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

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Interview with
Harry and Corry Hoekstra

Conducted July 22, 1992
by Donna M. Rottier

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

DR: Could you both please state your full names?

HH: Harry Andrew Hoekstra.

CH: Corry Hoekstra.

DR: And your current address?

HH: 338 Pineview Lane, Holland, Michigan.

DR: Your dates of birth?

HH: January 24, 1922.

CH: [date removed], 1926.

DR: Thank you. What date did you emigrate from the Netherlands?

HH: We left the Netherlands December 8, 1950.

DR: What part of the Netherlands are you from?

HH: We were from the province of Groningen.

DR: From a large city or a small town?

HH: A small town just south of the city of Groningen, called Haren.

DR: What did you do in the Netherlands?

HH: In the Netherlands I was an employee at the post and telegraph office. My wife had been an employee at a telephone office. But at that time we were married and she was at home; she was not working anymore.

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

HH: Several things. One was housing. We were living in with our parents because there was a lack of housing because of World War II. Another part was because we were kind of afraid of what might follow WWII because the Russians seemed too powerful to us. They had gone all the way to Berlin and East Germany. We knew that it would be

worse than the Germans yet, that they would overpower Europe.

CH: You always wanted to go back to Indonesia because he was born in Indonesia.

HH: I was born in Indonesia and I had planned after WWII to go back to Indonesia, but because it had been overtaken by Sukarno with a Communistic government, I couldn't go, and that's why I started looking elsewhere. I was determined I didn't want to stay in the Netherlands.

DR: What was life like in the Netherlands after WWII?

HH: We were recovering, but it was slowly, and it wasn't going as fast as we would like.

CH: But it was pretty good.

HH: Yes, it was not too bad.

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

CH: Relatives.

HH: Luck.

DR: Did you come directly to Holland?

HH: No, we first joined her relatives in Waupun, Wisconsin. We lived there for four years, and then we went to Grand Rapids, where we found other relatives of her, and we stayed there and we had a job there for four years. Then I could get a position here in Holland, which looked much better to me, so we moved to Holland in September, 1958.

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

CH: Cold, snow.

HH: The first winter was the worst one in fifty years. We got into an old house which was poorly insulated. So we couldn't get it any warmer than 52 degrees inside, and that was only in one room. One day it was 42 below outside. It was tough.

CH: The funny part is, you are young, and you can take an awful lot. You think all the time, if you work hard enough, it will get better. It did get better. It was not as if we were moaning and groaning at all. It was new impressions a lot.

HH: We always thought it would become better, and it did.

DR: What were some of the biggest adjustments that you had to make?

HH: One was of course speaking English.

DR: Did you speak any English before you came?

HH: Yes, and I think that has been a big plus. The immigration officials in New York told me that I wouldn't have any difficulty living in America because I was helping other people, as an interpreter, with their English. I had very little problems with the English language, and neither did she, when we got here.

CH: I'd like to tell you a funny thing about that. The first time we had to go to the grocery store, we took a piece of paper and pencil and in our English we were trying to figure out sugar and everything translated. We had a nice big list and we came to the store, and the guy looked at it, and he said, "Oh," and he read everything in Dutch.

DR: How many people did you know when you first came to the United States?

CH: An uncle and aunt and some cousins. We had a little girl when we

came, she was two-and-a-half. They wanted to put us on a farm. My cousin had eleven farms and he put people on, on what they call a 50/50, the expenses are 50/50. He wanted to put him on a farm, but he [Harry] had been in an office all his life and he just was not a farmer, so that didn't work. Wisconsin is a farm country.

DR: Was it a big adjustment to move from Wisconsin to Michigan?

HH: Yes, in a way it was the second emigration.

DR: Did you encounter any special difficulties in doing that?

CH: City life compared to country life.

HH: Yes, we certainly lived in the city.

DR: How hard was it for you to find a job once you were here in Michigan?

HH: It wasn't hard except it wasn't what I wanted. But we had a family, so I felt I had to take what I could get. I had had business college in the Netherlands, so I felt I could do better. The best thing I could get in Wisconsin was a factory job. That was not really the purpose for me to come here. I felt I could do better. Once you have taken a factory, every place I applied for a job, they always asked, "What are you doing at this time?" and I would have to say I'm working in a factory, and that did it.

CH: It was harder to get a job.

HH: It just seemed that I couldn't cross that barrier until I got here in Holland, and the guy found out that I spoke five languages and he said you are too good for the factory. He put me then in the laboratory.

DR: How long did you work there?

HH: Twenty-seven years, until retirement.

DR: What has motivated you to stay in Holland all these years.

HH: Well, for one thing, the job. Also, we liked Holland. It's a nice town, it's a clean town, it's pleasant.

CH: It's a nice place to bring up the kids. We like the beach.

HH: We felt it an improvement over Grand Rapids where we lived in the city, and this was much more what we would like.

DR: Who were some of the first people that you came in contact with once you moved here?

HH: Mostly people from the church.

DR: What church did you attend?

HH: We went to Calvin Christian Reformed.

DR: Why did you decide to go to that church?

CH: We thought they needed us. It was a small church.

HH: It was a small church that had just started and we felt they needed us.

CH: But they didn't.

HH: They didn't and later on we switched. We go to Harderwyk now.

DR: What were the reasons you decided to switch?

CH: That's pretty hard. The children were not satisfied. The minister had problems with the congregation. In fact, later on he went out.

HH: He's not a minister any more.

CH: It was better for us to leave there.

HH: And it's worked out fine. We're very happy now.

DR: In what other ways did you become involved in the community?

CH: I started working at Michigan Bell.

HH: I worked at what was Holland Color and later on became Chemetron, and now it's BASF. It was the same company, it was just being sold all the time. I got involved in Tulip Time, especially because my hobby is for history and Dutch heritage. I started the Dutch Heritage Show. It had been started. It was a costume show and I made it a variety show.

CH: He has been in there for nineteen years.

HH: No, it's about twenty-two years. I was director of the show.

DR: What did you think of Tulip Time when you first came?

HH: I was very disappointed, because I thought they would present something typical Dutch, and it isn't, it's something typical American. What the American thinks what Dutch should be, but it isn't.

CH: I was disappointed because all the floats were paper flowers instead of real flowers, and we were not used to that. So now, when we have visitors over from the Netherlands and we show them Tulip Time, I always say, don't be disappointed like I was. Look at all the work it is to make those paper flowers. Now I see it, but my very first impression was disappointment.

HH: The Netherlands is a land of flowers, and when they make a float, the weather is something like now—cool and kind of damp—and the flowers will last. They make these floats with real flowers and it's impossible to do that here.

CH: We know that now, but when you come you don't.

DR: How long did it take for you to start to feel differently about Tulip Time?

CH: Not long, I think. The second year really we realized there's a lot going on.

HH: We thought it was a great festival to bring the community together and there is some community spirit. It's fun.

CH: I love it.

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

HH: Not very much.

DR: Would you consider Holland a typical Dutch community?

HH: I consider it a typical Midwest American community with a Dutch influence, which you can see in the buildings, Hope College has some gables and so on, which is typical in Dutch style. But otherwise, no, I think it is a Midwestern town. They have their cleanliness. Everything looks neat.

CH: Also the labor force (it has maybe something to do with all the churches, too) the labor force is actually better than in any typical city. And crime, too, you have crime here, but it's less than in any typical city. I don't know if that's the Dutch influence or the influence of the churches, and the way they are related.

DR: Would you have responded to that question in the same way when you first came? When you first moved into Holland did you think of it as a Dutch community?

HH: I've really never thought of it as a Dutch community.

CH: Some people do, but we have never done that, no. It's always been a place that I liked.

DR: As more newer immigrants are moving into Holland—from Latin America and Asia, Vietnam and Cambodia—and it's becoming more culturally diverse, how do you feel about that?

HH: You mention different people. I have a very strong opinion because I am an immigrant myself. I feel, that if you want to be successful in a country like America, you have to say I want to become an American, and I'll speak the American language, which is English. It's a kind of English, it's not the same as English. Those people that come here and insist on speaking Spanish, I think they are doing the wrong thing and they are becoming jealous of, for instance, the Asian people, who in a very short time are successful. I think that's their trouble. They should say, okay, we are going to speak English, and actually it isn't that hard a language.

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

HH: For one thing, to discontinue the bilingual language in the schools.

CH: Give them the first year English so that they know the English language, but then teach them all in one language. The heritage you should learn from the parents. This is always said, when we teach them in the Spanish language, then the kids get that really rich heritage. But no, that should come from the parents.

HH: That's the only way that you can create an American out of the kids. Americans were taken from all over, from all different countries, it's a blend of people.

DR: Do you relate any of your experience when you came in the early fifties to the experiences of these people coming here now?

HH: In a way, I think, if I look at some of the people driving around

the cars that they have. I started out in a 1935, thirteen year old Chevy. Driving in an old car and those kinds of things.

CH: I think they come a lot better here than we did when we came.

HH: Yes, we had nothing.

CH: The people are all prepared to pick them up, to help them. We didn't have that. One time there was an article in the Sentinel about that the kids need bilingual language because what if those poor kids couldn't read and couldn't learn and stuff like that. He wrote back and said, my children went, and one of my nephews had to double a class because he didn't get it. But now it was good that he doubled, because now he's the top executive somewhere. Then we got a letter back from this one man and he said, isn't it sad for those little kids that they have to double. We don't feel that. Don't advance your kids in school unless they are ready for it, because you don't do your kids a favor with it. Eventually your kids don't know what they were supposed to learn and they end up on welfare eventually. So it's much better to double one class and then go on. That's what we felt that our experience was compared to what the tendencies are now.

DR: What was the experience of your children in education?

CH: Anne went to school in Wisconsin. There was no kindergarten there, so she went to first grade for two months, then we moved to Grand Rapids. Well, she was in first grade, so she went in first grade. She didn't have kindergarten so she had it tough for a few months, really tough. But she's pretty bright and so she had no problem. She's a lawyer now. She was the only one that had trouble with the

language a little bit.

DR: In what ways did your Dutch heritage influence the way that you raised your kids?

CH: Honesty, religion, work ethics.

HH: I always felt if you want to get somewhere, you better work for it. Like Anne, too, she worked to get her money for college. She worked hard, and she studied hard, and my other children, too. They realized this and for the rest don't stand there with your hand stretched out, expecting other people to help you. You have to help yourself if you're capable of doing it.

DR: Have you ever considered moving back to the Netherlands?

CH: No.

HH: Never.

DR: Have you gone back for visits?

HH: Yes, we've gone back for visits.

DR: And what are your impressions now when you visit the Netherlands?

HH: That it's a nice country to visit and it's nice to come back.

CH: When we come back, I feel like I'm home again. It's a funny feeling, but this is our home.

DR: Did any members of your family emigrate after you did?

HH: No.

CH: Well, wait a minute. My folks came half a year later, and my sister.

HH: Yes, but the plans were there, to emigrate with the whole family. So her whole family has immigrated.

DR: I have a sister in Grand Rapids. My brother died and my dad and mom

died, so I have just a sister left.

HH: We ran into a little snag here with the names. My name is Hoekstra. You see it all over. It's a very popular name, even in America. Wherever I go, I look in the telephone directory and I see the name Hoekstra somewhere--Chicago, New York, wherever I've been. Even in Alto in Wisconsin, a real tiny little town. The name Hoekstra is there. Her name was Antoon. They were the last people of their family to leave the Netherlands. It's supposed to be a Huguenot name. She was very surprised last winter when she was in Florida. She looked in a telephone book and she saw the name Antoon by accident, so she right away called these people and she wanted to find out if somehow or other they were related. She said, did you come from the Netherlands or France, and do you have family in the Netherlands or in France? The man said, "No, my grandparents came from Lebanon." Then this summer, we went to visit our children in Utah. Our daughters are in Utah and in New Mexico. On the way back we stopped in Oklahoma City. Again she looked in the telephone book and under the "A"s she found an Antoon. She called him, and there again the same story. He said, "I don't know that I have any relatives in Florida, but my grandparents came from Lebanon." So now I don't know if I married a Dutch girl which I thought I did or if I married a Lebanese.

DR: Could you maybe talk about some of your experiences in the early years after you immigrated here?

HH: One of the things, when I came back in the Netherlands, I talked to a person who had spent more than a thousand guilders taking lessons

in driving a car and trying to get her driver's license. I recall what I did in Wisconsin. I had never driven a car. Her cousin took me out in an automatic Dodge, a brand new Dodge and I drove around. Then I bought this old car, which had a shift, and I wasn't used to that at all, but anyway, it took me a while to get used to it. Then this cousin said, you'd better go get yourself a driver's license. So I drove to town, it was a small town. I went to the police station and I said, "I would like to get a driver's license." He said, "What's your name?" He didn't ask for any identification. He looked at me, he said, "You're six feet tall," and he said, "Let's go in the car." He said, "Make a right turn," and, "Make another right turn." So I made all the right turns and we just drove around the block, and he said, "Park in between those two cars." I said, "I've never done that." He said, "Okay, I'll help you. Stand beside this car and back up and turn the wheel, now turn it the other way and now go forward a little bit. Okay, you did well, you have your driver's license." It was easy as pie.

CH: When he came home with that car--they had to go to a different place to buy the car--it was seventy-five dollars. His cousin brought him and he had to drive it back himself. It was hard because it was the first time he drove a shift. He drove in the yard by us, and it was a nice day. "Oh, what a nice car. Beautiful. Let's polish it." We didn't have car polish, but we had furniture polish, so we polished the car with furniture polish. Beautiful. But it was getting real dark and darker. We had a garage, but we couldn't get it in the garage, so I went across the street to my cousin. He

wasn't home; she was there. I said, "Charlie home?" She said, "No, why?" "Well, we just polished the car and it looks like rain, and we would like to have it in the garage." "Oh," she said, "It doesn't matter that the car's outside." Well, for us it did matter. We walked back. I said, "You can do it. I'll go in the garage and I'll lead you." I stood in the garage and he went hop, hop, kind of jumping with the shift. "Slow, slow, whoah!!" He didn't know what to do and he pulled on the shift and he flew back out. I said, "Boy, you did that good." He said, "I didn't know what I was doing, I couldn't find the brake!"

HH: I saved your life.

CH: Yes, you did, because I could've never jumped sideways. [laughter] There's a lot of little things like that. We laugh a lot; we have a lot of good times. Saturdays was neat. He made very little money, and it was the three of us. Whatever we had left over on Saturdays, that went in Anne's bank, and then we bought a pint of ice cream. We had a pint of ice cream for the three of us. Oh, it was a feast! Well, now we have ice cream in the freezer all the time, we don't think anything of it.

In the house, too, we had the mice and the rats playing ring around the rosy under our bed at night. That was scary.

HH: It was a very old house, but we had fun. It was a beautiful house in the summertime.

CH: We came here, it was the Twenty-first of December, I think, when we arrived. It was just before Christmas. We went to Alto Church. In February was my birthday. We had never heard about showers or so.

The day before my birthday the neighbor lady came over and she said, "Tonight some women from church are coming in their house and we would like you to come, too." I said, "My husband, too?" "No, not your husband." Okay, so I walked down there. People came and they all brought boxes, just like a brown box. I didn't know what a shower was so I didn't even give it any thought. I thought they'd take food along to eat there. Then we played some games, and then it was all canned food for us, as a shower. It was really neat. The next day, our driveway wasn't plowed out because we didn't have a car and the snow was awful high, so he made a little gully through there and we had one of those little flyer carts, we borrowed one of those little kids' toy carts. I bet we made thirty trips with the cans on there. And we didn't have boots.

HH: In those time, those were all farmers' wives, and they canned that stuff in those glass jars.

CH: Remember that one day? I opened a can and I didn't know what it was, it was kind of yellow. I opened it and I heated it up, and we tasted it and it was terrible. We threw it away. I said to my cousin, "I don't know what that was." She said, "That was pumpkin; that was supposed to be for pie." We thought it was a vegetable.

HH: Pumpkin is not raised in the Netherlands, so we didn't know what it was.

CH: It has been good.

DR: Did you come in contact with a lot of other immigrants, or mostly Americans?

CH: We have some friends who are immigrants, but we made it a point not

to isolate ourselves, but to incorporate ourselves more or less in the American life. Now, too, we have more American friends than we have actually Dutch friends. That was our main idea, to not isolate ourselves.

HH: Some immigrants have formed little groups, where they stayed among themselves. We felt for us, and especially for our children, that it would be better to become Americanized as much as possible. Maybe I'm an oddball, but that's how we felt. We've never been sorry.

DR: I've gone through all my questions, are there any other parts of your experience you'd like to share?

CH: It's hard to think back. We had a lot of medical problems and we were always taught that America is a good country except when you get sick, which is true, too, but it has worked out all right for us. If you get sick, it's sometimes hard.

DR: How is America different from the Netherlands that way?

HH: In the Netherlands they take care of you from the cradle to the grave. Whatever happens to you, you just go to the doctor. You don't have to worry about the bills. Yesterday I took my sister-in-law to the airport. She had been here for almost two weeks. My wife asked her the questions, "Are you still getting a vacation pay?" What happens in the Netherlands is you get, even if you are old and retired, every month you get a certain amount of money from the government. In the month of your birthday, they double that, because they say you need that money for a vacation.

CH: So they never have to save for their vacation.

HH: If they want to save for a vacation, that's up to them, but they really don't have to. You get double-paid one month.

DR: Which system would you consider stronger?

HH: That depends. If you happen to be sickly and you need it, it's great to have it. On the other hand, of course your taxes are way up.

CH: If you are sick, the Netherlands is a better place to be, because look at all the people here who don't have insurance. If they need surgery, they can't.

HH: Or if you're old, they take care of you.

CH: But for the rest, America's a great country. I just love America.

HH: We wouldn't go back. When we are back, we feel we have Americanized and we don't feel that much at home.

DR: Would you consider yourself now to be more Dutch or more American?

HH: I feel I'm more American.

CH: I do too.

HH: The only problem is, when we are in the Netherlands, I have very little problem speaking Dutch. My wife has. She mixes English and Dutch. I can speak Dutch, and I can turn around and I can speak English. But the English I speak with a Dutch accent; the Dutch I speak with an American accent. Actually I don't belong to any country I guess. At first I didn't want to believe it, but the people said, you speak with an American accent. It was a brother-in-law and I said, yes, sure. But then I came in a store, and I thought—this guy is going to ask more if he finds out I'm an American. I said to my son, don't you speak to me in English, keep

you're mouth shut because he couldn't speak Dutch. I said I'll just talk to the shop owner. As soon as I had ordered something, it was film I guess, I paid, and then he said, "Do you come from America?" I said, "How do you know?" He said, "I can hear it, the accent."

CH: What we are also happy about, too, that we came here, when we look back, is that all our children go to church, they're very active in church, and I don't know how that would have been in the Netherlands. That has always been a big plus when we think about it.

DR: What was your religious background like in the Netherlands?

HH: Reformed. Calvinistic. In the Netherlands that's changed quite a bit.

DR: In what ways?

HH: So liberal. You really have a lot of people that don't even think about getting married; they just live together. They never go to church. They're nice, they're friendly, but they feel what's the good of a piece of paper?

CH: We were kind of shocked. Last week we had five people from the Netherlands, and two of them were students, college students. So we said Sunday, well we're going to church, we'd like you to go along, but you don't have to. Then this one girl said to the boy, "Are you going?" He said, "I don't know." I said, "You don't have to, but it's nice to know what an American church looks like." He said, "Well, I don't even know what a Dutch church looks like." Oops. Then I think, I'm glad that we came here. But it's a beautiful country to visit, the Netherlands.

HH: That's the only thing I sometimes feel about certain American churches, especially the Christian Reformed, to which denomination I belong. I think some of them are too Dutch, too traditional. This is 1992, it's not 1952, and it's not 1902, and it is not 1852. The world changes all the time, and so does the church, and the church has to change because the people are different. The message that the church brings should be in tune with the—the message should not be different but it should be brought in a way that is more suitable to the people of today. People have changed.

CH: That people can understand today, because we do different things today.

HH: Yes, and they should use the type of music and the things of today. Twenty years from now things are going to be different again, and then many of the people, I think, that are so much for change today, they should say, no, but we didn't use to do it this way, and we want to keep it this way. That's absolutely wrong, you have to be able to change.

CH: Sometimes you make religion out of your tradition. You have to be careful there, because your religion does not change, but your traditions may change.

HH: That's been my opinion. Another thing, is this is why we tried to become Americans, we wanted to change, because things around us are changing. We are older now, but things are way different now, than they were in the fifties when we came here, and we have changed, and there are a lot of people. They complained about all the Dutch people that went to Canada. Those people, most of them stuck

together. They are one certain Dutch group and they still have their Dutch services besides their English services, and those people were considered to be very liberal compared to the churches of Dutch descent here in America, in the 1950s. Now, they are more conservative than the American churches. That is because these people had the traditions of the 1950s and they kept them, and that's the way they wanted to be. In those days they were young, and now they are old. A lot of people don't like change; they are afraid of change. That to me is one thing that I noticed that you have to keep on changing.

CH: It's sometimes feels comfortable if you don't change.

HH: That's why they don't want to change.

DR: What do you see happening in the churches in the future?

CH: I think the women's issue won't go away, so eventually they'll have the women. Maybe the church will split eventually, I don't know.

HH: That for instance is what I feel is so stupid, because that shouldn't even be an issue. That's just bickering. To me the task of the church is to reach out into the world and make it a better world. To sit there amongst each other, and to bicker about—can a woman do this and can a woman do that? My second daughter is a follower, my oldest daughter is a leader. They are both females, that has nothing to do with it. It is what is up here that makes the difference. That's how I look at it. You have also men who are leaders and you have men who are followers. If you have a man who is a follower and you put him in a leading position, he is going to fail. The Netherlands, I look back at that, since 1890, they have

had queens, four queens in a row, and it went beautiful. There is no problem whatsoever, that they should have had a king. I feel there shouldn't be any differences as far as that's concerned. They have been arguing if it is Biblical by looking at the Bible for twenty years and they have not come out of it, so there is no straight line, so that is not an issue then. I mean, if it was black and white in the Bible, that it says a woman may not do this and this and this, but according to me, there are some that say it is so and there are others that say it isn't so. They argue for more than twenty years, well, then it is not very clear.

You have people that come here from the Netherlands and they look and they say, this is better in the Netherlands, and this is better in the Netherlands, and they're so happy when they go back. These people came here and they said we are impressed with the roominess, the space--almost every house has a little yard around it. In the Netherlands, they are all stuck together practically and they live on top of each other, and the result is the people become a little more aggressive [end of side one]. The American people are friendlier because there is more space, and they don't live right on top of each other. I go walking and everybody I meet says hello. In the Netherlands it wouldn't be that way.

CH: Now you can't generalize, because when you say America, Holland, Michigan is not America. If you go to L. A. or so, you have a different story.

HH: There again you have the people closer together. I think that makes the difference. You have to give everybody a little space around

themselves, so he can be himself.

DR: Is the Netherlands as a whole country, a very crowded country?

HH: It's very tiny, and it's very crowded. There's fifteen million people there and it's maybe twenty-five percent of the state of Michigan.

CH: The Netherlands fits four times in the state of Michigan.

HH: Where do we go with all the people? Where we were last year was beautiful, it was spacious. But if you go in the western part, it is one city next to the other city, and they are all grown together, and there is almost no country left. It is all city.

CH: But the northern part is beautiful yet.

HH: The northeast, where we were, is still open. I still have my hobbies interest in the Netherlands. I'm very interested and I read about windmills and I can give you a little talk on how dikes are being built and why they are being built, and I could talk about wooden shoes and what have you.

DR: What's made you interested in studying the history of the Netherlands?

HH: I don't know. I thought it was just interesting. I remember a lot about it, also, I remember certain things about Indonesia where I used to live. I think it makes it interesting how people are different. The games we used to play as kids in Indonesia compared to the Netherlands. In Indonesia for instance, you fly a kite, but the string that you use, you pull through glue. Then you cover it with pulverized glass. Then you try to come into somebody else's string and go back and forth with your kite and cut it. That was

just like a war. Whenever there was another kite, you wanted to cut the string on that kite and keep your own kite to be victorious. Those kind of games are not being played here, nor in the Netherlands. I thought it was kind of interesting why people did it there that way.

DR: How many years did you live in Indonesia?

HH: Eleven years. It used to be the Dutch East Indies. My dad was a missionary among the Chinese people that lived in Indonesia. He was principal of a Chinese Dutch school. There again, I may have come to the idea with the language thing, because they would take Class Zero, what they called, so it was something like kindergarten, and they would teach the kids Dutch. And from then on they would teach everything in Dutch. The thing is that it took the kids maybe three months at the most and they had the language, and then they speak two languages. They speak a different language at home than they speak in school, but it is no problem. When I worked in the Netherlands, I worked in the post office, the telegraph office, a big city where a lot of people come, because the Netherlands is situated between Germany, Belgium, France, England, and there's a lot of trade going on. I had to learn in school, it started in the fifth grade, French, German, English, and Dutch. I just loved it. I thought it was so interesting that I would get a foreigner at the window, and the girl would turn around and call me, and I would go and converse with the man. So I would speak then in German, then in French, then in English. I liked to do that.

DR: Can you still speak those languages?

HH: Not any more. English is no problem. Last year we made a trip to Austria. I had no problem understanding German. The French, too, sometimes I read something in French or I hear some French. I can understand it, but to speak it, I know the words, but they are too far away to recall. So I tend to stumble and stutter and then suddenly the word comes. I cannot converse in it anymore, but I can understand it. I think, if I was in Germany maybe for a month or so, I would pick it up, no problem.

DR: What sort of education did you both have in the Netherlands?

CH: I had high school and he had high school and business college.

HH: Never did much with the business college. Should have gone into accounting or something like that, but I went into the laboratory.

CH: I worked for twenty-two years for Michigan Bell, as an operator and sales-rep. Then when the office closed, I could retire early or go to Grand Rapids, and then I retired. It's been good.

DR: Well, that's all I have, if that's all you have.

HH: Good, would you like a cup of tea?