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Muller, John and Tena Oral History Interview: Dutch Immigrants who Emigrated to the United States after WW II

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Interview with
John and Tena Muller

Conducted July 9, 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?

JM: John Henry Muller.

TM: Tena Muller.

DR: Could you also state your current address?

JM: 790 Harvest Drive, Holland, Michigan, 49423.

DR: Could you both please state your dates of birth?

TM: November 1, 1918.

JM: October 8, 1917.

DR: What date did you emigrate from the Netherlands?

TM: 1949.

JM: May 15 we arrived here.

TM: No, it was earlier. We left the end of April.

JM: We came here in early May 1949.

TM: But we don't know the date.

JM: It took us fifteen days to go across the ocean on an "old tramp" steamer, an old "liberty ship" from the war, ballast--sand was in it.

DR: What part of the Netherlands are you from?

JM: When we emigrated, we came from Eindhoven. That is where the big Philips companies are. It's a good size city. We originally lived in Amsterdam during the war years. We emigrated from the harbor Amsterdam, which is unusual because there is a canal there that goes to Ymuiden and very few emigrants left Amsterdam by ship. Most of them went to Rotterdam. That's the only big port really. There's Eindhoven. There's where the big Philips companies are, something like Westinghouse. They bought Magnavac out here in the United

States.

DR: What made you decide to leave the Netherlands?

JM: If you had seen the Netherlands in 1945, when the war was over, there was not much there. I was a Merchant Marine engineer in the Dutch Merchant Marine and they called me (in Amsterdam was our company) to go sailing again. In 1946, right after the war, I came in America with a ship. My wife had a sister living in Grand Rapids and a brother-in-law which I never had seen because we married in 1943 in the middle of the war in Amsterdam. They sent me a wire, Western Union, with money because I didn't have the dollars to take a train to Grand Rapids, Michigan. Then they made the offer just before I left, I was there only a day in Grand Rapids. They made an offer that they would sponsor us. You needed a sponsor; I think you still do, this was forty some years ago. I said good, I'll go back. I wrote Tena a letter, which I don't know what happened. You didn't go to the Consulate. When I came home in Amsterdam, I don't know how many months later, and Tena hadn't gone to the Consulate in Rotterdam.

TM: That was a little hard to do.

JM: In the meantime she said, you have to get a job. I get sick and tired of you going for months and months on the ocean. I started soliciting. I solicited by Eindhoven at Philips, and I got a job there as an engineer. We still wanted to go to the United States. I had my mind set already. It was a good job, there was a house included and the whole works. We contacted the American Consulate, and it took almost another year.

TM: I wanted always to go to America. When I was a little girl already. My sister went in 1929 to America. I didn't see her for twenty years. My wish was always to go to America. I didn't know how. My sister was here; she could sponsor us.

DR: What was the trip to the United States like?

TM: On an empty "liberty ship," sixteen days around the Azores, with two little children! The only woman on board!! We had Mother's Day on board. In the morning they came with a big cake. We were not so much used to it in the Netherlands.

DR: How old were your children?

TM: Marcia was ten months and Bill was three years.

DR: How difficult was it making the journey with two kids?

JM: That wasn't too hard. The crew was real nice. There were no toys, there was nothing on board that ship. It was an old "liberty ship" that sailed during the war. I was afraid, being an ex-Merchant Marine engineer, that the thing would fall apart, because they build them in one day and put all the pieces together. They used an orange crate and hang it from the mast on a sling and Bill was swinging. Sometimes he almost swung right over the railing over the water. We couldn't find him many times, and then he was in the crew quarters and they all were drinking beer and he had orange juice. He sat on the table, he was a little shaver.

TM: And in the afternoon he slept with the captain. The captain had a bird so he was fascinated with that.

JM: We had to watch those kids. It was very dangerous on the ship.

TM: I had nightmares always, of him falling overboard. But Marcia was

an easy baby so she was no trouble. The only thing is we had no baby food on board or anything.

JM: We arrived in Baltimore on a Sunday, the worst day to come ashore. The captain said, "Do you Mullers want to go ashore?" We said sure, fifteen days on this old tramp steamer and we want to get off. They laid in the middle of the river, upstream they called it, and they lowered a motor lounge and with our belongings, it wasn't that much--suitcases--and the two kids and my wife, and we were on that barge and we came ashore. The customs officer was sitting there; he was sitting in a rocking chair. If I had known then what I knew now, I would never have accepted that guy as a customs officer. He was drunk as a skunk. It was a hot day, very hot, and he was in his rocking chair, beer cans all around him, and he said, "What are you doing here?" What are you doing here? "We came to America." "I know, but why do you have to come on Sunday?" He didn't like it; he had to work. For that reason he opened all our suitcases, which were not that many. But, in there, they had told us in the Netherlands right after the war some factories started up that made these nice woolen blankets, Dutch woolen blankets. They were very famous in those days. They said, buy some, for they are very expensive in the United States. So we bought some, and they smelled new. The captain had advised us to sleep under these blankets, don't take the ships blankets, use those and sleep under them, because then they are used. He didn't buy that. He said I smell, they're too new. Then he couldn't get the stuff back in, once you take it out. We were in a pickle there, and that guy was so nasty.

In the beginning, if I had known that, I would have asked for his supervisor, and tell him, I don't have to take this from you, being drunk, an official in the government.

TM: Besides, you had to pay money.

JM: He charged us money for it, yes.

TM: He put it in his own pocket I bet.

JM: We never got a paper. Nowadays you say, "Give me a receipt." No receipt.

TM: Then we had to go to New York; we were supposed to go to New York but the ship went to Baltimore instead.

JM: From Baltimore to New York with the train was just a terrible thing because it was so hot.

TM: And it was so cute. My son had one of those little suitcases. He had a little hat in it and some powder for the baby and a silver rattle and stuff like that

JM: and a spoon that my mother had given him.

TM: We were just sitting across Central Station in a cafeteria getting something to eat or drink and he must have put that little suitcase on the floor, and of course it was gone. Somebody thought maybe we had jewelry in it or something like that. That was nice to come to America and right away, my lands, we weren't used to taking.

JM: The impressions. I had been here in 1946. In 1946 it was pretty good. You were treated pretty good. At that time I walked in uniform. Everything was half price. I wanted to fly, but you couldn't fly right after the war. They were all busy with other things, so I had to take the train. We took the train, and we ended

up in Grand Rapids. There was the welcome from her sister and brother-in-law, which I had seen three years before.

Then I was getting back in New York. I came late at night, they thought I had jumped ship. I didn't, but it took so long, that train. One guy was still awake. He said, "Congratulations, you've got a son." He started yelling "Open the bars." I was an officer, so they figured we could take him to the cleaners. In the middle of the night they were sitting drinking. I don't drink. I still don't drink. Not as heavy as those guys did anyhow. It was fun.

DR: How did you get from Grand Rapids to Holland?

JM: I didn't like Grand Rapids. I'm very thankful that the people helped us. The church came. In 1946 they were members of Oakdale Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids. Before I even arrived there they [Tena's sister and brother-in-law] had told the whole church that John Muller's coming, my brother-in-law. He comes straight from Amsterdam and he was there during the war, so if you want to know something about the war, there is a guy that you can ask questions. I was so glad to be there in that heavy uniform. I could take my heavy jacket off. I didn't have any other clothes. It was a thick uniform and it was eighty or ninety degrees. Before I had anything to eat the bell rang and there came the people. It was a constant stream until three in the morning. They all wanted to ask questions. They couldn't all be in the house, so after a while a whole bunch goes in the back door out, and in the front door they came. I talked and talked; I lost my voice almost. At three in the morning I said, "I've had it; I can't talk anymore." The

people were so interested because they had family there. Of course some stupid questions were asked. Do you know Den Burg? Do you know De Jung? Well, it was a city of 750,000 people.

DR: When did you move from Grand Rapids to Holland?

TM: November, 1950. He got a job at Parke-Davis.

JM: I solicited at Parke-Davis. After a long wait I got a call to come to Detroit. They interviewed me and they said we have a plant engineer job available in Holland, Michigan, which is now the Parke-Davis job here, and we're starting a new product—it was an antibiotic, named chloromycetin; I don't think they make it any longer. It was a "wonder" drug. They made millions of dollars. They had a house for us near the plant (it is gone now; it is a parking lot), and we could live there for nothing. We put a phone in, as a matter of fact, two phones. They said you can do anything you want. Tena and I went down there and there were some engineer and he said, "What do you want to change?" It was an old house—a hundred years old. Well, she said, "I don't like this and I'd like that." She was very bashful, being new immigrants. She didn't ask for much. She could have asked for the moon. The heat came from the plant, a pipe underneath—steam heat.

TM: So we landed in paradise.

JM: Well, what for us was paradise.

DR: What were some of your first impressions of Holland?

JM: Grand Rapids first, because that is funny. She came in her sister's house and in those days, in 1949, it was normal to have wallpaper on one wall, painted on the other wall. She said, "I don't like this;

that's crazy."

TM: They were a little bit more antique. We had different furniture, more modern I think (in the Netherlands that is!).

JM: What did your sister say? "Don't say it too loud because a real American, not an immigrant (they were immigrants of course, too), if they hear that, they'll tell you, 'here is a one way ticket; go back where you came from.'" We never forget that because we are always very careful by making that kind of remark. After all, you're still an immigrant.

TM: Not now anymore. [To John] Are you very careful?

JM: I'm not insulting Americans. In 1950, just about a year I worked in Grand Rapids in a couple plants there. They knew I had a degree in engineering but that didn't mean a thing. Their saying was always, "Show us. That diploma what you have, that license for engineering, we cannot read it; it is in Dutch. But you show us what you can." There was a little engineer, he was a German, and he said that's the way to do it, what these people say. Show them and then they say, "Well the guy can do it." But to show that paper don't mean a thing; that wasn't readable. He could read it.

I came to Parke-Davis and I worked there until 1966, sixteen and-a-half years. Then on my free will I moved to Myles Laboratories in Zeeland. That's a chemical plant also. I knew the plant manager there. There again it is not what you know quite often, but who you know. He said, "You come like you're sent from heaven." I said, "Why?" "Well, my plant engineer is moving to a plant from Myles in the New England states and I have nobody. So

when can you start?" I had to give them a couple weeks notice; I had to be polite to my company and they treated me real well. So I started working there for sixteen and-a-half years. In the meantime they changed to Myles Laboratory, then Hexcel, and now it's sold again to Zeeland Chemical. It's all the same plant. It's a chemical plant in Zeeland. It's on the north side of Zeeland. That's why we came to Holland.

When I left Parke-Davis, I had to get out of that house. That's when the woman came in. I give her credit; she was smart. She said, we don't pay any rent here; we live free here, and we blow our money; we don't save it. Where did it go? I said, "What do you have in mind?" She said, "Buy a piece of property." She said you like the water. We started looking around on a Sunday afternoon with my brother-in-law from Grand Rapids, they were over. He said let's go tour around. The women want to visit, they stay home with the kids. We came back and we had a piece of property. I'm Christian Reformed and in those days it was always terrible to do business on Sunday. The guy said, "Do you want to come in and talk?" I said, "No, I'll come back tomorrow, but it looks good to me." We came home and said we had a piece of property, but I don't do business on Sunday. So we bought a piece of property. We bought it for \$11,000. It was a 100 foot property on Lake Macatawa. We sold it for close to \$1000 a foot. We're not rich. We bought this condo, so the money disappears real fast.

TM: At the time that we did buy it for \$100/foot, our friends all thought we were crazy. They said that is really stupid to pay so

much money for it. We lived there twenty-five years. We just moved here two years ago.

DR: How many people did you first know when you came to Holland?

TM: My sister.

JM: Two people. This is interesting too, and it is not to knock the religion at all, but the changes in this denomination. She smoked: "We don't smoke here." And lipstick. Here they use heavy lipstick, much heavier than in the Netherlands. But the women smoke a lot more there than they do here. Now things are changed of course, over forty years later. But going to church, that was funny, too. I didn't have a car. That was in Holland, Michigan. In Grand Rapids I couldn't even think of having a car; there was no garage. I walked to Central Avenue Church, by Centennial Park. Out of church I stood there by myself. Some guy came to me and said, "I'm Dr. Brouwer." He was a PhD. He said, "I'm an elder of this church and you must be new." We started talking. He said, Where do you live?" I said, "Howard Avenue, across from Parke-Davis." "Oh, where's your car?" I said, "I don't have a car." "Bike?" I said no. "How did you get here?" "Walk." "Walk?! That far?" I said, "That's not very far." He couldn't believe that I walked. In the afternoon, they had Dutch service yet, and then at night they had the regular service, so three services. "Your wife?" "Well, she's home with two small kids." "Tell you what. Why don't we pick her up for Dutch service?" She couldn't speak English very well, and that was fine. Then at night, the doorbell rang again, we were just quietly. There was that fellow's brother-in-law and he wanted to

pick us up to go to the English service again. I said, Three times?!" They didn't like that at all. "These people are no good," they said to their family. They're our best friends now, by the way. They tried it once more. They said, "We invite you for Sunday (that was custom) company." They had these trays on their laps. They give you all these trays and they came around 10:00. Well, 10:00 we wanted to go to bed. And they start eating. All these things we had to get used to. It's all on your lap: a cup of coffee here and cake and a bun and cheese and the whole works.

TM: They don't do that anymore either.

JM: There was another one. That was one blow after another these people get from us. We didn't know that we insulted them. "Take your kids along." "Kids along? We never take kids along. We aren't coming with these kids; they're all over the place."

TM: They go to bed.

JM: They thought that was terrible. Slowly on they told us. Once in a while we still have fun. They tell us how idiot it was that we didn't like what they liked and what was normal. For us it wasn't normal at all, but we got used to it in a hurry.

DR: What were some of the hardest things to get used to when you moved here?

JM: That was hard for us to change that almost overnight. We were not used to that.

TM: In the beginning when you are here, it is like a scale. It's way hanging over to the Netherlands, and then slowly on it goes. Then in many years time there's no difference any more. Maybe some

people they are different, and they maybe think different, and have maybe more relatives there. I had no father and mother there. That makes a difference, too. I wanted to be here. It wasn't always easy in the beginning, especially when my neighbor we all could just wave to each other. I thought after half a year, I don't care if I'm going to say things right or wrong, I'm going to talk with my neighbor. We had so much fun. It was after twenty-five years or so, we belonged to a group of people who work in disasters. We had a big meeting, and just like that, there were those people again and they called themselves, "We are your father and mother. Remember when you came here and you couldn't talk?" We had so much fun seeing each other again after so many years.

JM: The funny part was that the guy, Rottman, said, in the big meeting, "we found some children of ours that we (at least Tena) thought were English, and John, too a little bit." I spoke English because you had the three languages in the Netherlands. There was the "English-English." I said always half, and "it is half." Anyhow, in that meeting they said, "We were teaching them English," and one guy stood up and said, "Boy, you sure did do a bad job."

We lived first with her sister and brother-in-law upstairs in a room with two kids for two weeks. No air-conditioning, in the city (Addams Street. I wouldn't go there without a gun if you asked me now). The heat was unbearable under that roof—poor insulation. They couldn't help it, the house was of the 1920s.

TM: Our first purchase was a fan. A small fan.

JM: We still have that dumb little fan, a little tiny fan. I said, "We

have to get out of here." We moved to an apartment, and we had to pay rent of course. I had a job. That was above a garage in Humble Street; it's still there. I worked and she stayed home, the heat beating on that roof, it was hot. I worked at night, so in the daytime I came home and slept, about 8:00, 9:00 o'clock I came home. The guy down below had a garage; he was the owner. He started spraying cars, and that spray goes through any little crack, and I almost suffocated in that bedroom.

Next door was a guy, a policeman. There was one hot water heater between the two apartments. She wanted to do the wash. Every Monday the hot water was gone. That other next door, she quick used all the water up; she got up earlier.

TM: She had just as much right.

JM: The policeman, I said, "I'll fix him," and I turned the valve off. One day I heard noises in our bathroom. It was on a flat roof so you could go through the window. He was opening the window and he got in there, and he said, "I'm going to fix that Dutchman," and opened the valve. I caught him. I said "Okay, I'm going right to the chief." I knew that much already; you learn fast. And complaining, that's breaking and entering, and for a policeman. He said, "Please don't do it; let's make a compromise. You wash one day and she wash the other day." Okay, that's fine.

Another thing about language. Bill was three years old—spoke fluent Dutch, but no English. There were no bilingual teachers. There was a professor from Calvin, and he always walked to Calvin and came over Humble Street. He was from Dutch descent and he spoke

fluent Dutch. He saw these kids playing and suddenly he heard this kid talking Dutch to the other kids who didn't understand a word of Dutch, and they got along. He said in Dutch, "Good day, boy, who are you?" "Oh, I'm (he said Wimpi, that was his Dutch name for William) I'm Wimpi Muller." "Where do you live?" "Right here." "Where are you from?" "Von Nederland." "Nederland" is the Netherlands. Every morning he had to talk to him, stop and talk to him. It wasn't long, three months, and he came home, and she couldn't understand him because he spoke English. She said, "You have to talk Dutch to me, because I don't understand you." He spoke two languages; he could switch right over. That always gets me when they talk about these linguistic teachers we need, which cost billions of dollars in the United States. They say these kids don't learn it. Yes, they learn faster than you think. So fast. They cannot write it and read it probably, but they speak it.

TM: If they're three years old, by the time they're five, they can teach them how to write it, too.

JM: He doesn't speak Dutch. He'd like to, but now he's forty years old. He was asked in kindergarten by a teacher here in Holland: "Now we have here a little Dutch boy, come from the Netherlands (that was two years later when he went to school) and he will sing some Dutch song." Bill thought that was great, and he did. Then it started: "Ha, ha, ha, ha!! Silly!" He came home and said, "never again," and he didn't want to speak Dutch anymore. Now he's so mad that he can't speak Dutch. He tries to and we just croak. He said, "I blame you for it"; he blamed us for it that we didn't keep it up.

He himself said I don't want to speak it. The girls don't make much of it. Bill is the only of the four kids (we had two boys and two girls). We took a trip to the Netherlands with him a couple years ago with his wife (he married one of these Southern Belles from New Orleans). She didn't speak Dutch but they bought a tape and you can see how he wanted to speak Dutch. On their way to work in New Orleans, this is about forty miles back and forth every day, they had the tape on, and all they'd talk is Dutch to each other—try to. She is so funny because she doesn't make much of it. Whipped cream in the Netherlands is "Slagroom." She called it "S-l-e-g-c-k-room." We were in a restaurant there, and she loved that whipped cream because it is the real stuff, not out of a can, artificial stuff. She loved it, and they put it on everything in the Netherlands. She said to the waiter, "I want that piece of gebak, a pastry, and I want a lot of that "Slegckroom." "Slegckroom, what do you mean, Slegckroom?" I just laughed and said, "She means Slagroom." "Oh, I didn't know what room she was talking about." They loved that country, too. Bill is crazy about Amsterdam. He was born in Amsterdam. He loved Amsterdam.

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

JM: Never. I don't want to live there any more.

TM: To visit but not to live there. Too crowded.

JM: The first time we came back was after fifteen years. We couldn't believe it. We visited in Eindhoven the street where we lived.

TM: It was all new at the time.

JM: I said, "Is this Tobiasausserstraat (that was the name of the

street)?" I said, "I can't believe it's so small. I thought we lived on a big street with trees." Not big at all anymore.

TM: And everybody says that, who goes back.

DR: How many times have you been back to the Netherlands?

TM: I couldn't tell you all the times.

JM: I counted the other day, thirteen times. Two times were not too good. It was for funerals: my father and then later on my mother passed away. You still call it a trip because you stick around for a couple weeks because of your family. You have only one sister left, out of how many?

TM: Yes. Klara was gone so there were seven left. Six was all that's left. The one girl went to Indonesia. Dutchmen go all over the place.

JM: I have a brother and two sisters left. The connection isn't there anymore. When my mother was still living, she was the hub. The letters went to her and she told the other kids. Once in a while you wrote a letter, but not that much, because Mother was still living. Mother is the source of the news between America, and you hear that so often. But when the parents are gone, it fades out a little bit. My brother never writes. He's a good guy, but he never writes. My older sister writes, the other sister, both married to a Reformed preacher. One was "Neder Duitsch Hervormed." The black stocking church, like here compared with Protestant Reformed, but even worse than that. In Amsterdam during the war we lived in an apartment. There was a guy and we were scared stiff (whoever you talk to, you better be careful and know that person real well).

There was a guy in a black hat and a black jacket or clothes. He said, "Hello. Do you know me?" "We don't know you; who are you?" "I'm Kees." Kees was the preacher who married my sister. We didn't recognize him—black suit, black tie.

DR: Did any of your relatives emigrate after you?

TM: No. They come to visit.

JM: My brother almost, because his wife died and he was going a little berserk and the doctor said he had to have a change of pace. He himself decided to come to America, but he didn't have a sponsor. I sponsored him, but then it fell through because he found another girl and stayed there. They love to visit. That's one thing for the Dutchmen that I don't like. You go over there, and it is really true in our case. You go over there and if they have a vacation planned, they go. You can make the trip, spend all the money, and they take off. They never say go with us on vacation when we go there. My brother loves to go to France, and now he is in Greece. They take off, and they never invite you. The cars they have in the garage, they never say you can use my car. But when they come here, as a matter of fact, we tour them all over: Niagara Falls and you name it. They even ask, "We'd love to see this and we'd love to see that." That is so different with the Dutchmen there and when you live long enough in America you're different.

TM: I just talked to a Dutch lady about her relatives and she said a couple came a couple times and they wanted to go to Miami. She said they expected us all the way to bring them to Miami. They did that two times, and then she said, this is enough, when you go over

there, they don't take you nowhere.

JM: They don't take you. You have to rent a car. No, nobody came. We don't have any relation—yes, a nephew. He's a professor at University of Troy, but we have seen him only once.

TM: He [John] is one that talks all the time. He [the nephew] never talks. He has exactly the same name.

JM: He doesn't say a word. He's your typical absent-minded professor.

DR: You said that you went to Central Avenue Christian Reformed Church? What made you decide to go to that church?

JM: We were "Gereformeerd." That's Christian Reformed here. Logically you start looking for that kind of a denomination.

TM: On the north side there were no "Gereformeerd" churches.

JM: The CRC churches came later on the north side, except Harderwyk CRC.

TM: Central Avenue was really the closest.

JM: It was a nice church. My father was over for a visit; my mother didn't come,

TM: It was in 1952.

JM: and they were tearing down the old church, Central Avenue Church. It was at first a wooden church there. In 1952 he came, and the preacher was a Groninger. My father's name was Willem, and William Haverkamp was the preacher's name. Help tearing the church down. My father was an old sea captain on the ocean, ocean liners and freighters. Sure, and they were tearing the church down. I never laughed so hard, the preacher and my dad, tearing on these benches, and tearing this down. They got along fine.

My father and mother came one time together. She had this tea

set, real thin. My dad bought it before the First World War in Japan. They came in New Orleans, or Houston or so, somewhere in the south. They came ashore and then custom. My mother had all that stuff packed herself, and she did it beautiful. Someone said, "Open up," and she said no way in Dutch; she couldn't speak English. He said, "Open up." My dad spoke English, but he stayed a little back; he didn't want to let them know that he spoke fluent English and he let him struggle with my mother. He said, "Lady, you have to open it up." She said, "No, there is breakable stuff in there; there's a tea set in there and I bring that to my kids in Holland, Michigan, and I'm not going to open it up, that breaks." He argued, and she argued, and he said, "Oh, go ahead." Then it came here, it was in our house on Howard Avenue. It was all beautiful. She had it in a tea wagon. We went away for an afternoon or a night, and we came back and

TM: I came back and said, "What happened?" He [Bill] said, "Oh the cat jumped in the middle of all those dishes and broke those." There were twelve cups there; there are six left. So it was all broken. Later on when he was grown up and we talked about that he said, "I was playing ball in the house but I didn't dare tell you." [laughter] He felt terrible. I saved all the pieced yet. One of these days, he's going to have them.

DR: Do you still go to Central Avenue Church?

JM: No. We moved on this side of town where we lived on the North side, in Waukazoo Woods. We went to Harderwyk. They call it "Harder by the Week" now that church. It is "harder by the week" when you go

there.

TM: We started Calvin Church.

JM: Yes, we were charter members of Calvin Christian Reformed, that's on Lakewood Boulevard. We ended up in Harderwyk. That's another Dutch name. These people came from the city of Hardewijk. That's why they called it Harderwyk.

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

JM: Good job at Parke-Davis. Good job in Zeeland. Why should I move? We lived in a nice home on the lake. We got that with hard work and sweat. I finished it myself. We had the shell built. They tax you out of your house there on the lake. It's terrible. Taxes are unbelievable. But I thought, why, leaving a nice place; we loved it there. Then we moved in here and sold our house on the lake. Everybody said you will hate that there--no trees. Well there are a couple of them they put in. You don't see the sun come up on the beautiful lake. We had a motor boat, we had a sailboat. No, we never missed it. The excitement I guess of coming here, and a lot less work. I don't have to plow snow again, and no grass to cut. We also work for the Red Cross and our church has also a disaster group. So we work for both. We went out quite often down south, tornadoes and hurricanes and so on. We have seen a lot of the country that way. Get acquainted with the Cajuns, the French-speaking Cajuns down in New Orleans. It's always easy to lock the door, you don't have to worry. We have two daughters live here in Holland; they're both single and they have a store downtown, the Holding Company.

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

TM: I volunteered for over twenty years in the coffee shop of Holland Hospital, and Red Cross for over ten years in disaster work. John is disaster chairman of the Ottawa County Red Cross.

JM: I'm in charge of the whole Ottawa County. Fires, storms. National we are involved through Midwest Operation Headquarters from the Red Cross. It takes that whole middle section of the country, and then they send us out to these place like New Orleans and Southcomroline, Cajun country. We have friends there; you make a lot of friends. [end of side one]. I was also president of the Exchange Club in Holland. That's like the Lions and the Rotary, a service club. We had always a home show every year. Twenty five years already. I got involved in it right away. You have to mix. That we found out. Don't have a clique of Dutchmen and don't go out of that circle. That's the worse thing you can do. We have Dutch friends, immigrants also, but we also have people that live here for two or three generations already. That works the best. If you stick with the Dutchmen, and we never speak Dutch. For the fun we do. After church we have coffee or so and we call it the Dutch Coffee Klatsch. We talk all English because friends are sitting there and they don't understand you. It's very impolite. I think it's terrible if Spanish people speak Spanish all the time because you never know if they're talking about you or whatever. And it isn't necessary, because if they come by the counter, then you hear them speak English. They refuse to do it.

DR: What do you think about these new immigrants who are coming into

Holland?

TM: They're spoiled. And they get everything.

JM: They have too many demands. We never had any demands. We didn't ask for it because we feel sort of hard work, you'll get there, and it pays off. If you start talking in a clique, who'll want to help you? We came in the time, in 1949, the late 1940s when a lot more Dutch was spoken here. Now you don't hear it so much anymore.

TM: If you complained about something, they said,

JM: "Out, go, where you came from." Now you try it once, and they'll drag you to the court.

TM: If you say that now, see, that's not fair. We had to have a visa to come here. After five years we became American citizens. It seems to me that anybody and everybody can come just in here and get welfare and stuff.

JM: There are a lot of good Spanish people, too, and African-Americans, but it is the bad ones you remember. The good ones you forget; they live like everybody else. But it is the few

TM: who make more noise than the rest.

JM: It's always that language. It is perfectly right for an Italian or a Frenchman and a Dutchman to keep their ethnic background. I love that when they do that. But when you're in America, the language is not Spanish or Dutch; it is English. And they can't get it through their head. They think this city has to speak Spanish because we are Spanish. In the beginning, yes, the Dutchmen came here and they had all the rights to speak Dutch. They settled this town. After a while that fades away, and then you should speak English in my book.

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

JM: Don't give in so much. Don't go to the hospital or wherever you go, public places and you don't speak the language and they come right away with an interpreter. I have been in the license bureau. I was so mad. There was a guy in front of me, Spanish. Could be Italian, could be Dutchman, too, but he spoke Spanish, and there comes some gal who speaks Spanish. He couldn't read stop signs or all that and they gave him his license. I said, I object, this man goes on the road, and he doesn't know if it says road closed. He goes right through there, or whatever. He can't read the signs; how can you give that man a license? When we get our American citizenship we have to speak and read English. They let you read English, and if you couldn't, it doesn't have to be perfect. I still have my accent and we will never get rid of it because we were too old when we came, but at least we tried, and she particularly tried, and in what, six months you could help yourself.

TM: I could read real quickly, in uneven starts. I didn't care if I said it wrong, and I think that's a help. If you just sit there and don't want to say anything, you're never going to learn.

JM: We went grocery shopping in Grand Rapids in a Meijer store. There was only one or two Meijer stores then. We walked in that Eastern Avenue Meijer store and she said, "There's a guy following us." "Don't pay attention." Finally he stopped and said in Dutch, "Are you Dutch?" Because then I had to talk Dutch to her because she couldn't understand too well the English language, but she got away with it. He said, "I noticed that, you talk Dutch. I'm Mr. Meijer

(it was the old Mr. Meijer). I always welcome Dutch immigrants because I am Dutch. I started here with nothing." Now look what he has. Of course that's his son.

TM: He said to me, "Wouldn't it be nice if everyone talked Dutch?"

JM: Yes, that was the old Dutchman. He was an old timer.

TM: It'd be easier that's for sure.

JM: I've worked with the Spanish people. As a matter of fact, in the Red Cross, is Norma Luma. She is the teacher in AIDS and HIV, which is a terrible disease of course. She's always kidding me. One time she said, "I'm engaged." She's divorced. She said I'm engaged with a Vanden Berg. I said, "What?! You and a Dutchman?" "Yes," she said, "You know, John, I like guys with boots on." I said, "He had boots on?" "No, he had wooden shoes on; I was crazy about the guy." Then she said, "April Fool's Day." It was April one. I can get along with her because we kid each other. I say, ah, you crazy Mexicans, and she doesn't get mad because she says, oh, you Dutch should talk. I say, Norma, you sit in your office and I have my door open (in the Red Cross) and you start always speaking Spanish because she deals with a lot of Spanish, too, and the immigrants. I said it sounds to me like a typewriter. She laughed. As long as you don't get serious with each other. If you do it in fun, it is all right. But if you get serious. I had one at Hexcel, a foreman, and he told me something. He said, "Oh, you dumb Dutchman." I said "What!" and I grabbed a piece of pipe and I almost hit him. Guys held me back. I said, "If you do that again, Walt." The word went to the plant manager and he called John can you come in my office.

He said, what did I hear, you are running with a pipe after the foreman? I said, yes, I would have killed him probably. "Why?" I said, "He insulted me." "Oh, he did it in fun." I said, "No, he didn't do it in fun." He said, "Next time walk around the block." Yes, maybe I should, but then I'd find another idiot. Life in America, yes? It's not easy.

DR: Often Holland is viewed as a typical Dutch community. What do you think about that?

JM: Not any more. Not typical. They try to, and that's perfectly all right. I think the Mexicans have some rights here, too. They've contributed to the welfare of the town, too. They pay taxes.

TM: And the Laotians and the Vietnamese, and all those.

JM: But I don't like it when they want the park—Centennial Park—one year they didn't like it because they wanted Chavez, that guy in California, the strong union. They wanted to call it Chavez Park. Come on now. I don't like it what that lady said on the radio here. She said, "Kollen Park, you don't have to go there. It's all Mexican. They have taken it over." She was a very old lady, a grandma. It's not right to say it that way, because these people have the right, too.

DR: Do you think it was more of a typical Dutch community when you first came over?

JM: More so, yes.

TM: But still different. You cannot compare with the Netherlands. In the beginning I would like to travel. Trying to write to my sisters how it was here, it just doesn't make any sense until they came

here. She said, you eat your lettuce like for a rabbit and I'll eat my Dutch lettuce, like Boston lettuce is what they have. It's nice and soft. But I don't want to eat that; that's for a rabbit.

JM: That is true, the food. When we saw celery and said what's that for? Rabbits eat that thing. But then you get used to it. I love lettuce and I love celery, too. Your sister, she's now ninety-one. She was here years ago, and they always wanted to go somewhere and we suggested we go to see Bill, our son, and his wife in New Orleans. She didn't know how long it would take; I didn't tell her that. We were just on the other end of Chicago and she said, "Are we there already?"

TM: They can't understand what a big country this is.

JM: Distance has no idea.

TM: Even coming from Grand Rapids when you pick them up and coming here, Grand Rapids to Holland, they think, we're never getting home, how far is it?

JM: And Detroit. She came with the bus. She flew into Chicago and there was the bus to Grand Rapids, and she said, "What a wilderness. Don't they do anything along the side of the road?"

TM: They have all dead trees along the side of the road; why don't they clean it up?

JM: This country [the Netherlands] fits I think four times in Michigan alone. This is about 180 miles by 200 miles. Before you know it, you're out of it.

TM: You need only one day; you don't need to go in hotels there.

JM: Tena came from Assen, in the province of Drenthe. The Frisians are

terrible people [laughter]. They're stubborn. We were on that trip to the Netherlands and in the plane ride my boy said, "Tell us about the Frisians; they're so stubborn." I said, yes, they're stubborn. When the Romans came up here, and they moved up to the river Rhine here, they didn't cross, because they knew the Frisians were there, and they were man-eaters and they clubbed them to death. That was true in those days; they were wild people. When we came in Friesland here in the little town of Sneek, we saw a little boat laying there and we could have lunch and a tour over all these lakes. I said, "Let's do that. Let's talk to that captain, that looks like the captain." I said, "Sir, we'd like to make a tour with the boat, but one thing we want to know first, my boy in the plane asked me about the Frisians and I told him in the old days when the Romans came, they were so wild the Romans didn't cross the River Rhine. They were scared because the Frisians clobbered to death. he said, "We still do," just like that with a straight face [laughter]. So we never made that boat tour.

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

JM: Fine, fine. Then they get more Mexicans in there, too, and that's perfectly alright. You can't let these kids stand on the side. It is now a mixture, but they still call it Tulip Time. The museum is a good example. They were afraid to call it the Dutch Museum. They call it now the Holland Museum, because they want to get the Spanish influence in this town. There is coming more and more a Spanish influence. There is no doubt about it. We like the Spanish food, and if the Spanish wouldn't come here, we wouldn't have that

probably. But I miss my Herring, and my smoked eel. That's alright.

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

TM: Oh, I thought it was real nice.

JM: That is was real nice and they do their best. It's changed over all these years, too. They get more authentic. They brought the windmill in, which was quite a feature from Bill Wichers. We knew him well. Now they have the Fiesta in the Civic Center. I think these people cannot kick about it, that it is only Dutch. It isn't any more. All you have to do is walk on the street. Go to Fifteenth, Seventeenth Street, there's not a Dutchman living there anymore.

TM: Oh, that's not true.

JM: They were all Dutch street with nice little houses all painted nice. Now you see an old rotten car in the front yard. I hate it when I see a mess.

TM: This is not all true. There are some dirty Dutchmen, too. You got them all over the place.

JM: But it still irks me when they don't keep up their houses. Screens are kicked in. You're right. They don't always have to be Spanish people. Working the Red Cross you see plenty, even in this town when there's a fire. You may not talk about it, but how people can live, beats me.

DR: Could you talk a little bit about your children and how your Dutch heritage has influenced them in any way?

JM: The oldest one, Bill (we had another one that died during the war

who was also a Bill), but the oldest one, when he grew up, he was a rascal, like so many of these kids. He went to Calvin.

TM: He became an archaeologist and an anthropologist and a marine archaeologist. Not any of those things he does anymore. Now he's in computers. My youngest son, he lives in California. He works for Diasonic and MZI, the magnetic imagery.

JM: Where you shove the people through like a cat scan except this is magnetic.

TM: They have it all very good, and the girls have a shop in downtown, The Holding Company.

JM: 17 East Eighth Street.

TM: My daughter Jean, who is the younger one, she likes to go, we have taken her to the Netherlands. My oldest daughter, she only wants to go in her own Volkswagen when there is a road. She's never going to go in a plane or in a boat.

JM: She did fly in planes until she had an experience when the plane dropped so many hundred feet and that scared her.

TM: My youngest son, he's been in the Netherlands, but he is an American. Bill (the oldest son) went for a whole summer by himself when he was fourteen, to his grandparents.

JM: He came back and he was a guide on the BOAC, airline, and nobody could speak Dutch, but a little old lady in a wheelchair to be cared for and the stewardess said, "You speak Dutch?" So he took care of her. We got a letter from some nice people about what a nice kid he was and how well-behaved. He did all right.

TM: You still think about those things. He was fourteen years old. He

went alone to New York, and from New York he had to transfer and go to the Netherlands. Later on I thought, how stupid, who knows, he could have gone on the wrong plane or whatever. But he called from New York, somebody must have helped him, and he said I'm here with Mr. Muller (the same name), I'm sitting in a bar, but I'm drinking Seven-up. Mr. Muller was going to Sweden and he's getting married there, and he's taking care of me. I felt much better then. We got a few cards from people who were on the plane from Grand Rapids to New York that he was a real nice young kid. That was good, but later on you think about it and you think, how stupid.

JM: He was with my parents in Rotterdam, big city, and they had a Euromast Tower one of these things you see in Seattle with the restaurant on top. My dad didn't keep an eye on Bill, and he said, "Where is that kid?" And he was on the outside railing loose, so many hundred feet above the ground, and then he walks. It was idiotic to do that. I never seen anybody that loves that little country so much, particularly here in Drenthe, where there are so many bike paths. Anyhow, we survived. Next year we're fifty years married. We married during the war, during an air raid in Amsterdam. We were sitting, ready to go, you get married first for the church and then you go to city hall or the other way around; that is a must. A church wedding is not legal by the law; you had to go to the city hall. You still do that. Here you can go to church and that's it. There you had to go to city hall. We had a church wedding in a church in Amsterdam. The preacher was shot later on by the Germans, and so was the custodian because they found

weapons in the church they claim, and maybe they were right, I don't know.

We went back when we were forty-five years married to the same church on a Sunday. I found the church (I knew where it was, but all that traffic). That church was completely changed. It was not a Christian Reformed Church as such anymore. It was a free-for-all with hippies in it. You couldn't believe it. There were lesbians sitting there and homos. They were sitting arm in arm, there wasn't even a service. Young kids ran that church. The three galleries were closed off, they were only down on the main floor. I was the only one with a suit on. I didn't know that. Then they said, where are you from, and they were drinking coffee before the service downstairs, and we sat in there, and we're from America, but we were married in this church in 1943. "Oh interesting. By what preacher?" "Dominee Ferwerda." "Yes, he's dead. I said, "I know, he was shot during the war." The young kids had only heard that. During the service I said where's the preacher? There is no preacher. Finally a man came in with a black suit and he was the preacher, and they told the preacher, that young group like the consistory almost, they tell him what they want him to preach from. He has nothing to say in the morning. They said, we have a couple here from America, and almost up to today they're married forty-five years, and they came here now to celebrate. They said, oh, then that is the flowers of the month. I don't know what that means. Then they had a little band. There was not an organ playing. They had a little band—drum and trumpet and the flute. Suddenly they

started playing, in honor of our guests, "Sentimental Journey." I said, "Is that for us? I can't believe it." Afterwards we got flowers, and we took a picture in front of the pulpit. Then we talked a little bit more, and they had a whole bar downstairs with booze. Sundays closed. But that's to get the kids in the church when they do shuffleboard and all that and play games, and then they come and they drink beer and hard liquor. After church, another air raid, in the shelter again, down in the basement, and there we sit, waiting and waiting, but we didn't get hurt.

DR: I'm through my list of questions. Is there anything that you haven't said that you still want to say?

JM: You started out with what made you come here. We said already in the beginning, the Netherlands was nothing. You could hardly get a job.

TM: We were looking to the future. He had a good job.

JM: I gave a good job up at Philips and I didn't get a good job back here.

TM: Not right away.

JM: It was a rotten job in the power plant of American Laundry that is still on Division, but it wasn't long, because I went to the library and looked at companies and Parke-Davis looked good in Holland. I had been in Holland in 1946. They took me out with the old Model T to Holland and Ottawa Beach. I walked on the pier. I hopped stones and got on the pier. I remember Eighth Street was still herringbone parking on an angle to the sidewalk. I had an ice cream cone that was fantastic. It was that real "slagroom," that whipped cream.

Already there we started talking a little bit, my brother-in-law, about immigration. He said, "I have a good friend, he's plant engineer at General Motors Chevy plant in Grand Rapids." I saw him when we settled here. That was a depression already. 1949 there was a kind of a depression like they have now, because he didn't have a job there for me. That's why I started working for American Fiber Court. Never a day regret that we left.

TM: Never were we a day without work.

JM: I say thank the Lord that I never was a day without work. For immigrants who want to come here—there are not too many anymore—I would say, if you have a trade, you are better off than when you have no trade. That's much harder to get a job. Thanks to my trade as a Merchant Marine engineer, I had no problems. As a matter of fact, the vice president from Parke-Davis for engineering, he said to me, "What impressed me with your letter and your resume is that you were a Merchant Marine engineer." I said, "How is that now?" He said, "When I worked for Parke-Davis in Sydney, Australia, I had an assistant who was an ex-Merchant Marine engineer, and when I saw that, that you were, I said that's the guy I want to talk to." And he offered me the job. We were very fortunate. We had our ups and downs. She had cancer and almost was a goner—colon cancer. She pulled through.

TM: That was twelve years ago.

JM: Now we get stiff. We walk every morning. In the winter we walk in the mall. In the summer we walk here around.

* * *

JM: But we like it. We're busy. We're busy with the Red Cross. We're busy with church work, and that store.

* * *

DR: Thank you very much for taking the time for this.

JM: You're welcome.

TM: Yes.

Muller was member of Dutch Resistance

SENTINEL 8/30/2006

By JOHN CHARLES ROBBINS

Staff writer

John Muller of Holland knew the horrors of war, witnessing the death and destruction in his native Netherlands, as a young man in his early 20s.

Those harsh and trying times chiseled out the man he would become, first as a member of the Dutch Resistance, and in his later years when he worked tirelessly to help others.

Muller, 88, died at his home Aug. 24. A memorial service is 11 a.m. Thursday at Pillar Church in Holland.

Muller's remembrances will live on in a soon-to-be released documentary film "The Reckoning: Remembering the Dutch Resistance." It has its Holland premiere at the Knickerbocker Theatre at an invitation-only event in late September.

"It was an honor to know him," said John Evans, the film's director.

"He's a great storyteller," said Evans, who first met Muller in 2003, and interviewed him several times.

"He had a great sense of humor. He could use the humor as a crutch but right when you pull the humor away, just below the surface, there was a very vulnerable man."

"There is a lot of wisdom in what he wants to pass on," Evans said. "He understood the value of passing on this historical information."

Jean Muller of Holland also spoke

of her father's good sense of humor.

"He liked to make everybody feel comfortable and he liked to tell a good joke," said Jean.

Muller was 23 and living with his family in Amsterdam when German troops crossed the border in 1940.



Muller

On May 5, 1995, the 50th anniversary of the Netherlands' liberation, Muller spoke with The Sentinel about his memories of World War II.

"When we woke up, a lot of people thought it was thundering. But they

were bombing the airport," he said.

After the Germans took over the city, Muller was forced to work as a shipyard mechanic fixing German minesweepers, and he and his fellow Dutchmen did all they could to sabotage the equipment.

Muller had heartbreaking memories of the day an Allied plane mistakenly bombed a residential district of Amsterdam.

The Germans ordered the shipyard crew to help the wounded, but Muller never imagined the horrific scene digging in the rubble of a church filled with children and nuns.

"The children, most of them were dead," he recalled.

The episode at the church forever changed him.

"He felt like his life was spared but his innocence was taken," said Evans.

Muller worked as a sailor, courier and truck driver. He and his wife, the late Tena, immigrated to America in 1948.

Muller worked at Parke-Davis and for Miles Laboratories in Zeeland, retiring in 1983.

It was then that Muller and his wife became deeply involved in aiding others, as disaster relief managers for the Red Cross.

"I am very proud of him," Jean said.

"He was always one to step up and do those things. It was his philosophy; this country was good to him and my mother and that was payback," she said.

Muller's desire to help those in need extended to animals, too. On a frigid February night in 1990, he and a neighbor saved a dog from drowning in Lake Macatawa.

"It was cold, I'll tell you ... I thought my toes would fall off," said Muller, who was 72 at the time.

"You couldn't give me a \$100 to go back into that water now," he said after the 30-minute icy rescue, adding, "ah, but we're dog lovers, so ..."

Contact John Charles Robbins at (616) 546-4269 or john.robins@hollandsentinel.com.

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John Muller, 88

SENTINEL

8/26/2006

John Hendrik Muller, 88, of Holland, died Thursday, Aug. 24, 2006, at his home.

Born in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, he immigrated to the United States in 1948 and settled in Holland in 1949.

He was preceded in death by his wife, Tena, in 2001, and by a son, William Muller, in 1944.

He served in the Dutch Merchant Marines, and later joined the Canadian Army.

He was a former employee of Parke-Davis, and had also worked at Miles Laboratories in Zeeland until his retirement in 1983. He was a member of Pillar Christian Reformed Church and of the Exchange Club.

He had been a volunteer for the American Red Cross and Christian Reformed World Relief Committee.

He is survived by his children, Bill and Maureen

Muller of Asheville, N.C., Marcia Muller of Holland, Jean Muller of Holland, and Tim and Debbie Muller of Vacaville, Calif.; three grandchildren; sisters, Mrs. Kees (Wil) Van Den Broek, Mrs. Leen (Martha) Stolk; sister-in-law, Catrien Muller, all of the Netherlands; nephews and nieces.

A memorial service will be 11 a.m. Thursday at Pillar Christian Reformed Church, 57 E. 10th St. The Rev. Christopher DeVos will officiate. Burial will be in Pilgrim Home Cemetery.

Visitation will be 6 to 8 p.m. Wednesday at Lakeshore Memorial Services, 11939 James St.

Memorials may be made to Hospice of Holland or the Children's Advocacy Center. An online registry book is available at www.lakeshore-memorial.com.

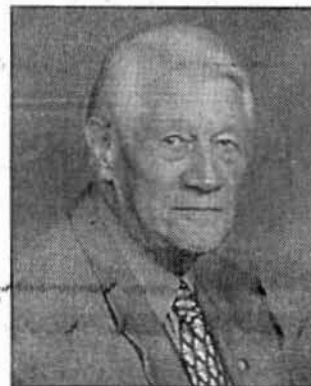
8/29/2006

Death notice

John H. Muller, 88

John H. Muller, age 88, was born Johan Hendrik Muller in Amsterdam, The Netherlands, on October 8, 1917, died in peace and dignity at his home in Holland, Michigan, Aug. 24, 2006, with his daughter Jean at his side.

Mr. Muller immigrated to the United States with his wife and family in 1948 and settled in Holland in 1949. Mr. Muller was preceded in death by his beloved wife Tena who died in 2001 and a son William Muller (1944). During a long and productive life Mr. Muller held many jobs. He was first and foremost a sailor, having been in the Dutch Merchant Marine service before World War II. During the war he was a forced laborer at the beginning of Nazi occupation of The Netherlands and subsequent to his escape joined the Dutch Resistance. Near the end of the war he joined the Canadian Army serving as a courier and truck driver. Mr. Muller married Tena Rooda of Assen, The Netherlands, in 1943. After moving to Holland, Mich., in 1949, Mr. Muller was one of the first employees of Parke-Davis which at that time was located on Howard Avenue in Holland. He also worked at Miles Laboratories in Zeeland until his retirement in 1983. He was an active member of Pillar Christian Reformed Church and a life-long member of the Exchange Club. Since retiring, John and his wife Tena volunteered as Disaster Relief Managers for the Red Cross and CRWRC traveling to natural disaster sites all over the United States. In recent years he was a source and subject for several movie companies in films about the Dutch Resistance in The



Netherlands during WWII. The latest film by Grand Rapids film company Storytelling Pictures called "The Reckoning" will be released and shown in Holland at the Knickerbocker Theatre in October.

He is survived by his four children: Bill and Maureen Muller of Asheville, N.C., Marcia Muller of Holland, Mich., Jean Muller of Holland, Mich., Tim and Debbie Muller of Vacaville, Calif.; three grandchildren: Kathryn, Patricia and Paige; Sisters: Mrs. Kees (Wil) Van Den Broek, Mrs. Leen (Martha) Stolk; sister in law: Catrien Muller, all of The Netherlands; several nephews and nieces.

A memorial services will be 11 a.m. Thursday, Aug. 31, 2006, at Pillar Christian Reformed Church, 57 E. 10th St., in Holland. The Reverend Christopher DeVos will be officiating. Burial will be in Pilgrim Home Cemetery.

Visitation will be Wednesday from 6 to 8 p.m. at Lakeshore Memorial Services, 11939 James St., in Holland. Memorial contributions may be made to Hospice of Holland or the Children's Advocacy Center. An online registry book is available at www.lakeshore-memorial.com for those who cannot attend the services.

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