half. First at WHTC and then WJBL, which is now JQ, came into town. They had a larger radius so I could get into Kalamazoo and that area, they had a more powerful station. So I switched to that station. I was with them for a long long time. Then I started to do an English-speaking Dutch program on WHTC with Dutch jazz from the Netherlands and classical music from the Netherlands. Then WBLV in Muskegon, Blue Lake Fine Arts Station started up and I did a classical program for them, too. That was an hour, and another hour. There was a time

that I did about four hours of radio work a week, which kept me pretty busy after work. I was busy every night with that, which was fun doing. I liked to do it. It was more like a hobby than work. The only thing is that when you go on vacation or so, you still have to come up with a program, so then you have to make programs ahead.

In 1973 what is now WGVU started up with public broadcasting in Allendale. I went to them and said, what about Dutch television programs? Well, show us what you have. I got in contact with the Netherlands. I came up with Dutch television material. From 1974 to 1984 I did a weekly Dutch program on Channel 35 on Sunday afternoon, from three to four. In 1984 the material sort of dried up, the Dutch started economizing and didn't have too much new material available any more. Then it died out. I do sometimes something when something new has come up. Then I say, I have some new material about this and this and that, so I do an occasional program yet. From 1974 to 1984 I did it on a regular basis. That was a lot of work, that television work. It all came in Dutch for they were regular Dutch television programs. I had to translate it all and do sound over. Wherever there was Dutch spoken, I had to dub in the English translation. The average program, I figured out, a one hour program took from twelve to sixteen hours to prepare. Fortunately I had the kind of job where I could say today I'll stay home and I'll work on my television program, which I couldn't have done if I had a nine to five job or a factory type job. That was my involvement in radio and television.

There was a large organization, it has shrunk quite a bit now,

which is the Dutch International Society, with headquarters in Grand Rapids. At one time I was a board member of that organization, too. Not for very long. I think about three, four years or so. That was my involvement in Dutch related things in this country.

DR: What sort of audience do you think listened to most of your programs?

CD: Most of them were Dutch, not necessarily immigrants only, but second and third generation which still spoke Dutch or wanted to brush up on their Dutch listened, too. Especially in the English language programs I did I had listeners from all over and from all kinds of backgrounds. That made it very interesting for the people who said well we just wanted to listen and we're finding out things about the country we didn't know anything about. I have piles and piles of fan mail, sometimes not so friendly.

ED: I have a whole scrapbook I made of all the things he was involved in, newspaper clippings and so forth, pictures that were taken. He was very well-liked at Grand Valley studio, because he's a funny guy.

CD: I had a fun time there.

ED: He did a lot of nice things. We still to this day always run into people that say to him, "Hi, Case," he has no idea who they are, "How come you're not on television anymore?" They did a survey about his television program and the poll indicated that about 50,000 people watched it, which is really quite amazing.

CD: Some, at some specific programs, I had an audience of half a million people. That was a series of programs about an American pilot who

was shot down over the Netherlands, landed in what was then the Zuider Zee, was rescued by the Germans and imprisoned there. After the war when they reclaimed the land in the Zuider Zee and made those big polders there, some 1600 planes came to life again, or actually came to the surface again. One of the planes that came up was his. Three of his buddies, the co-pilot and gunners, were still in that plane. Dutch television filmed that whole episode where they're digging that plane out of the mud and he was there. I got those Dutch films, and I located the surviving pilot who lived in New Jersey, got him over here, and had him on television while showing those films about the digging up of his plane. That was heavily publicized in the papers. Well, there was something concerning an American pilot. That was a program that drew the largest audience. My pride at that time was, and I have that on paper, it drew a larger audience than the Sunday afternoon football program at that time, which was quite surprising for Channel 35 at that time, too.

DR: Your turn?

ED: My turn? Oh, I didn't do anything so earthshaking. I stopped working when the children were born. Then when they were both in school, I went back to work, very part time, in an office. I did that for a long time. I worked for a car dealer for about sixteen years. Then for a while nothing. Then I got a very part time job at the Chamber of Commerce which is a lot of fun because I did a lot of the tourist, talking to tourists, and have done that last year yet. I still am on call, helper-out when they need all of a sudden

somebody because they have a staff meeting. I'm still a little bit connected with them. That's paid work. Then I've done some volunteer work. A lot for the church always. I still am a volunteer for the Christian schools when they serve meals, they have to have waitresses and kitchen workers. I'm still on a list with that; I just did it last Friday for a wedding. I have been on the board of the Community Concerts. It's not called that anymore. It's now the Hope Great Performance Series, but it used to be the Community Concert Series; it was a national thing. I was on the board and then I sold subscriptions for that for a long time. I've done some volunteer work for the hospital auxiliary from the Christian Reformed churches, collecting money mostly. Now since the last seven years now, I've been a weekly volunteer at Evergreen Commons. I'm there every Wednesday afternoon and I run a library there. That's what I'm mostly involved in. I don't know what else.

CD: Entertaining the grandchildren.

ED: Yes, right, and having them over for a couple of days and things like that.

DR: It sounds like you've both been very busy.

CD: Yes, you're also involved in a little recorder group.

ED: Oh, yes, I forgot. I've been doing it for almost twenty years now. I'm a member of the Holland Recorder Society. We get together once a month and we play, just for fun. The wooden flute type recorder. Dr. Huttar and his wife are the mainstay of that group. We meet at each other's houses. [end of side one] That's a lot of fun; I love to do it. We have played on occasion in church, once in a great

while we've played for a Christmas program. We even played for what they then called the Madrigal dinner at Hope College years ago. Little things like that. We don't think we are really good, but we are good enough sometimes. It's just more for our own pleasure. A nice group of about eight to ten people.

DR: To switch gears a little bit, what do you think about festivals like Tulip Time and other "Dutch" festivals in Holland?

ED: Oh, it's a lot of fun. I have nothing bad to say about it. They do a good job with the costumes. The Dutch dancers look wonderful. I don't think the dances look very Dutch, but then we are not from rural areas where they maybe originate from. But on the whole, I think it's great. I think Holland could have done a better job of keeping a Dutch look. If you compare with Pella, Iowa, for instance. Pella, Iowa, you get a much more better impression that it's of Dutch origin.

CD: What irritates me sometimes around Tulip Time is the nonsense in the media about what is supposedly Dutch and typical Dutch. Wrong use of verbs. For instance they will always say in the paper, "The dancers 'klompen' through the streets." Big headlines. No. There is no such verb as "klompen." A "klomp" is one wooden shoe, and two wooden shoes is two "klompen." But you cannot "klompen." That's just one of the things sometimes when articles do not make much sense. Overall it's fun. It brings life into the town.

DR: What did you think of it when you first came?

CD: Our first impressions were that they didn't use real flowers on the floats.



ED: I still think the floats are kind of primitive, but then we were used to the real flower floats in the Netherlands.

CD: More like the Pasadena Parade of Roses. They use real stuff there.

ED: Yes, that's fabulous.

DR: Would you consider Holland to be a typical Dutch community?

CD: No. More an all-American, but conservative town. But not typical Dutch.

DR: Do you think it ever was a typical Dutch community?

CD: It might have been, in the very beginning.

ED: Way back I think so, definitely. When you read the history. In fact for quite a long time I would say.

DR: When do you think that changed?

ED: Oh, the beginning of this century I think it started to change. I think up to the 1920s they still used Dutch in the churches and in catechism and so forth, from what I understand. Not now anymore. The only thing is yet that so many people have a Dutch name, but otherwise people are American; they're not Dutch.

DR: What do you think about some of the newer immigrants that are coming to Holland, like immigrants from Latin America and Southeast Asia?

ED: It's fine with me. Some people have a lot of trouble with that, but I think that's very unchristian. I often say that Holland isn't just there for Dutch people. It's a free country. That's what they throw at us when we say something. It's a free country, so it's a free place for everyone. It would be nice, of course, if they would all behave and all have nice yards and keep up their houses. We have a problem right next door here, I'm sorry to say. She's a



Spanish background; she's not an immigrant, though. The yard is a disaster.

DR: How do you think these newer immigrants are changing Holland?

ED: I hate to say it, but not necessarily for the better. A lot of the, when you read about crime, it's awful, lots of times it's a Spanish name. I hate to say it, but it's true. That has to do with their background. On the other hand, one would hope that being here, they would be influenced and adapt, which in a lot of cases is true. The Asian people make a much better impression. They're hard working, they keep their houses clean, and they're more motivated. Whether that has to do with where they come from, I was thinking of the climate, but that doesn't hold because Asia is hot, too. They say if people in hot climates, they have a different work schedule because of the temperature. But then that wouldn't work.

CD: It's cultural background.

ED: It must be cultural then. I don't feel like I'm qualified to really define all these things. I notice that a lot of sociologists don't even agree with each other anyway. But I have no problem with other people. I would just as soon trade her for any color people, so that they'd keep the yard nice like everybody else. It makes for a nice looking place. And to this day people say that Holland is one of the best looking towns, the neatest looking towns. Even our relatives say that. Which is kind of nice.

DR: Do you see any parallels between your experience when you came in 1953 and their experiences coming now?

ED: Parallels in so far that it's economical mostly. Of course, the

Asian ones, it's political escaping from Communism or whatever. For the Mexican people I think it's strictly economical. They are looking for a better life.

DR: Do you see them encountering some of the same problems you encountered?

CD: Yes, basically. There is a difference, though. The Dutch, the German, the Norwegian, or whatever European immigrants that came here, were faster in adjusting to different circumstances than a lot of these Hispanic people are. If we didn't know some English already, we were forced to start speaking English right away. There are scores and scores of Spanish people in Holland, Michigan, who still do not speak English, or refuse to speak English, and only Spanish is spoken in the home, which then makes it necessary for our public school system to have bilingual education, which wasn't there for use or other immigrants from Europe.

DR: Do you agree with that?

CD: Well, it seems to be necessary.

ED: I have a little bit of a problem with it. It was never done for the Dutch who came, and it was never done for a lot of other European people, in New York and so forth, when all these Italians and all these East Europeans came. I don't remember that they ever had bilingual teachers in their classrooms. But then that's another time.

DR: What do you think should be done about that?

ED: I don't know. They should apply themselves. I have a nurse friend in the hospital. She's a wonderful person, very caring, but she

gets very irritated when she gets an older Spanish lady or man in the hospital who don't speak English, and then she finds out they've lived here for thirty, forty years already. She's also an immigrant, and she thinks they should have taken the trouble to learn. After all, there are evening classes, community ed. classes. There are opportunities for people to learn. They should go through the trouble of doing that then. But it's a different culture. It's not as strange here for people from Europe, not as different as it is from people from Mexico. A lot of things have to do with that.

CD: Then again, the Asian people cannot be compared to European people either, but they don't seem to have any problem adjusting or getting to work.

ED: The only thing I do think, that we have some people in our church that were sponsored, big families, and they did end up eventually going to California to be near relatives. And that's very understandable, even though they did well here, they still go to where there are more of the same. I don't fault any culture or any group of people that they would like to be together. There is no getting away from that. This melting pot business is really baloney, because you still have all the different neighborhoods in the big cities: the Chinese quarter, the Greek quarter, the Italian quarter, and that's understandable. My best two friends are both Dutch immigrants, because there is something between us that I do not have with all my other friends, I have lots of other friends, too. But there is a difference, and we can talk, and we talk half Dutch and half English, and we're having a ball. We talk Dutch when

we don't want people to hear us. There's some bond that is just not there. I have great sympathy for any other group of people that they feel the most at home with their "own kind." It's just logical.

DR: In what ways has your Dutch heritage influenced the way that you raised your two children?

CD: We taught them to eat with their knife and fork [laughter]. Well, at least they do it properly.

ED: We spoke a lot of Dutch to them when they were small. They're thirty-four and thirty-seven now and they both can manage to converse in Dutch. Broken Dutch, but they keep it up. For five weeks we had my sister and brother-in-law here from the Netherlands, and we all got together several times and they could manage just fine. They are very interested in their background. They were not when they were teenagers, but then teenagers never agree with anything. They were pretty normal teenagers as far as that's concerned. One time when we were going to the Netherlands and our oldest was seventeen, she didn't really want to go. She would miss three weeks and all kinds of stuff. She was involved in competitive swimming both of them. Now they are very interested and they both wish they could go there often, but it's hard with families. We've taken them numerous times when they were young, so they know a lot about it. Whether we brought them up any differently than people here, I really would need more time to think about it, if there is an change, any difference.

CD: I don't think there is. They never came home telling us that their

friends could do other things than they could do or were allowed to do more things than they could. Their friends this or that. There never was that kind of a problem. From which you then can conclude that our upbringing wasn't any different than their friends.

ED: I think some of their friends were allowed to do less than we let ours. We were not quite as, conservative is not the word I'm looking for. There were still, when the children were small, there were a lot of people whose kids couldn't do anything on Sunday afternoon, not even play outside or ride their bike, or go ice skating in the winter. We didn't have a problem with that. That goes back to the same thing we mentioned before. When we came here we thought really this is backwards here.

CD: When we first came here those first ten years we were considered liberals in our church. They did not understand what the word liberal actually stood for, but they knew we were a little different and allowed more things that they thought were wrong.

ED: I don't know if this question comes up at all. I was thinking about that yesterday. We are still different to this day. If I want to be real critical, we still don't belong. I feel that in church. We still don't belong; we're not one of everybody else.

DR: Why is that do you think?

ED: Because we came from somewhere else. We didn't grow up here; we weren't born here.

CD: We didn't go to the same schools. We don't always vote Republican. We're outsiders.

ED: We're outsiders, and everybody else feels the same that is an

immigrant.

CD: Sunday morning after church we have coffee, and somebody comes up, "Hi, Case, how are you doing?" "Fine," I said. "Now, what kind of language do they speak in Switzerland?" That's where we are good for.

ED: Yes, "Been to the Netherlands lately?"

CD: "How do you do that in the Netherlands?" "Do they have this in the Netherlands?"

ED: We've been here now such a long time.

CD: And that still prevails.

DR: Do you think now if you went back to the Netherlands, that you would belong there?

CD: No, definitely not.

ED: No. We probably would be considered outsiders there now. We can still melt away in the crowd, though. Yes, we would be.

CD: It is remarkable, and this has been an experience from way back already, even with a Dutch bought raincoat on, you [Elsa] were waiting for the bus once, and this is one of your experiences I remember. And the people asked you if you were Canadian or American.

ED: Yes, that has happened, but it also has happened oodles of times when I'm shopping there that they do not notice. Sometimes they hear something, maybe a certain word that I say differently, that they say, "Are you from America?" How did she know? I said a Dutch word. Often they don't notice it.

CD: That's happened to me, too. I just walked into a tobacco shop and

bought a package of cigarettes. The man asked me, "Are you Canadian?" They first assume that you are Canadian, for most of the Dutch immigrants went to Canada, far more than ever went to the United States. After World War II they went there fifty thousand a year for a number of years. There's an awful lot of them in Canada. When they notice that you are from abroad, they first assume that you are Canadian.

ED: There is by now, sometimes I think that when I'm there, there's hardly a family in the Netherlands that doesn't have a relative either in, mostly in Canada, or Australia. It's just amazing.

CD: Canada made it real easy after World War II to come to. They paid for your passage, you could take furniture and everything along. They assigned a sponsor for you; you did not have a choice. They wanted people badly after the war.

DR: Why is that?

ED: Because it was so sparsely populated.

CD: What's the population of Canada, which is larger than the United States? I think thirty million, thirty-five million at the most, something like that. The peculiar thing is that after a few years in the Netherlands, ten years after we left, they had the same problem in the Netherlands, and they started importing people. They started having foreign labor come in from Spain, from Algiers, from Turkey, all kinds of them. Morocco. They got in some sort of industrial revolution and were suddenly short of labor. Since then immigration has stopped. Once in a while somebody trickles in here because of a relative who says you should come over, or there's a



good farm for sale here. But there is no steady stream of immigration anymore. It's completely reversed. Another thing which is remarkable, too, that people from here who think for whatever reason, either they're dissatisfied here, or are getting homesick, especially when they're getting older. I just heard that story from a friend just last Friday who then go back to the Netherlands, with their social security from here and their savings, and after selling their house, and think that they will be happy in the Netherlands again, after two or three months are back here again. I heard just recently about a story like that. Somebody who first had bragged, "I'm going back to the Netherlands; you can have this country, etc., etc., sold my house, got \$120,000 for it, got my Social Security. Boy I can live like a king in the Netherlands." Three months later he was back. That tells you something, too.

DR: I'm through with my list of questions.

CD: Well, it's about time. [laughter]

DR: Is there anything else that we haven't covered or anything else that you want to say.

CD: No, I can't think of anything. Do we still eat Dutch?

ED: In some ways, yes, some meals are Dutch. I still don't make lasagna or spaghetti, we don't eat pizza. Now I'm not speaking for the children. The crazy thing is that especially our oldest daughter doesn't cook at all like I did while they were brought up on more or less Dutch meals. That's an interesting point, not very important I don't think. Yes, in a way we do still do a lot of things Dutch. We drink tea for breakfast, never coffee. Only when we're on trips,



then he drinks coffee for breakfast, but otherwise he drinks tea. We eat a lot of potatoes, I would say more than most people here. Boiled potatoes with gravy.

I do remember that when I started working at Holland Furnace we had to write little notes on whatever we were doing, it was called the department accounts receivable. We were two desks next to each other. It wasn't long, now I'm kind of bragging, and the head of the department said to me, you are a better speller than anybody else in this room. I was pretty proud of that. I was really good in languages at school. you either have a feel for languages, or you don't. I'm a fanatic scrabble player by the way. I play twice a week with my Dutch friend, who has nothing but grade school, and she is terrific. And we play in English, not in Dutch. But that helps a lot in keeping your spelling up, too.

CD: Finis.

ED: We get such a bang out of reporters and people. They don't know how to pronounce French words at all. Frightful. Those are things that we notice. Americans are very poor in any other language. They don't even know how to say just little expressions. They can't even say those right. They don't care. We are the biggest country, brag, brag, brag. We have quite a bit of trouble with that, this bragging business.

CD: We get quite a kick out of it, in fact quite a few laughs. We're always going for the gold [in the Olympics], and then we don't even get the bronze. On the other hand we are very proud if they do get the gold.

- ED: We root for America first and then for the Netherlands. The Netherlands doesn't have a lot of people in there, but they have a bronze medal already. We are for the United States, and we've done that for years.
- CD: We had a terrific time one time when we were in the Netherlands, also during the Olympics in Munich, when Mark Spitz won seven gold medals.
- ED: We were in the Netherlands and we watched everything on t.v. there, without commercials. They have to pay a yearly fee for television, that's how they collect money. They do have commercials, but they group them in one spot; they don't break up a program.
- CD: And not all during the day; they only have that at news time. Five minutes before news time you have nothing but commercials, and then you get the news, without commercials, and the rest of the program is all without commercials again. But there are commercial companies. Luxembourg, and the Netherlands has one, too, where they do have commercials. But their national networks are without commercials, but like Elsa said, you pay a fee, a listening and viewing fee. You pay also for listening to the radio.
- ED: Some kind of a tax or whatever you call it. There are a lot of things different, which makes it interesting.
- CD: Some things better than here, in fact quite a few things are better than here. We are always very careful to say that in the company of Americans, because the first thing they say, "Well, why don't you go back?"
- ED: We are not supposed to criticize anything, to this day. Well, as a

born American you can do it, but we are not supposed to do that, which is grossly unfair. We've been citizens for years. That's another thing that makes us to this day outsiders in a way. Oh well, I always say I'm a person of two worlds, which makes your life experience richer really. People also don't want to hear that you know more than what they do. We're having a grand time here. It's wonderful. We're happy. I call this my palace. We have no desire to keep up with the Joneses.

CD: Did I tell you about those two. . .

ED: Oh, here comes a joke.

CD: Did I tell you about those two Reformed ministers from Holland, Michigan who went to the Netherlands? They went and they arrived there on Saturday evening and went to their hotel. Being Reformed they thought that Sunday they'd better go to church. They asked the desk clerk where is the nearest Reformed church? "Oh, it's not too far, about two or three blocks from here." That's where they went, being good ministers, going to a Reformed church. They got lost on their way to church, and they came in there kind of late. As you know, churches fill up from the back, so they came to sit quite on the front pew almost, which wasn't so good, for they thought, well, we'll just see what everybody else does, and if they stand up, we stand up. Fortunately, a man came in after they came in, late, and sat in front of them, so they were safe. Everything went fine; when he stood up, they stood up, then sat down. Until just about at the end of the service. The minister announced something and this man stood up, so they stood up, too. Then everybody started laughing.

The whole church was laughing. The man sat down again, so they did, too. After the church they introduced themselves to the minister. They said, now we didn't understand too much for our Dutch isn't too good. Everything went fine, but only at the end of the service when we stood up everybody started laughing. What was the matter? "Oh," the minister said, "I remember. I announced that a new family had joined our church, the Johnsons. He would be happy to introduce all of them, but he couldn't for Mrs. Johnson just gave birth to a beautiful girl just last night or this morning. But I asked the proud father to stand up." Now you can turn the thing off.

Note: Page 11, Schiphol is the international airport of Amsterdam.  
Page 17, The Dutch International Society, formerly called the Dutch Immigrant Society, had a membership of 14,000 families until the late 1970's. Membership has declined since then and now stands somewhere between three and four thousand.