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Hoekstra, Fred and Helen Oral History Interview: Dutch Immigrants who Emigrated to the United States after WW II

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Interview with
Fred and Helen Hoekstra

Conducted June 23, 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?

FH: My name is Fred John Hoekstra.

HH: My name is Helen Hoekstra.

DR: And your current address?

FH: Our current address is 1116 West Thirty-second.

DR: Could you please state your date of birth?

FH: My date of birth is the fifteenth of April, 1919.

HH: My date of birth is October 25, 1918.

DR: What date did you emigrate from the Netherlands?

FH: We came here the sixth of December, 1956.

DR: What part of the Netherlands are you from?

FH: For our married life, we lived twelve years in Groningen, in the city of Groningen.

DR: What kind of a place is that?

FH: The province of Groningen, and the capital of the province of Groningen.

DR: Is it a large city or a small town?

FH: Yes, quite a large city.

DR: What did your family do?

FH: I was a baker. My dad was a farmer, a dairy farmer. I became a baker, and I was twelve years a baker in the Netherlands, and I had my own bake shop over there.

DR: What made you decide to leave the Netherlands and come to the United States?

FH: More for adventure. The whole neighborhood was about emigrating to Canada and America. And we got the emigration bug, too, and then

decided to emigrate.

HH: We really did not have to go away, but we had it really busy. It was always rainy. That summer it was sixteen or seventeen Sundays raining. When we were planning to go for a walk, it would start raining. We said, let us go to a warm land.

DR: Did you have relatives that lived in the United States already?

HH: Not at all.

FH: Not at all. Yes, we had an uncle that lived in the United States. But we didn't have any contact with him, though, of any kind.

DR: Where did you first come in the United States?

FH: We were supposed to go to Grand Rapids, but they had work for me here in Holland, and we went right away to Holland.

DR: How did you decide to go to Grand Rapids?

FH: Our sponsors. There was a church in Grand Rapids that was sponsoring us. That way we came to Grand Rapids.

DR: What sort of job did you get here in Holland?

FH: I went straight to the bakery.

HH: French Pastry

FH: Yes, French Pastry

DR: How easy was it for you to find a job? Did your sponsor help you set up a job?

FH: No, the sponsor did not have a job for me. When we were still in the Netherlands, we had a telegram, a telegram from here, that there was a job for me here in Holland.

DR: In what bakery?

FH: That was French Pastry [Shoppe], on Eighth Street. The owner was

John Elsinga. He was a Dutchman, too, and an emigrant.

DR: You mentioned previously that you had three children?

HH: Yes.

DR: How difficult was the traveling to the United States and the adjustment for your family?

HH: Adjustment was easy. Fritz had right away work and the kids adjusted real well. The schools, too, no problem at all. The language. The little one was three. We came in December, and when he came outside in April, he talked English.

DR: How much English did the two of you speak?

FH: I had high school in the Netherlands. I had three years of English over there. I could not talk it. I could spell it pretty good. It was hard for us.

HH: To make sense of it. The language was hard for us at first, yes.

DR: How did you go about learning it?

HH: Through the kids, and television, and radio.

FH: Through the kids, and talking to different people, (the first couple years we didn't have television), and going to church, and talking to the people.

DR: What sort of people did you first come in contact with when you moved here?

HH: Dutchmen.

FH: Yes, more immigrants.

DR: Did you seek to contact them, or did they contact you?

HH: When we came, they contacted us.

DR: What were some of your first impressions of coming to the United

States?

HH: Good.

FH: Yes, real good. It was in the winter. We came in the winter, and it was really a strong winter over here, with a lot of snow. We were not used anymore, to a lot of snow.

DR: Was it difficult finding a place to live and settling in?

FH: No, they had a house for us. First we lived on the beach on Lake Michigan. They had a house for us. Then they found for us a house here in town.

DR: Who found a house for you?

FH: The people where I was working for. They looked for a house for me.

DR: How many years did you work in that bakery?

FH: Not even half a year. For four months, and then we bought our own bakery.

DR: What was that like, buying your own business here?

FH: It was a big adjustment to go. The difference was we had our own bakery for twelve years in the Netherlands. We knew how to run a business. That made a lot of difference. In the bakery that we bought, was a girl who had already worked for years in that bakery. She knew what was going on. We had to do the baking and the bookkeeping and everything. She helped us out with sales managing and with the language.

DR: Did you both work in the bakery?

HH: No, at first I didn't. I stayed home with the kids. Later on, I slowly started working in the bakery, helping out when it was busy.

DR: Do you still own this bakery?

HH: No, we had it for twenty-five years.

FH: We are completely out.

DR: Does it still exist?

HH: Yes, Hempel's Pastries.

DR: What made you decide to get out of the bakery business?

FH: I was sixty-two, or sixty-two and a half. We said, this is enough. I had a chance to sell, and we went out. But not because I was sick of it. No, I still liked it.

HH: You worked there for a couple years still in the mornings.

FH: Part time, yes.

DR: Looking back to when you first came, what was probably one of your most difficult adjustments to make?

HH: You miss your parents, especially all the holidays—birthdays, they are really special in the Netherlands, and the other holidays, Christmas and so—then we really miss the family, the relatives. You miss them in the beginning and you still do more when you get older. They came to visit us quite often, my mother and my dad. My dad once but then he had a heart attack and he died. My mom came over when the kids got married, and several times after.

DR: How many times have you gone back and visited the Netherlands?

FH: Maybe ten, twelve times.

HH: Every other year or so.

FH: The first ten years we didn't go back.

HH: No, the first ten years was hard; we couldn't get back.

DR: Why was that?

HH: Because the bakery. Fritz couldn't get missed, the kids too small

to leave alone.

DR: Did you ever consider moving back permanently?

FH: No, never.

HH: No.

DR: Why is that?

FH: When you have been so many years over here, no, then you cannot.

HH: And the kids are here now, and the grandkids. To visit is nice.

FH: It all has changed over there, too.

HH: Yes, it is different there.

FH: You don't find it back the way that you left it. It all changed.

DR: Did you have any members of your family that emigrated after you did?

FH: You had one sister.

HH: Yes, one sister, and she immigrated to Canada.

DR: Did she have a similar sort of experience as you did?

HH: Hers was all different again. She was not married. At first she was here by us. Later on she went to Canada. She met a guy, and he came out of Canada, and that is the way that she went to Vancouver.

FH: At that time, through an ad in the paper, that way she got him. But she will never tell us exactly how she got him, how she met him.

DR: In what sort of ways have you been involved in the Holland community?

HH: Church work, for the school, volunteer work.

FH: Members of different organizations.

DR: What church do you attend?

FH: Central Avenue Christian Reformed Church?

HH: Fritz still goes to Evergreen Commons baking, volunteer work, and I go to day care on Thursdays, volunteer, no working, volunteer.

DR: Is Central Avenue the church that you've attended ever since you've lived here?

FH: Yes.

DR: What religious background did you grow up with in the Netherlands?

HH: It was really the same.

FH: Really the same, yes.

DR: What made you decide to follow the same tradition once you got to the United States?

FH: We were brought up Christian Reformed.

HH: And to bring up the kids the same way we were brought up.

FH: And we believe in that way.

DR: Are your children still in the Christian Reformed Church?

FH: Yes.

HH: Yes, all three of them.

DR: Have you ever considered moving on or changing to a different church?

FH: No, really not. At the moment, and you know it too, there is a lot of trouble in the Christian Reformed Church.

HH: Sometimes we say, when they start fighting, then we go out.

FH: Then we say, we went through the same thing in the Netherlands. There we had the split in the Christian Reformed Church in 1940 and 1945. They had that fight in the Christian Reformed church in the Netherlands. Then one family member would not talk to the other family member because of the church. And we said we will not go

through that a second time. Then we leave.

HH: But that is not that far yet.

FH: No, we will not be a member of a fighting church.

DR: What has motivated you to stay in Holland? Have you ever considered moving away from Holland?

FH: No.

HH: We love Holland.

FH: Holland is a beautiful place.

HH: To live by the lake. Holland reminds us of home, I think.

DR: In what ways?

HH: Family ways, church, the schools are good.

FH: We've said so often, shall we go a couple days up north, but then we look at it and we say, why shall we leave Holland? This is so beautiful. You find everything over here.

HH: You can walk by the lake and you can do everything. We travel, yes.

FH: Yes, we don't stay all the time in Holland.

HH: But then we come back and then we say, this is the best place to live.

DR: Have your children remained in Holland or have they branched out?

FH: We have our daughter living in Kalamazoo, but both the boys are living here in Holland. I don't think they will leave Holland too easy either. One is working for Herman Miller and the other one is working for Howard Miller, and they are most of the times on the road. They have been in every part of the United States, but they are always glad that they are back here in Holland.

DR: How did your Dutch background influence the way that you raised your

children?

FH: We kept it up, the Dutch way. We were brought up that way and brought our kids up the same way.

HH: But there's not much difference, the American people or the Dutch people, not really, not here.

FH: The upbringing has changed over the last twenty-five years.

DR: In what ways?

FH: In every way.

HH: They are freer now. We had more discipline than there is now.

DR: Do you see that as positive or negative?

FH: Negative, no, in one way it is nice.

HH: Yes, we were brought up when we were small and there was company, we had to be quiet. We could just listen. But now the kids, they take part in it and I think that is really good. That is really good that they are included, too. We really could not grow up so good, they kept us down a little. I think that is a good thing, but a lot of things—discipline. There is not so much discipline anymore, and I think that goes too far the other way, that there is no discipline.

HH: We were brought up strict.

FH: You were brought up stricter than I.

HH: Yes, stricter than you were brought up. We could never pray by the table, not allowed, but the kids here take part of it, and that is in the school, too, the kids take more part in it. They go for class and they can talk and so. When we had to do it, we were shaking in our boots, we were not used to it. I think that is

really nice here. I like that, that the kids take part in a lot of things. They just go up in class. Our granddaughter, too, she is just ten, and she plays a little song in church. She just goes up there now. I never would when I was ten. I hardly dared to open my mouth. I think that is just great, that they can do it over here.

DR: What parts of your Dutch heritage have you passed onto your children?

FH: Our kids are really Americans. But still, there is some Dutch in them.

HH: In the upbringing of their children. They almost do it just like we did it.

FH: We didn't bring our kids up so strict?

HH: No, we didn't bring them up that strict.

FH: In some way strict, they knew they could go that far and not any farther.

HH: At night they had to be home at a certain time. They could go away and they could do a lot with their friends, but they have to be home.

DR: Would you consider yourselves more Dutch or more American?

HH: We are more Dutch, but not the kids. We always celebrate the birthdays and all that stuff. We are more Dutch in that way. Our kids, no. My daughter has a husband, and they don't even think about the birthdays, and I think this is not good. They are not brought up that way. The birthdays, they don't even say happy birthday. My daughter-in-laws are the same. When there was a birthday in our family, my dad would pray by the table, then he'd

mention that, and he thanked the Lord that he had added another year to one of the kids lives. All those little things, I am missing that here.

FH: That just a way of living, the customs.

DR: Holland is seen a lot of times as a very typical Dutch community. Do you see that?

HH: I think so.

FH: In some ways, yes. In church and at schools, yes.

DR: Would you respond to that differently when you first came as opposed to now. Do you think that it's changed over the years?

FH: Still you have here a lot of conservative people.

HH: It didn't change so much yet. The last couple of years, I think, then it changed here.

FH: Especially the churches.

HH: On Sundays, when we came here first, the kids could not do a thing on Sunday, neighbors would say. We had a Sunday in the Netherlands, it was more a family day, but here they had to go Sunday School, and then the afternoon, choir, and catechism. In the week my husband was always baking, and he said, those kids don't have to go to Sunday School. I hardly see those kids, I want them home on Sundays. Out of church, then we have to have coffee. We always do that, have coffee and goodies, and later on we have dinner. Not all the other parents liked that. Then the other kids wouldn't go to Sunday School either. His friends all around, would say, he doesn't have to go to Sunday School, can I stay home, and oh, no, you have to go.

FH: We did not have Sunday School in the Netherlands. Sunday School was for kids who never went to church. That's what Sunday School was for, and not for kids who went to church in the morning. They did not go to Sunday School.

HH: They could go home with the parents.

FH: That way our kids went never to Sunday School. We liked to have the kids home out of church.

HH: We had more of a family day. Here it was busy Sundays, had to go to choir, we came home, and Sunday School, yes, at first they went to Sunday school, and eating fast, and then they had to go to choir.

DR: How has that changed over the years?

HH: Oh, that is still that way. Those people have a real busy Sunday.

DR: Do you think it's more that way?

HH: Yes, more.

FH: Our grandchildren all go to Sunday School.

HH: And then they eat fast when they come for dinner here, and then they have to be at two o'clock at church again. Sometimes after church, after the second sermon, there is something else for those kids. When they grow up a little bit, they spend the whole day in church. We were not brought up that way. I think that they have a busy Sunday here. Not that it is wrong, but I guess there is not much left for the family.

DR: What have you done to keep Sunday a family day for your family?

FH: It still is. The house is always open. The kids know we like to have them home.

HH: The coffee pot is always on. They come out of church and we have

coffee together, if it is possible.

FH: We like to have them home if it is possible. The door is open, they can come in. They don't have to call us first, and ask can we come over, no, they know the first thing the coffee pot is on.

DR: Did the fact that Holland is more of a Dutch community make it an easier adjustment for you when you first came?

FH: That made a difference I think. A lot of people knew still a little bit Dutch.

HH: In the stores, too. When sometimes we wanted something and we didn't know what to say, there was always somebody who could help us. They could speak Dutch and we got what we wanted.

DR: Did you keep up speaking your Dutch once you came here then?

HH: Yes, we speak it together quite often. We had lessons, too, English lessons.

FH: That was more fun.

HH: Yes, more fun but you learn always something. One evening with a couple other families that emigrated.

FH: I know when we were always terrible busy in the Netherlands. When we came over here, I worked forty hours, and maybe in the Netherlands I worked sixty hours. One afternoon we were walking downtown, it was in the winter. That could never happen in the Netherlands. We had the store open until six o'clock. But now we were walking downtown and we looked at each other and we said to each other, "Do we really like to live this way--work forty hours and walk here in downtown on Saturday afternoon?" We said no.

HH: We liked to work again, have our own business again.

FH: Then we bought our own business again.

DR: Was that a hard adjustment for you?

HH: You worked long hours.

FH: Yes, but I was used to long hours.

HH: The first couple years were hard.

DR: Could you talk a little about your business and how you decided to run it?

HH: The baking was much different. In the Netherlands you had all little stuff, and all fancy stuff over there. We had a beautiful store, we had really a busy store in the Netherlands. On Saturday we were always working with five or six people over the counter, bread and all kinds of fancy stuff.

FH: There is more quantity over here.

HH: Yes, big donuts. We never saw a donut in our life. Here it is much easier, much, much easier.

FH: But with bookkeeping and all that. It is a lot easier. You have so many rules over there, and laws, and not here.

DR: What types of rules?

HH: You could not sell warm bread before ten o'clock.

FH: And you could not start working before five o'clock in the morning, and six o'clock in the night you had to be closed. But that was a good thing. Here the stores are open until nine or ten o'clock or some twenty-four hours seven days a week. That is so wrong.

HH: You don't see that in the Netherlands. Every store has to be closed six o'clock, and Saturday earlier. And you have always an afternoon free.

FH: You have to take vacations. We left because we didn't like all those rules. Now later on we say those rules were really good.

DR: How long did it take for you to come to that realization?

FH: We came one time back from vacation here in Holland and that time every store was closed at six o'clock here at night. Then Meijer opened their store on the north side, and Meijer was open until twelve o'clock and then it changed, everything changed. Stores were longer open.

DR: Do you think that is a good or a bad change?

FH: A bad change, for the families. Before they knew that the dad was coming home at six o'clock. Now, they don't know when he'll come home, if they work in the night or have a night shift.

HH: We think it is bad, but I guess the Americans, no.

FH: Well, last night in the paper, I read it, how nice that in Europe that they have that. They knew over here that that is not good. Here some stores are seven days and twenty-four hours a day open. They will not change that.

HH: Over there in the afternoon at twelve o'clock, the stores are closed, that they can have supper or a little snack together. At one o'clock or one thirty, some people do it at one thirty, some do it an hour. But most close up so that they can have lunch together.

FH: Life is now just as easy over there, and in that way easier over there.

DR: Did you run your store according to those rules or according to the "American" rules?

FH: To the rules over here. But we never had a store longer open than

six o'clock; six o'clock it was done. In the morning, when we had here a customer at four o'clock in the morning, you helped them. But in the Netherlands you had the door locked.

HH: Before ten o'clock you could not sell fresh stuff. When the bread was still warm, no, you couldn't sell it. It has to be cold. It was not healthy to eat warm bread. There were the health reasons.

FH: It was for protecting of the workers, too. So that they don't make more than so many hours, and for the competition, too.

DR: How do you feel that the Dutch heritage has been preserved in Holland?

FH: Real good I think.

HH: I think so too. They do a lot with the museum and all that, and the archives.

DR: What do you feel about festivals like Tulip Time?

FH: Beautiful.

DR: How did you feel about them when you first came?

HH: We never saw so many wooden shoes together. [laughter]

DR: Did you get involved with them immediately when you first came?

FH: The kids got right away involved in the parades and we always went too.

HH: we never missed a parade, unless we were out of town. Otherwise no, we never missed a parade.

DR: How did you feel about them back then?

FH: They are great over here.

HH: The festivals are good over here. I can't say otherwise, the parades and so.

FH: Now when they have a tulip time parade over there in the Netherlands, they have all live flowers. You don't have that over here now.

HH: The parades are different there. Very different. There is all with live flowers.

DR: How do you think the things that Holland has done reflect what life is like in the Netherlands?

HH: Good, I think so, with the windmill over here, and there are more things.

FH: And along with Tulip Time they have the Dutch heritage show, and they show the people how we lived in the Netherlands.

DR: Increasingly, Holland is becoming more culturally diverse. How do you feel about that?

HH: When we came here, when you see that, we missed first the flowers. That was the first thing that we missed. But in the Netherlands they go around with flowers and they buy every Saturday two or three bundles of flowers for your house. We missed that. Yes, that was one of the most things that we missed, wasn't it Fritz?

FH: Yes, Holland is changing.

HH: When we came here the people didn't have flowers in the garden, but now they do. That's changed a lot.

FH: At first, there were not any Spanish people living over here, and that has changed.

DR: How do you feel about that change?

FH: We are ourselves immigrants, too. When we should say, we don't like it, we are about in the same boat as those people.

HH: Don't say that. We try to learn English, and those people, they don't try to learn English, they just speak Spanish. Yes, the kids try, but the parents, when they came in the store and they had always a little kid with them, and they were telling the mother what to buy, tell her what they wanted. They don't want to talk English.

DR: What do you think about that?

HH: Well, I think they should learn English.

FH: Yes, that is again a fault here in America. We don't have a language over here. We speak English, but not a. . .how shall I say that?

HH: Yes, well, the Dutch have Dutch, and the English have English.

FH: Yes, the Dutch have Dutch, well, that is the language. The Netherlands is Dutch. But America has not an official language like that.

HH: There's English.

FH: America does not have an official language, though. We speak it, but not official.

DR: There are a lot of people that come from a lot of different countries and speak a lot of different languages.

HH: It is the "Melting Pot."

FH: Spanish kids have the special lesson in school for their language, that is no good.

HH: We had to learn English right away.

FH: Our kids had to learn right away English. The teacher would not speak Dutch to our kids. We had to learn English, and then you pick it up in a couple months. There was a custom over here, when

immigrants came, their kids were set one year back in grade.

HH: In the Netherlands, when they were in the third grade, they put them in the second here.

FH: We lived for a week on Lakewood Boulevard, there was a country school. Our kids went there for one week to school on Lakewood Boulevard, and they had never immigrants in that school.

HH: They were the first immigrants when our kids came.

FH: They asked our kids in what class in the Netherlands, in what grade. They put them in that same grade. Then a week later they put them in the same grade they were in in the Netherlands. A week later they went to a school here in the city, and they asked, in what grade were you over there. No. They were in third grade. So our kids were never put a class back. And they could make it, too. It was the biggest nonsense to put those kids a year back.

DR: What do you think is holding back these new immigrants from making it in the same way?

FH: I think that they are hard workers. Especially the Cambodians, and the Vietnamese.

DR: In what ways do you think they are changing Holland?

HH: In the culture a little bit, with the food, that are all different.

FH: I think in one way they're good. We have all the same rice over here.

DR: How have you seen Holland change as more immigrants from lots of different countries have come in?

FH: We have a lot of industry over here. We were always short on workers over here, the last years. That way, people are coming to

the cities where they need workers, that we had a big influx of other people from other cultures, who took those places.

DR: How do you compare yourselves to newer immigrants from Latin America, or from Vietnam, or Cambodia?

FH: The Dutch as workers had a real good name, hard workers, they had a real good name. I think that the Vietnamese and Cambodians are too that way. They have a real good name, as workers.

DR: Do you think that you had similar experiences as they have?

HH: I think so, yes.

FH: Yes.

DR: How do you see Holland changing in the future because of these new immigrants?

HH: It is getting busy and it is more criminal, I guess.

DR: What do you think causes that?

HH: Do you think there is jealousy?

FH: Jealousy between the colored people and Vietnamese and Cambodians. I think that the colored people and Spanish people, they don't like it that those Vietnamese and Cambodians work them up so fast.

HH: A lot of them have businesses already. I think there is some jealousy there.

DR: Why do you think some have been so much more successful than others?

HH: Stronger wills.

FH: They are stronger workers. They like to be their own and become something.

HH: And then the whole family works, not just father and mother, but the kids. Everybody works hard to accomplish something.

DR: How do you see Holland changing in the future as it becomes more and more diverse?

FH: It will give problems. As long as the people are working, that makes a lot of difference. When all those different kinds of people, and when they don't have work, then there gives trouble, because then they have too much time to think about other things as work.

DR: What do you think needs to be done to avoid that?

FH: Come into politics. Try to give everybody work. But that's not so easy.

HH: I guess it will get busier, and maybe more. Some businesses move out.

FH: Too bad our government did not do a thing in the last years. Not the government, but the Republicans and the Democrats. What did they do the last year for those people? Nothing.

DR: Do you think that there are more problems now than there were when you came over?

FH: Oh yes. A lot of problems not only over here; they are all over the world.

HH: We lived at Fifteenth first and the kids could play outside until ten o'clock, and you don't dare to do that anymore. Walking on the street, you can hardly do that anymore, especially when you have teenagers and so on. And that's just not only in Holland. In Kalamazoo and everywhere it is bad, too.

FH: There are still a lot worse places than over here. we still live in a pretty safe city.

FH: My son, he's running for Congress. I have to pick up signatures. You have to have so many signatures to come on the ballot. I talk with a lot of people, and a lot of people who came here the last year from other places. They all like it over here. It is a nice city to live in, they say.

DR: Have you talked with other Dutch immigrants who haven't liked it here?

FH: No, about the same experiences we did.

HH: All our friends like it here. At first we had a couple friends they were really homesick after a while. She was for years homesick for the Netherlands. But when she had the kids, and got busy, and all this, she liked it over here.

DR: When you first came did you associate more with other Dutch immigrants?

HH: Yes, and we still do. You can talk about your backgrounds, and Americans, they have a different upbringing.

FH: When we are in company with American people, they know a lot of people here in Holland. [end of side one]

HH: We don't have so much in common with Americans. For example, they have a reunion, from the schools and all, we cannot take part in that. We didn't go to school here. We miss out. Last night we were talking about it with other American friends. They said, pretty soon we have a reunion from fifty years. We miss out on that. Ours is in the Netherlands, and we don't have anything here.

DR: How hard was it to adjust to that?

HH: Not to think too much about it.

FH: They had the anniversary for the school where I went. It was a hundred years old. I felt sorry that I didn't go. That kind of thing, you all miss.

HH: And you don't realize that, not before. . .

FH: No, you realize more, when you have less to do, and you're thinking more about those kinds of things.

HH: When we were young, we were always busy with the kids, and the bakery, and we didn't realize it. But now we are older and we have a little bit more time. Then we got a letter again, and we say, oh, that is a school reunion, and we can't go, and we miss out on that.

FH: I know later on, what we did to our parents. We took their grandchildren, we took them away from them. At that time, we didn't realize what we did to them, that we took their grandchildren away. My parents saw their grandchildren never again. Andrew was ten years old, and the other ones were seven and three. They saw them never again.

DR: How difficult was that for you?

FH: We didn't think about it. A couple years ago, my son, his company was planning to place him over to the east. I fought as hard as I could to keep him over here. I couldn't do anything to him, but to talk to him, don't go away from here. Stay here. We would miss our grandchildren. And what did we do? We took them away, and that time, when we left, that was in 1956, we said maybe we will see them never again. Not at that time that everybody flew back and forth.

HH: Now they travel back and forth all the time, and we do ourselves, too. And we saw your mom and dad, but they did not see the kids

again. My parents did when they came over. Your mom and dad didn't see the kids again.

FH: Our own kids, they don't know their cousins in the Netherlands. I think when they would know all their cousins, then they would tell us, why did you leave?

HH: Our youngest son said that to us once. He went to the Netherlands, and he had such a good time, and he said, "How could you leave that country there I thought it was just great?" And the Netherlands is nice.

DR: You said that when you were younger, you were busy with your kids and so you didn't think about the fact that you were separated from your family. When did you first start thinking about that?

FH: Maybe five, six years ago. One day and I thought, hey, what did we do? We did the same. We took our grandchildren away from them.

HH: We are really lucky that we have the kids all around here, when there are a lot of parents, there in California and all over the place, that we have the grandchildren all nice close by.

FH: But then you can still visit them. They are in the same country.

HH: When you have them in California, sure you can still go there. But we always have to go overseas.

DR: What do you think has kept your kids so close?

FH: They have work over here. That makes a difference, too.

HH: They love their work, and they love the family, too, to step in or so and have coffee with us.

DR: How often have your children visited the Netherlands?

HH: Not that often. My daughter just once. But they are really not

that interested in the Netherlands.

FH: And Andrew two times.

HH: And Pete more for his work. For his work he flies overseas sometimes.

DR: How interested were your children in their Dutch background and your Dutch background?

HH: The older they get, the more interested they get.

FH: When we were thirty, forty, fifty years old, then they hated that we were talking Dutch to each other. When we were in stores or in the restaurant, and they were with us, they said to us, "Don't talk Dutch." They were ashamed that we talked Dutch, that we couldn't talk English.

HH: Now the grandkids when we talk Dutch, they say, "Don't talk Dutch, then we can't understand it, Grandma."

DR: Did your children keep up the Dutch language?

FH: Yes, pretty good. When we have relatives over out of the Netherlands, they can take up a conversation.

DR: Was it difficult for you to keep your children speaking Dutch as they were growing up?

FH: No, we like it that they talk, that they keep it up.

DR: Did you always speak Dutch at home, or did you speak English?

HH: When we are together most of the time we speak Dutch.

FH: And when the kids are over, we talk English to them as much as possible.

HH: Sure, when the kids are over, then we talk right away English.

DR: When your kids were growing up, did you speak more Dutch or more

English?

HH: At first we spoke more Dutch. Slowly, though, we had to learn English.

DR: How big a priority was it for you to learn the English language?

HH: I think it took me five years.

FH: I still have trouble once in a while. With some words, think, what is that, what is that.

DR: When you first came over, did you find other Dutch immigrants whom you associated with?

FH: They were all immigrants from the last year, they came. We came in 1956, they came all earlier on, 1950 and 1952.

DR: Did that help your adjustment?

HH: Yes, that helped our adjustment. They are still our friends. They are our brothers and sisters, we say. We can depend on each other. When we need help, or when there was sickness. We didn't have brothers and sisters here.

FH: And we are still interested in the work what the kids of our friends are doing. We are still one big family.

DR: I've gone through all of my questions. Is there anything you'd like to share that we haven't covered?

FH: One of the nice things, our son is now running for Congress, and I think that's a big thing, and we can see it that we are really Americans, too. We think it's great that he's running for Congress.

HH: He's running against VanderJagt.

[Incidental conversation]

FH: But I think that it's very nice when we have been here thirty-five

years, that our son is running for Congress.

HH: A big experience.

DR: Do you think it was easier or harder for him because of his Dutch background?

HH: I think that it is harder for him.

FH: He has other ideas. He has some of our ideas. We like to talk politics.

HH: Yes, we like to talk politics. We found out the first years that the Americans didn't talk about politics, and we really missed that. I think it is getting a little better, but otherwise a lot of people, they don't like politics here. In the Netherlands, politics is everything. Maybe it comes that this is a big land and the Netherlands is a small land. Maybe that is part of it.

DR: Do you think your views on how important politics is have influenced you son?

HH: Yes, I think so.

FH: After five years, we became right away citizens, and the kids became citizens, too.

HH: We have still friends who are not even citizens, and we don't like that. We are living here, and then we should be citizens also. We were here five years and we did it.

FH: We live here in this country. We made it our country. We cannot go always back and say that is over there better and that is over there better.

HH: No, there are things that's better, but that is the other way, too.

FH: They said it was so easy to start a business over here. You put the

money out, you try to get the money, and you start baking. In the Netherlands you cannot do that. There are so many laws, certificates for this. Here, you have the money and you have a place, and you start up. It was really easy for us to start our own business.

DR: Did you know that it would be so easy when you came over?

FH: Yes.

HH: Oh, yes.

DR: Did that influence your decision?

FH: Yes. Life was in that way a lot easier over there.

HH: And the taxes I guess.

FH: And other things in this country are rougher. If they don't make it, they don't make it, and people don't worry about it. It's your own fault, and you did it, and you tried it, and you didn't make it, well. We love it over here.

HH: Yes, we have it good over here.

DR: That's all I have to cover. Thank you very much for taking the time for this.

HH: Oh, your welcome.

FH: I hope it is helping you with your work.