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Interview with
Marguerite Meyer Prins

Conducted July 7, 1992
by Donna M. Rottier

1992 Summer Oral History Project
Subject: Elderly Holland Citizens

[Marguerite Prins was born on April 30, 1895]

DR: Have you lived in Holland your whole life?

MP: More or less. I taught in Mount Pleasant, Michigan for two years. Then I was in Wisconsin University for another year, and then I taught at West Aurora for a year-and-a-half before teaching at Hope. My mother and father were going south, and they didn't want the two kids who were going to college left alone in the house, because you know what happens. So I gave up my job and came to Holland. There was a vacancy at Hope. Dr. Edward Dimment hired me. Then Dr. Wichers, and then Lubbers. So I taught under three presidents. I enjoyed it; I enjoyed teaching.

DR: What did you teach? What subject?

MP: French. That was the main thing. The funny thing was that the First World War took German out of the high schools. I had majored in German and English. I never enjoyed teaching English. But I did enjoy teaching French at Mount Pleasant, Michigan. I went to Wisconsin University to get a masters degree. Then I came to West Aurora and that was a wonderful experience because I had a season ticket to the Opera and I could hear all those gorgeous voices. That was a wonderful experience for me. After that I came to Hope in 1923. I taught a year-and-a-half at Hope before I was married, and I quit teaching. The next thing, I lived across the road from the superintendent of schools. He came over one day and said Miss. Emma Hoeky's is quite ill, could you take her place for a while. I thought it was maybe a week, and for the rest of the whole year. I taught at the high school. My daughter never knew I taught there. Not long ago she said, "I didn't know you taught at high school." I

said, no wonder, I just taught the French. Esther Snow took the German classes. I said, I went after you [her daughter] went to school and I was back before you came home from school. So she never realized it. But anyway, then Mr. Wichers came to me and he said, Nella, my sister, is going to go on to school. He said we need help there; can you help? He had offered a job in English and I said I'm not a good English teacher. But I said, if you ever had a vacancy in French, I'll help you in French. So I had opened my big mouth, and I didn't have a foot to stand on. That's how I got back to Hope.

DR: Could you talk a little bit about some of your experiences teaching at Hope?

MP: Well, for one thing (this is funny), a boy came to the door and said, so and so can't meet you tonight in Grand Rapids (I was going with somebody in Grand Rapids). I said thank you. Then I thought, that's mighty funny, it isn't like this man to send a student in to tell me. So I went anyway, and there he was. But it was a lot of nerve on the part of that student. I had to laugh about it really. That was funny. Let's see, there was something else that was funny. When I got there, Miss Boyd said to me (she was teaching German). She said, you're going to have a book allowance. She said you better spend all of it, because if you don't, it goes into the general fund. That fund was only eighty-five dollars. What can you buy nowadays in the books for eighty-five dollars? Then, with the war, the German went out, but the French was pretty good. Then the next war, the French went out. I had a class of six beginners, and

that was unusual, a very small class. Then war took the French out; it just dropped way down. They said, we have to put in Spanish; the soldiers coming back want Spanish. I said, I don't think I'm a good Spanish teacher. I can do first year, but I am not able to do second year. But I had to do it anyway. I knew I wasn't a good second year teacher. I enjoyed it, but those boys that came back from war, and here was I, a little bit of a shrimp, and this whole room full of boys, six footers. I thought, what am I going to do with all these boys? Among them were a lot of the people, for instance, the doctors of today, two or three doctors who are doctors know, and here I am, I'm still hanging on, and I don't know why?

DR: How many years total did you teach at Hope?

MP: In all, I taught a year-and-a-half before I was married. Then I came in, in about 1937, and then I taught until I stopped, and that was in 1967. I enjoyed it. I always enjoyed teaching French. I have three very good students, who were majors, who are now teaching French. One is Beulah Kampen. She's a minister's wife. She's helping in New York. She's getting students ready for big exams. She's a good teacher. She taught at Hope, and I attended one of her phonetics classes. I had to judge them. She was an excellent teacher. She had a very good ear. Then another French major is teaching in Mc Henry, just outside of Chicago. And that's a wealthy school. She wrote earlier this year, and said that she had twelve grades, all twelve grades, and they go right straight through. And she's a good teacher. Dina, very good ear, and a nice person. She always comes to see me. She writes to me twice a year, my birthday

and Christmas. And then I have one other one, in Lansing, Michigan. She was one of my earliest ones. I think she had some very good beginning French, because when she came, she was excellent. She got a job in Lansing. She has been for several years taking students over to France. Those are three good majors. That's rather gratifying, that they picked it up and enjoyed it, too.

DR: What did you see changing at Hope College during the years that you taught there?

MP: The laboratory is excellent. I think they've enlarged the offerings, and they're very good. This has been a very good change. I think we were hiring too many graduates of Hope College. You don't expand that way; you don't enlarge your vision. Over the years they have done that, and I think it is an excellent school right now.

DR: What were some of the biggest problems that you had while you were teaching at Hope?

MP: It was money. We had eighty-five dollars. What can you buy for eighty-five dollars in foreign books? So we got in the habit of buying those paperbacks, which isn't good. We know it isn't good, but that's the only way we could enlarge the offerings there for studying. They told us, be sure to spend it all. If you don't, they put it back in the fund and you don't get it back. Miss Boyd told me that, so we always spent it. When I think of how my sister Nella poked into those catalogs for the paperbacks for five cents difference! You wouldn't do it nowadays. In the first place, a library with paperbacks isn't any good. That is what we had to do

then in order to get some stock there on the shelves. It was fun. My sister Nella was a very good teacher, and she had a lot of enthusiasm. We liked the same things. Here we were. When the agents came, they would give you books to study, and perhaps buy. We'd go over those catalogs for five cents difference, and when I think of that, it was a poor buy because a paperback doesn't last. The cover of a paperback is no good, but that was the best we could do with eighty-five dollars. What could you do now with eighty-five dollars? I think today we have a deeper variety of people teaching. There were a lot of Hope graduates teaching when I was there, and I don't think that was really good. The money wasn't as plentiful as in some schools, so you had to take, more or less, who would come here.

DR: Did that change at all while you were teaching?

MP: Yes. Most of those teachers are now dead; they've all passed on. Well, at age ninety-seven, whom do you expect to see? I think I'm the oldest graduate. Eva Pelgram who was in my class and became my sister-in-law later, she died just recently. Otherwise it was nip and tuck, which one of us would outlast the other.

DR: What year did you graduate?

MP: 1917. It was a long time ago.

DR: What changed from the time you were a student there and the time you were teaching there?

MP: They've changed the old Graves. I went there last year to one of the programs, and I didn't realize that the floor slants to the west. The speaker was over there, and I sat here, and that was

fine, except the sun came up. Here was this brilliant sun right behind the speaker, and I haven't been there since, but I knew enough from that experience, not to sit facing that window. I don't know what they can do about it, but it is bad, if you are listening to a lecture in there facing that afternoon sun. But you see, you don't always know those things. That was my criticism of that room. Otherwise, no, it's a very excellent school, and we've had a lot of family in it. My brother Harris graduated, and I graduated. My sister Helene had three years at Hope, my sister Nella had two years, and Freddie had one year, one or two years. All the Meyer kids had to go to Hope, and that was good. In fact, I think any kid who wants to be something should not enter freshman year in a big school. I think he should have his underpinnings in a good lower-grade school, and then go for his graduate work or his last two years, to a larger school. Because when you're a freshman, you just get helpers, you don't get the real McCoy in a big school. That's how these people get their degrees by teaching. But you don't get a good teacher that way. You're much ahead to go as a freshman, first two years, to a smaller school and get established. Then take your advanced stuff, and then you get the good teachers. Of course, some people can teach and others can't. You can pour it in, but you can't make them swallow it.

DR: What made you decide to become a teacher?

MP: Why because that was about all you could do. All of my friends at least either went to Kalamazoo Normal School and then taught, or got their A.B. degree, and a lot of them got them later. I just never

thought about anything else; I took for granted I'd be a teacher.

DR: Did you ever think later about wanting to do something else?

MP: No, I enjoyed teaching. I think my sister Nella was a born teacher. I'm not sure about the other members of the family. I don't think my sister Wilma was a good teacher; she was an artist. She did teach for a while, but she didn't enjoy it. I think you have to like teaching, you have to like communication, and you have to understand what the student is doing, why he wants to teach and all that, because most of them want to go into teaching, or if it's a business course, they want to get into business. I don't know anything about those people.

DR: You said that you spent most of your growing up years in Holland?

MP: Yes.

DR: What are some of your earliest memories of growing up in Holland?

MP: Roller skating, with wooden rollers. And farther back, sidewalks that were made of tar, and very bumpy. The end of Holland was Seventeenth Street. That was the farm district. Now look at it. At that time, Holland was quite restricted. My brother would get out at Sunday afternoon and go swimming, and the neighbors would complain, that's bad. In a few years their kids were growing up and they had college here so those students could go all the time.

DR: What was Holland like when you were growing up?

MP: We had a curfew. We had what we called the Mockingbird, and it blew at seven o'clock in the morning, twelve o'clock at noon, one o'clock, and six o'clock at night, and then kids off the street by nine o'clock. We didn't have a lot of this rowdiness, but of course

Holland was much smaller, and much more religious than it is now. I think children were different. We didn't have t.v. That's really a curse in many ways. It has its good points and it has a lot of bad points.

MP: I think it wasn't so hard to discipline kids in those days as it is now, because kids now grow up sitting in front of the t.v. and hearing and seeing all this junk. They're not really studying. And two workers in the family is not good. Those kids are out running wild. I'm not sure that the parents realize it. They've been brought up that way, too. When you're ninety-seven and you go back in your memory, those parents were disciplined and the whole situation was different. Nowadays, the kids take hold. We have children going to Europe when they have no common sense at all. I think the parents should go first, and then the kids. But it isn't that way. The parents want their children to have all the advantages, and I think sometimes the children do not have the education to appreciate what they see in other countries.

DR: Why do you think it's changed to be that way?

MP: It's t.v., you've got everything in pictures. I well remember coming in about twelve o'clock one night on New Year's Eve, and I was so enthralled by this little tiny bit of a broadcast and hear all those gorgeous orchestras. I was in seventh heaven. We didn't see them. That was just hearing it. Then later we had the pictures of it. I think that children hear bad language on television. And the minute they go to school, they hear everything under the sun. It's too bad, because you can't govern somebody else's child. Kids

pick up all kinds of nasty tricks. What are you going to do about it?

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

MP: You can't do much, as long as you have t.v. and the kids are bound to sit there and it's easy for the mothers. They do what they have to do and think, well the kids are taken care of, at least they're not running wild. But what they see and hear sometimes is worse than running wild.

DR: While you were teaching, did you see that change coming about?

MP: Yes, it was in my lifetime. First it was just those little tiny, and I remember the orchestras, the dance orchestras on New Year's Eve, it was wonderful to hear those, but I don't think we had at that time the crazy stuff that you see now. The interviews are laugh-provoking now, and I don't think we had them at that time. You didn't hear that crazy language, and these songs. The popular songs were decent really in those days. As you got more and more competition, and it got wider and wider in its scope, everything is accepted. I don't think it's good for the kids. I think they might better sit and read. You can't tell somebody else what to do. So you have to set a good example yourself. It must be difficult to run a college when you have all of these odd people coming in. I think we have a wonderful college here at Hope College. It's a decent school. They're interested in the teachers as well as the students. I think that's good.

DR: How did you see students change during your years at Hope?

MP: There's been a change undoubtedly. I haven't seen it. This is what

they tell me, that the students call the professors by their first name. I don't know about that. I had one student come in. He was a veteran. He said, "Hello, Teach." I said, "The name is Mrs. Prins." I didn't want any of that intimate stuff, because the minute you do, you lose your hold. You've got to keep the kid, if you're going to get anything across, you have to keep their minds occupied.

DR: What do you think should be the relationship between a teacher or a professor and a student?

MP: That's a hard question. You've got to show a real interest and a desire to help them. I think the student has to feel that. Beyond that, I don't know. I've had some students that were pretty punk, and I passed them. There was one boy, I write to him today, and he writes to me. I flunked the kid, really, in the middle of the semester. At the end, I passed him. He came to me after class and said, Mrs. Prins, you know I didn't deserve to pass. I said, you are entirely right, you don't, but I knew you wouldn't get any more out of the repetition of the subject. I said I thought I might better pass you, and you could put that time on something else. The only time I ever did that. But he writes to me now. He married a girl, I never met her. She used to send me dried flowers from her garden. I had three lovely gardens, and always interested in flowers. So she would send me pressed flowers.

DR: What are some of the most exciting things that you've done?

MP: You can look at the map up there. [Mrs. Prins has a map on her wall of all the places in the world she has visited]. Those have all

been exciting. Some of those, in the United States, I didn't put all the trips in, but we used to take our children through the United States and all the capitol buildings. I took my first trip, not knowing what was going to happen, but just plunged in. I paid for that. I had to borrow a few hundred dollars from my father. My father was always willing; any money for education was fine. Neither he nor my mother were educated people. My mother had a beautiful speaking voice. We always had to read the Bible at the table. We all had to be at the table, too, which isn't what you do nowadays. I think families were really happier in those days. But we had to all sit at the table for breakfast. There were six kids, and that was a job. I think it was much better in those days, to have a family community breakfast or some time at least during the day. I don't think they do that anymore. Everybody eats and runs. They can't help it. It's so important to have cash in your hand. You've got to have money to get along and these people are both working. Father and Mother are both working. What are you going to do? I don't see how they're ever going to get rid of this system.

DR: Do you think that there was a way to get out before we got in so deep?

MP: Money talks. The people in Congress are to blame for all of this, and also this party system. They're a dyed in the wool Republican or dyed in the wool Democrat. In our own family we went to the polls, and we might have just as well all have stayed home, and sent one, Nella, the unmarried one. Otherwise we all canceled each other's votes. Even so it's good to think about it. I don't know

if people understand what's going on today. We're dug in so deep, and it's all on account of money. Money is the root of all evil. I've just been reading some of those things that come out of the Bible. You have to have it. I hear from my kids. I have a nephew up there in that picture. He's married to a Thai girl. She was married and had two children. They live very happily together. He's the father now of these two boys. The older boy is ready for college. He came home one day and wanted a pair of sneakers, and he wanted the expensive kind—ninety dollars to one hundred and ten. They said, we can't afford that. We're both working hard, and we can't afford that. You'll have to have something less. There's the thing. You look at somebody else. I suppose that's built into us. I don't know.

DR: You were talking about the first trip that you took?

MP: My first trip was to Otsego by horse and buggy. The next trip with Nella was on the old Pere Marquette with a bag of currant-bread sandwiches—no dinner on that trip to Grass Lake to visit my sister, wife of Dr. Nichols. I was at the University of Wisconsin. I had just gotten my second degree. We lived in the French House. My father sent three of us girls there, and out of state tuition is horrible. The one sister, Helene, never became a French teacher; she was an English teacher. She got her advanced degree at the University of Michigan. Nella got her A.B. from Wisconsin University. That was the best thing we ever did, to live at that French House. You had to speak if you wanted to eat. You heard so much talk about going to Europe. A lot of these people had money

and sent their kids. After a while you just took for granted you were going to go. And I did. I saw this ad by the American Express. It was set up by a professor from Texas. We went into the northern part of France. Later, after we were back at the University of Wisconsin, a professor said, why did you go there to study? Why didn't you go to Tour down in the southern part. I said because it was cheaper. I didn't have any more money than that, but I could afford that. But I couldn't really afford that, I had to borrow from my father. I used my money I had saved from teaching, but I needed about three hundred dollars more. My father was always willing for education, education and music.

DR: Was education always stressed as something important in your family?

MP: Yes, my father never denied any money for education. My parents were not college graduates, but my mother could read the Psalms beautifully. She had a very lovely voice. The placement of her voice was good. That's a big item in French. She could read that Bible like nobody's business. My brother Harris was interested in photography at that time, and transposing on records. I still have one recording in which my sister-in-law, who's long dead, and I sang a duet. On the other side he had put my mother reading the twenty-third Psalm. The duet went fine, but on the other side he did some funny little trick; he was just a greenhorn at it. So he did something wrong, and I'm sorry about it. I wish I had it. Her family--none of them were educated formally--but they all wanted their children to be educated.

DR: Were your parents from Holland originally?

MP: Yes.

DR: How long has your family been living in Holland?

MP: We found a letter. I'll show it to you. [Mrs. Prins has two scrapbooks in which she has recorded her family's history and we spent some time looking over the first scrapbook]: This is a copy of a letter written by my great-grandmother, I suppose it is. That's the way they were brought up. Hell is right around the corner. I showed this one time to the lady minister we had at that time. She said, that's pretty severe, isn't it. I said, yes it is. After that appeared (that wasn't so many years ago). That woman had to die first, and that letter was found in her belongings. It's a shirttail relation.

I never could get next to my grandfather. My grandmother I just loved; we would have such good times together. But I was scared to death of him. I can see now, now that I'm older and that letter turned up, I can understand. He would go upstairs at eight o'clock in the evening. He said, "If it's all right with you, I'll go to bed," and he would read his Bible. I can see now, but I didn't understand it at that time. They were pretty severe.

At that time at Hope College, each department had the privilege of having a speaker, and we had Dr. Henri Peire come and speak. I gave a luncheon for him. They had a French club in Grand Rapids. We would divide the expense and get a good speaker. And we had this man, too.

Henry ten Hoor used to write poems. This is one for Gordon Van Wylen's birthday. He has one for me in here someplace, too. He

would always write a poem.

This is interesting. Did you ever read Dandelion Wine? It's a short story by Ray Bradbury. I read it, and I liked it so much that I wrote to him and I told him that I enjoyed thoroughly that story of when he was young. At Christmas time I had this card. I thought, I don't know who this is. This was at least six months after I had written him. And he sent this, "Love, from Ray Bradbury."

DR: Have you written the whole story of your life in that album?

MP: I started way back here, with my grandfather. This was supposed to be orderly when I started, but then everybody gave me stuff, and so finally I had to find room. Now it's pasted in where there is room, so it isn't in order at all. It was fun doing it. There's mostly, at first, pictures of the family. This is my sister, Wilma, who was an artist. Then I filled in between. I don't know if the kids will ever enjoy it, but they all want to book. So whose to get the book?

This is when my brother was interested in photography. It was the same group but two exposures. He was always fooling around with stuff like that.

This was the one-hundredth celebration of Meyer Music House. This is Hendrik Meyer, a graduate of Hope—he has just moved South.

This is the eighth grade graduation in 1908. That dress is in the museum now. It was all tucks and insertion. A skirt that wide doubled. They starched everything. It was a very elegant dress. Mrs. _____ heard about it and she came over and interviewed me, and she wanted it. She went over

every inch of it to see if it was authentic. I said, it is, except there is a strip in the back where it was lengthened. My mother couldn't have put all those tucks and insertions in it without getting all the good out of it. So I had to have it lengthened all the time. That was my best dress.

DR: What part of Holland did you grow up in?

MP: 4 West Twelfth Street. Right across from the old museum. That was our family home. When I was four months old, we moved into it.

This is an interesting picture. This is my whole family. My father had a music store here, and also in Allegan. This was a celebration, they called it an "outing." [end of side one]. That's a nice way to entertain, but you don't see that anymore. At the centennial, we had a big party. That was fun. Everybody came.

This really goes back to where I started going to school--A.B. at Hope, 1912 was high school, 1917 graduated from college. This was the A.B. from Hope and then the University of Wisconsin later. This is Beulah Marris. She took my place later at Hope. She was a star pupil. We still write.

DR: Did you ever consider going to any other college other than Hope?

MP: No, I never thought of it. Hope was right here, and that was it. We all had to have a little bit of Hope. My brother Harris had four years, and I had four years. Nella had three years. Wilma had one year, and Fred had one year, and then they went to different schools.

This is the old Prins-Baker quartet. That was a college quartet and they were always asked to sing. My husband used to say,

I wonder if we were really that good.

DR: How did you meet your husband?

MP: My parents knew his parents way back. I never went with him through college. Just one of those things you know. I came to Hope thinking I was going to marry somebody else.

DR: When did you get married?

MP: 1923.

From here on I explained why there was so much music on both sides of my family and my husband's family. My older brother was an organist at Hope Church when he was sixteen years old. Then the president of Hope College was also a big wheel in the church. My brother said to him, I think I should have a raise in salary. I don't know what it was then, it probably was not much. Kollen, Professor Kollen we called him then, he said, "Young man, it is a privilege to play the Hope Church organ." I don't know whether he ever got the raise or not, but he's a teacher from Ann Arbor.

This was one of our trips. We were coming home. This was our waiter, and I don't know why, he just struck me as being so funny, crazy, and I don't like his looks. We got home, and here in the paper was his picture; he was a spy!

Here's my son. He was in service, and he was a musician. He just retired this year, so he came here to see me. He conducted the Wellesley Symphony Orchestra besides his University of Massachusetts job. We always had music. In my husband's family, his sister was a church organist and Peter and his brother, Teunis, sang in the Prins-Baker Quartet. We had it on two sides. My boy, when he was

only two years old, had rhythm. At that time the very popular song was Valencia. We'd sing it or put the recording on and he would go up and down. He showed that musical ability when he was only two years old.

The next volume of photographs is most of the grandchildren. This volume is called "The First 90 Years" and ends with my ninetieth birthday and the party that we had to celebrate.

Here's the music house sold. It's in the process now of being finally sold. My great-grandfather started it, and then my grandfather, and my husband was in charge of the record department. The whole family was in it. It ends on that note. A lot of these people are dead. Wherever there's a little cross, they're gone.

DR: Were you still involved with Hope College even after you retired?

MP: Yes, more or less. I'd have to give recommendations, and I had all my record books for quite a long time. Finally, a girl asked for a recommendation, and I thought, this is it. There won't be anymore. She was a French major, too, but she did not stay in the teaching business. She did something in religious work. I thought I cannot run from pillar to post hanging onto all this junk. So I said, that's it, no more, and I destroyed my book of grades.

I usually look for interest in the Sentinel "On the Way to Today." It's quite surprising how much of that I remember. I cut it out. It's the column in the Sentinel--fifty years back, seventy-five years back, a hundred years back--and if I know the names, I cut the items out and put them in here.

DR: Do you remember certain parts of Holland as you were growing up? Do

you remember the resort areas?

MP: Yes. At that time we had a dirt road, and you went up a hill. We had a picnic up there. My father rented a little cottage. And the zoo was out there at that time. It was a private zoo; it was really quite nice. We had to go to this cottage up this hill. There isn't a hill there anymore, but we had to get off because it was too much for the horse. That was Getz's farm, and now there's no farm at all. There was a zoo.

DR: What were the Depression years like here in Holland?

MP: I remember very well that I went through the Depression. I was a member of a reading club. We each had a turn entertaining the reading club. We each gave a book and that circulated. Each time we would circulate that so we all had access to that book that was bought by somebody. It was my turn. We didn't have any money, and two little kids. So I said, I'm not going to put on the dog. I gave them toast, cinnamon toast, and coffee or tea. Afterwards, several months afterwards, Jeanette Mulder said to me, I think that was so wonderful that you didn't try to be something that you weren't. We were pretty poor during that time. I remember one time we didn't have any butter. My husband came home and said, "Where's the butter?" I said I don't have any and I don't have any money to buy any. He popped out of the house. I don't know where he got the butter, but he got it. I never asked him. We went through the mill. I'd take my husband's shirts and turn them around because the back never gets worn. It's always the front that gets ironed. We'd take the back of that shirt, turn it around, and make pinafores for

my daughter. My sister Nella and my mother would help. We'd all sit there and sew. We went through the Depression. It doesn't hurt anybody. It's all in the mind's eye.

DR: What kind of memories do you have when you look back on the Depression?

MP: We did not have elegant food. We were glad to have just ordinary food. We helped each other, and sewed and made clothes for the kids. Nowadays, when I think of my granddaughter in Grand Rapids. What she pays to clothe that little girl! And it's foolish. They teach the kids the wrong thing; they get too fond of appearance.

DR: What was it like living through the war years in Holland?

MP: Just like that. We went to mail a letter one night, this was during the war years. Where the library is now, was a home. In fact, it was where I was sent to kindergarten, Miss Lulu's kindergarten. My brother Harris was also sent to kindergarten there. They never should have taken down that beautiful home. It had a beautiful stairway. They could have put that library anyplace, and they took down that lovely home. That reminds me of something else that happened. My brother was sent (my mother had four little kids that kept her busy all the time). Harris, my older brother, twenty months older than me was sent to that kindergarten. When my mother didn't know where I was, I was going up there to that kindergarten, kicking at the door until they let me in. Finally, Miss Lulu was her name, she called my mother and said, you might as well let me have that little girl here every day with her brother because she's here every day anyway. So that's how I went to private

kindergarten. When I was supposed to go to regular kindergarten, it was so crowded, they knew I'd had that kindergarten training, so they put me in first grade. I was always two years older than my sister Helene, but actually, four years in experience, because I was up. She was a blonde and sort of fragile looking, so they kept her back a year. The sum of it all was that there was nearly four years difference. We never had friends together. Helene and Nella, who taught at Hope, were about the same age in their experiences, but my sister used to tell them what beautiful dresses I had. My mother would make them. She'd have a woman come in for a full week. We always called my mother "Helen behind the door" because her machine was behind the door and she was always sewing. So we always called her "Helen behind the door." Consequently, because we had that four years difference in experience, my next sister and I never had anything to do with each other; I was grown up and she wasn't. That's the way things happen sometimes. But Nella, the next one, and I always had the same interests. We both liked teaching, we both liked the French language, we both liked to go to France.

DR: How did you first start with your French?

MP: I was home. Mother had been sick, so I didn't get started in the Fall. Mrs. Durfee who was the Dean of women called my mother, and she said (I was going to go to school in the middle of the year; I was going to start then), Marguerite is not going to get in the right class because she is starting in the middle of the year. She said, I can help out, if you would send her to me, and I will tutor her in French until she catches up with that class, which will be

around Thanksgiving time. That's how I did it. I had that private tutoring first. Mrs. Durfee was also a graduate of University of Wisconsin. We had the same training. Later Miss Lichty who became Dean of women, she also had her training at the University of Wisconsin. So we always rooted for Wisconsin.

DR: When you were a student at Hope, where did most of the other students come from?

MP: All over. A lot of them came from the east, and quite a few from Iowa, that was before they had the college there. They came from all over.

DR: Were there more men or women, or was it more equal?

MP: There were mostly men. Not many foreign students, not at that time. It was cheap to go at that time. I have given, to each one of my grandchildren, their tuition for their first year in college, on order to get them started. Once they get a start, they're apt to continue. I think money spent for education is good.

DR: When you were a student at Hope, were men and women treated differently or equally?

MP: About the same as they are now, it's just that there was a majority of men in college. Girls had a wider choice, which is good [laughter]. I remember very well going to a party, and I had a beautiful dress, but it had no sleeves, just a strap over the shoulders, a lovely dress. This one man said, you look so kissable in that dress, it was a beautiful pink, and I always remember that. On the other hand, that was what he thought, but then another girl said she thought it was terrible, all that exposure. Hard to please

everybody. Here I am now, the oldest one, the final oldest graduate. Eva Pelgram and I (she was my sister-in-law), we had a neck and neck speed. She just died, her birthday was in October, she didn't reach that. Otherwise she would have been ninety-seven in October. Now I'm the only pebble on the beach. The kids come to me and they say, Grandma, did you really see all this at one time. I said yes, sure, why not, but they can't believe it sometimes. That's why I began the books. I want them to see how things were. They were pretty religious. I had a paper that my mother wrote that she presented for her church group. I don't know what became of it. I think I took it along one time and quoted from it, and somewhere when I put that book back that remained in it, I can't find it any place. I wish I had it, but I don't. I remember my mother had a very lovely speaking voice. She could read those Psalms. She memorized the one hundred nineteenth Psalm. Why, I don't know. I can go through that whole Psalm and it doesn't give me any meat. I like the forty-second Psalm and the twenty-third Psalm and some others. But the one hundred nineteenth? I think she must have had a contest or something. I was no good at memorizing anyway. The one hundred nineteenth, that's a terrifically long Psalm, a lot of words to memorize.

DR: I don't have any more questions. Is there anything else that we haven't talked about?

MP: I must say that Ek Buys has been wonderfully kind to me. My sister Nella was very fond of him. At that time he was in business. I can remember her saying, I'm going to turn my financial affairs over to

Ek Buys. He's still a wonderful person. He gets me straightened out. If I get my accounts in a meddle, he comes over and straightens them out. Now my daughter does it all; I don't do it anymore.

DR: Could you let me know your address so I'll know where to send this transcript?

MP: This is room 23 at Fountain View. Twenty-three is so easy to remember because they used to have a saying, "Twenty-three skidoo." They don't use it any more, but that's an old saying. So every time I see it, I think, oh skidoo.

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MP: My father and mother were always interested in education, absolutely all the education you could get. I think that's good. That's the trouble with Holland now. There are jobs in a specialty department. These people come up here from Texas and they aren't educated. They're not interested in it, and they don't make the kids study. So we keep going on in a rut, and they're not getting educated.

DR: Is this something that has just recently been developing?

MP: There's always somebody who's trying to get in the council or some of these important jobs, and trying to do something. But you can't move a group. One person who has a job, that's fine, but you have a hundred others who are dirt poor, and not interested in education. All you have to do is go to the mall, or a Meijer Thrifty Acres. You can see them all running around, and interested in their clothing, I think, a lot of them.

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

MP: I don't know. It takes a wiser mind than mine to know. I think they're trying to help. It's just like you can lead a horse to water but you can't make them drink. It has to come from them. Yes, here and there you've got a good person, but the parents are all working and they have to work to keep alive. I think that's what it is. I blame Congress for the whole thing, and Guy Vander Jagt should get out of there. I had Guy in class. He's a great talker, but I think he was originally going to be a minister. He had a lot of religious education, but he got in Congress, and once they get a hold of you, it's pretty potent. I write him once in a while and tell him what I think, and I know that he gets the letters, because I say, "Dear Guy." I don't go through all that rigmarole. He answers! But what can he do? He's only one person against all the rest. Basically he's a decent person. I think some of them aren't. Money is the source of evil. You need it, you can't do without it, but it is the source of all evil. I don't know what you can do. It takes more than one person to change anything in Congress. You get in there and life is so sweet, I can't say that I blame them when they want to stay there. It's an easy life. I think it takes a politician. You have to be a politician to know how to operate there and the dickens of it is that the politicians are at the mercy of wealthy people. So we go round and round in a circle. I'm not going to see the end of it, I'm too old.

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You don't choose a lot of things in life, so you have to make the best of it--do what you can. I think that Hope College is a wonderful institution, and I'm glad that my kids have all had at least one year if not more. It's full of good men, like Ek Buys, (he's on the Board of Trustees). We have some good people like that, really good Christian solid people. That's wonderful. We don't have to pull out somebody that has money, but no decent background. It's a funny world we live in.

DR: And you've seen a lot of it.

MP: Yes, I have. It's been very enjoyable. I have it on the map up there because there's so much concerning these countries. I can at least remember where these countries are. If you don't have something in front of you to think about, it goes by you before you know it. They all have such crazy names. It will never get settled, I'm sure of that. It will be perhaps better managed, but I doubt very much, because if you look at that whole little unit there, they can't get to the water. And they're so poor they can't have the essential things to make a living. So what are you going to do? I don't begrudge any of the money I spent traveling. We never went very ritzy, as far as that's concerned. We went with a good group. We usually went with a bonifide company, and he had to keep his job with that company. They've been interesting trips. That way you get a little rounder education. I'm grateful for all the experiences I've had. I don't know why I deserve them. It's probably because I've always liked people. It's fun to meet people and see how they live.

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DR: Thank you so much for taking the time for this. I really appreciate it.

MP: You're welcome.