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## Wagenaar, Neal and Mary Oral History Interview: Dutch Immigrants who Emigrated to the United States after WW II

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Interview with  
Neal and Mary Wagenaar

Conducted July 23, 1992  
by Donna M. Rottier

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

DR: Could you both please state your full names?

NW: My name is Cornelius Wagenaar, but they call me Neal.

MW: My name is Mary Wagenaar. They call me Mary.

DR: And your current address?

NW: 3892 Lake Ridge Drive in Holland, Michigan.

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

NW: I was born [date removed], 1926.

MW: February 25, 1925.

DR: What date did you emigrate from the Netherlands?

NW: I don't remember the exact date, but it was January 1950.

DR: What part of the Netherlands are you from?

MW: North Holland.

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

MW: I lived in Sint Pancras close to Alkmaar, which is the town of the famous cheese market. I went to school there. It was a marvelous place to live. Everybody knew everybody. Very friendly. I had a marvelous time growing up.

NW: It's a long time ago, but I still remember that it was a nice place to live. During the war we had our problems. Coming out of the war, there was a new expectation but also, people wanted to go to other countries, and the United States was one of the countries that people talked about.

DR: Could you describe a little bit of your experiences and involvement in the war?

NW: In 1940, I woke up early in the morning, maybe it was about 5:00,

and I heard German bombers bomb an airfield close by, saw the planes go. From then on we saw German soldiers all over the place, more and more taking command of the economy, directives and so on. Later on towards the end of the war, 1944 and 1945, my dad was in the Underground, and we helped him here and there, there's a lot of detail to it, but eventually he got picked up and he was in solitary confinement for a while. Shortly before the end of the war he went to Germany; he was shipped to a concentration camp where he died just a couple of days before the English liberated that particular camp.

DR: Can you describe a few of the details of being involved in the Underground?

NW: My dad had a motorcycle and he would distribute food distribution cards which were handed down by the government for everybody, and which had been cracked, as they called it, stolen from certain places by armed commandos. He would distribute those to the people who had gone "under," they called it, to the farmers and so on, otherwise they had to work in Germany they had to be supplied with these coupons. He went by train and motorcycle doing that particular job until he got caught.

DR: How widespread was the involvement in the Underground?

NW: Quite a bit, but percentage-wise of the people it's hard to say. I had an uncle who was part of those armed commandos. He got killed. And my dad of course, too. Other acquaintances. Another fellow at my church who went to a concentration camp; he died. Another one was shot, who was also a commando member.

DR: Were you yourself actively involved in that?

NW: Not particularly, because I was just sixteen, seventeen years of age. A couple of times my dad came home, for instance with a rifle, and he said, bring this to Uncle Dirk please, who lived about two miles away. And I went, with my pounding heart, in the dark, with the rifle next to me, on the bike, and I made it. We brought radios to him, too, because there was a certain time you couldn't have any radios.

MW: I can remember my dad, he was postmaster in Sint Pancras. After they had broken into the distribution office, they brought the food stamps to our post office, and hid them under the floor in a crawlspace. Then Neal's dad came at the door with another man and they would pick up those stamps and identification cards so that they could distribute them. The Germans could never raid the post office because it was protected by the state and that was one of the few safe places.

DR: What was the reputation of the people involved in the Underground?

MW: They were good. It was the ones that were in favor of the Germans that were not well received. They were called the NSB, the National Socialist Party. They were hated because they were spies. They would give people's names who then were picked up and put in prison.

NW: But the others, they were the heroes.

MW: After the war, the girls who were going with German soldiers, they had their heads shaved and were tarred and feathered. They got the treatment.

DR: I understand that you [Neal] came to the United States first without your wife?

NW: Yes.

DR: What brought you to go to the United States in the first place?

NW: Adventure. Plus some subconscious urge, I believe. My dad was in flower bulbs and he always was talking about exporting. And after he didn't come back from the war, I continued his brokerage business in flower bulbs. Somewhere along the line I wanted to see England and I wanted to see the United States. I wrote into an ad from Associated Seed Growers in Cambridge, New York, for a fellow who knew about flower bulbs and gladiolus. After going back and forth, by letter, he became my sponsor. He was manager of the company and he said come over. So I did.

DR: What part of the United States did you go to first?

NW: Cambridge, New York, which is close by Albany.

DR: How long were you there?

NW: A couple of months, then he sent me to Indianapolis because they had a branch there, too, and then to Los Angeles, where I worked and sold seeds to the nurseries.

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

NW: A lot of traffic. A lot of cars even then. And a huge country. I drove back from California later to Michigan. It took four nights and four days. Also, believe it or not, as soon as I got off the boat I was drafted. I went to work for my boss and someone said, "You have to go see the teacher." "What for?" "Well, she is the registrar here" in our small village for the draft. She said, you have to do this and that, and write your name down. Shortly thereafter I was drafted. I got an extension, a deferment of about

six months, but then I had to go into the army.

DR: Even not being an American citizen?

NW: That was the response of everyone: "You're not an American, you have to?" Yes, you have to because you're an alien allowed to be here for permanent residence. Then you must serve. The Korean War was going on. I went to the Consul in Los Angeles, the Dutch Consul. He said, you may stay but you have to serve, or you may go back home, but then they'll never let you into the country again.

DR: How did you feel about that?

NW: Strange, but I had to make a quick decision.

DR: What did you end up doing?

NW: I did go into the army and served for almost three years.

DR: Where did you serve?

NW: Fort Hood, I was trained there. And then to Germany. Almost went to Korea, but I didn't, fortunately. I was sent to Germany. We were engaged by then.

DR: Did you know each other before you came to the United States the first time?

MW: He's a forceful fellow. We dated. Once in a while I got a letter in the mail. He had my name wrong on there, but it got where it was supposed to be. Then he wanted to write first. Then he wanted me to be his girlfriend. Then he came over because his grandpa was dying. In one week I had to make a decision: marry him or not. We became engaged in a week. My father and mother never had seen him. They knew his grandpa. Grandpa always came to the post office, and then he wanted to talk to me and tried to prevent him from staying

in America. The family thought it was terrible, but I couldn't do a thing about it. After we became engaged, he came to Germany, and we got married the next September. It all went fast.

DR: What year were you married in?

MW: 1952. 1951 we were engaged, November. We got married in September.

NW: That's a story all in itself, though, because being in the army, you have to have special permission from the authorities to get married. I had to obtain all these different approval papers, and I had to go through a stack about two inches high. It seemed like it never got to the end of it.

MW: I had to be tested in Germany, at the army camp. I can still see myself laying there. It was a big room, and all those soldiers walked by. I've never been so embarrassed in my life. I had to go through that.

DR: What was it like being in Germany after the war?

MW: Oh, it was beautiful where we lived, in Ider-Oberstein.

NW: It was beautiful country. We liked the people, too, even though they had been our enemies.

MW: We rented a one bedroom room. It was just one room with a bed and a little table and an armoire. That's where we lived. That's where Allen was born. It's just a beautiful country.

DR: Did you feel any tension at all between the Netherlands and Germany?

NW: In a way, because we were in the mode of wanting to say to the Germans, even the ones that we rented the room from, look what all you did, etc. This fellow had been a proud member of the German army, an officer, and he got pretty mad. He said, history goes the



way it goes, and this is what happened.

MW: The worst was in the trains. We were in the train and all these men sitting in there and they were still Hitler followers, and that we could never understand. That was tough.

NW: Well, it was so deep in their bones. You have people today in Germany who will still hark back to those days with a little nostalgia.

MW: So many widows. And they worked hard on the land, real poor. Remember, some husbands were in a Russian concentration camp, and some came still home.

DR: How soon after you were married did you move to the United States?

MW: That was another experience. We went there by boat from Bremerhaven to New York. Stayed in a hotel there one night, and then by train we went to Highland Park, Illinois, where Neal discharged from the army. We entered Chicago first, then to Highland Park. That was Christmas day. We were the only ones on the railroad station, with Allen in a baby carriage. I said to Neal, I'm Mary and Joseph and little Jesus, because it was very quiet. You could hear the church bells, but there was nobody. Everybody was either in church or what. There was a little midget with an enormous head and a very small body, and he was a paper deliverer. He said he knew someone that was renting a room, a bedroom, it was a rooming place. That's what we got. A very talkative lady, her husband was dying of cancer, he was lying on a bed in the living room. I had a bedroom upstairs. I was alone there with Allen because Neal had to go all the way to Texas to get his car. He went by bus to Texas.

NW: I had to be discharged, but it took about three weeks. I had to still serve three weeks. After I was really out, I had to get my car, which was set on blocks in a garage in Gainesville, Texas, with a widow lady. I went down there by Greyhound bus, pushed it off the blocks, got oil and gas into it, and drove all the way up to Chicago.

DR: What was that like for you [Mary] being alone for the first three weeks?

MW: It was winter, and lots of snow. I had to get some groceries, and I had to carry Allen and the groceries. I had to walk about twenty, twenty-five minutes to a store, and then I got a few groceries and went back and I went upstairs again. I could use her kitchen. But the baby could not cry in the daytime, and he couldn't cry at night, because she had sleepers that slept in the daytime and she had people that slept at night. So it was kind of nerve wrecking. Then she would come and visit me and she talked and talked. My English was, my regular schooling was not that good. I was so good at saying, "Uh huh, uh huh." It was an experience.

DR: When you [Neal] finally got back from Texas, where did you go after that?

NW: Kalamazoo.

MW: First we looked in newspapers. The lady said, we had to get furniture. A friend of his had rented a downstairs apartment, so we had to get furniture. There were all those ads and we were not familiar with the ads here. There was a whole household, for one hundred fifty dollars you could have a house full of furniture. Oh,

that was cheap, it was in Chicago. We thought we'd look once. I didn't dare go out of the car. It was such a bad neighborhood. Neal went way up there. It was terrible he said. Broken dishes.

NW: It was a pile of junk. You could buy it and use it, but even then it was a high pressure salesman, and I was glad to get out of the place.

MW: We bought it all on that Saturday morning we got into Kalamazoo, we bought everything that day, and they delivered because we didn't have anything. Then we knew that it was no way that you could have it all for one hundred fifty dollars. We learned everything the hard way.

DR: Did you know any people when you came to the United States?

NW: My friend. A friend from school. He had previously emigrated, too, and he was working in Kalamazoo, so he got us an apartment. We moved right in, after we bought the furniture.

MW: That was another thing. The gas man was supposed to connect the gas range, but I thought I could do that. I was monkeying with that knob, and at that time the Consumers' guy said, "What are you doing?" I said, "Connecting the range." He said, "You could have blown up the whole house." [laughter]

NW: Luckily the Consumers' man came.

DR: What did your families feel about your moving to the United States?

MW: My father and mother felt real bad.

DR: Did you have other brothers and sisters?

MW: I had one brother and one sister. My brother died a couple years ago. My sister comes here almost every year. So that's neat. My

father and mother both are gone. That's the only thing I feel real bad about.

DR: In what ways did they feel bad about you moving here?

MW: My mother was an orphan. I think when they have been an orphan, they are much closer to their children.

DR: Did they ever try to stop you from coming?

MW: No. My mother said, when you go there, don't stick to the Dutch language, when you say "a," you say "b." You learn the language or only speak that language. Don't stick to the Dutch. And that's what we did.

DR: Did they ever visit you here?

MW: No, my mother had been sick. Ever since that time had been real sick. My father came after my mother died. He was here once. That was really nice.

NW: My mother was a widow. At first, after I came out of the army, I thought maybe she'd come over with the other brothers and sisters, and we were trying to do it, but then we told them, why don't you wait a year, because we were so poor. We thought we'd get a little bit on our feet first. Then after a year was over, everybody had gone their ways—gone to school, found a job—so they didn't want to come over any more.

DR: What sort of job did you get in Kalamazoo?

NW: I started on my own trying to sell bulbs. It didn't go too well. I started growing some plants. That didn't go too well. Sick of poverty as we knew it, so I started studying with La Salle, Extension University. For two hundred fifty dollars they would

carry you all the way through C.P.A. exam in those days. I studied and worked. Got to work for a C.P.A. in Kalamazoo. I got my certificate, but I didn't feel I was cut out to be in public accounting work all my life. After I got my certificate I started working for Somerville Construction Company which was a gas and oil pipeline outfit in Ada. Later on I moved to Holland because Mary had allergy problems. She always felt good here when we were at the beach on vacation, so then I found a job with Bil-Mar Foods until I retired.

DR: It sounds like you had a pretty tough time in the very beginning. What was that like?

MW: I can remember the first year was absolutely horrible for me. The first nightmare I had I can remember. I was on a bike and I went past my parents' house and I couldn't stop. It was a nightmare. I can still remember that.

DR: What were some of the difficulties you had in your first years here?

MW: Probably money. We were really struggling, and Neal was not the type that liked to work in a factory. We managed, though, and it was interesting. We were happy nevertheless, but we were poor at that time.

DR: What effects did all those difficulties have on you?

NW: Not many. You grow through all that experience. Everybody gets here without money mostly. There were people there in Kalamazoo who said you ought to take a factory job and make a little more money rather than trying to go for himself. In the long run it was better, the way we went.

- MW: I think you feel it more that the Lord provides. When we didn't have anything always something came. You never notice it when everything is smooth.
- NW: The only time in Kalamazoo when we didn't have anything to eat, I went to the store and I thought I'd buy something on credit. There was this lady, she said, "Oh, you haven't got any bread, here's a couple loaves of bread." That was in the very beginning. We never had any real problems.
- MW: You just manage for some reason.
- NW: After two years or so, three years, you [Mary] went to the Netherlands. We borrowed some money and you went to see your folks.
- MW: That's because my mother was getting so ill. That was nice, too, going there. I can remember another thing. At first we started a flower stand. It was on the way to the Borges hospital. It was a bad neighborhood, but it was a nice way to get to the hospital. I thought that people were like in the Netherlands. You have all those ideas that they will buy flowers to bring to the sick, but they bring flowers to the dead. I didn't know that. We had all those flowers. We came out of it without debt, but we had to work one Sunday, it was Easter, we had all those Easter lilies. They didn't all go on Saturday, and we had to get rid of them because money was into it. I went on Sunday. I felt so bad. I went with Allen in the baby carriage. I thought this is sin on Sunday in a store. I thought how can I do this? I said to Neal, "I can't do this." He said, "I'll go, then you go home." I walked home, and I didn't know that I had a big pencil behind my ear. When I worked at

the post office I always had a pencil behind my ear. People looked at me and looked at me. Church came just out and there I walked home. We got the elders, and people had seen us on Sunday and that's a sin. The elders came over to visit us that we were open on Sunday, and then we explained it all and that was okay. People telling the elders that we were in the flower stand on Sunday. Now all is changed. You don't think that anymore, but in those days they were so critical of everything.

DR: Who were some of the first people you came in contact with when you lived here? Who did you associate with?

MW: Mostly the Dutch people.

NW: Mostly the church people. We went right to a Christian Reformed Church.

MW: People he knew were all going to church there. They came over visiting a lot.

NW: A lot of Hollanders in Kalamazoo as well as in Holland and Grand Rapids, so you move in those circles.

DR: What made you decide to go to a Christian Reformed Church?

NW: We belonged to the Gereformeerde Kerk in the Netherlands.

MW: He did.

NW: So then we went to the Christian Reformed Church. Now Mary was Reformed in the Netherlands.

MW: But I feel you have to go with your husband. You can't have both.

DR: Did you feel any hesitation in joining the Christian Reformed Church?

MW: A little bit because they're way stricter. I had a little bit more

liberty which was not in our church either, but I was that type. My father and mother let me go in that sense. I thought there were so many no-no's. I had a terrible time with all the no-no's. Now it's all changed, but in those days. That has changed, thank goodness.

DR: Did you ever consider going to a Reformed church in America?

MW: I go sometimes. Larry goes to Christ Memorial and I do like that church, but we are happy in our church, Neal being in the choir. . . Sometimes I would like to.

NW: There is really not much difference between the two.

DR: After Kalamazoo you moved to Grand Rapids?

NW: We moved to Dutton because I was working in Ada. Then from Dutton we went to Wyoming.

MW: Because I was pregnant with Larry, I got so terrible sick, it was allergy. Doctor didn't know what it was, when we moved to Grandville, and rented a house there. It was the aspirin that I became allergic to, but they didn't know that.

NW: That was an interesting story. Mary was pregnant and she just couldn't keep anything in her stomach. She felt so sick.

MW: I had such terrible headaches. I took aspirin, but I didn't know that that caused me that I couldn't breathe. They rushed me to the doctor and they gave me a shot, and then I felt fine again.

NW: Then she got these terrible wheezes and tightening up. The doctor said this is just all something, you really should never have any babies anymore. They thought it was because of the baby. Towards the end of her pregnancy it got better. The doctor found out it was all because of the aspirin she took. She had become allergic to the



aspirin. She was allergic to dust and a lot of other things, too, but the funny thing was that it took the doctor a long time to figure that out.

MW: Now there are more people who found out that it really is aspirin but they never knew that. People have these terrible attacks.

NW: She had shots for about sixteen years. She did not have a smell, therefore she did not have a taste, and then that's why we thought, every time we come out here she feels better, let's move to Holland, build a house here, find a job here, and it was a lot better. Slowly on she got out of her entire allergy problem and her smell came back.

MW: The doctor said your blood is completely clear and I had to quit taking shots. I knew that already because there was no reaction to those shots. I was completely over it, but then the terrible thing was, I had taste. You won't believe it, everything I thought was tasting so good didn't taste that good, because you make your own imaginations all in your head anyway. Like carrots, they were absolutely out of this world. I went sometimes to Mr. Steak and had liver and onions, and I thought that was so good. Then my sister came over and I had my smell and taste back, and I said, let's go for liver and onions again. I couldn't get them past my lips, still can't. So you make your own. People that lose their taste, don't worry, you make your own.

NW: She'd just sit there eating in a restaurant or so and say, "This tastes gorgeous." But then she was simply remembering back.

MW: Then if it was something I never had, then it is like paste, there

is no taste. Your mind can know a lot of things, but not all.

DR: What was it like moving around as much as you did? Was that hard to adjust to?

NW: No, not really.

MW: You miss your friends. Every time you have to. I hear so many fathers and mothers say it is so hard on children. But it is your attitude that makes your children accept it. If you make them ready for it and then you say that's part of life and you make adjustment to it, they don't have any problems. You have to adjust yourselves. Everywhere there are nice people, and you just make new friends.

NW: It might make a difference like when you're in the army and you move from place to place, where there is no church, no school. You have Christian school here, too. So they went from one Christian school to another. Sure they lost their friends, but it was more or less the same environment. It might have made a lot of difference.

MW: I think they adjusted nicely. We never brought them to school. We put them on the bus and they got there. They did pretty good. I didn't have a car at first, so I could never bring them the first time to school. It was tough, but it made them stronger I think.

DR: What made you decide to finally stay in Holland?

MW: We like it here, and retired here.

NW: It's close by the beach, and we had built a house here. I found my last job here I figured. Then you don't want to move anymore.

MW: I just love living here. It's too bad they have a new subdivision coming behind us, but then we still have a lot of trees, so then we still have privacy.

NW: Holland is a nice sized city. It used to be a lot smaller.

MW: It's a good place to raise your children.

NW: Yes, it didn't feel so big city like.

MW: I'm not a big city girl.

DR: Do you remember some of your first impressions of Holland?

NW: My first impression was, it's a nice small town. You had to crane your neck to find a restaurant, to find somewhere to go eat. Now they're all over the place.

MW: Then they didn't have any hardly at all. But then we weren't used to going to restaurants anyway. So that didn't bother us too much. We picnicked a lot. Even in Kalamazoo we always picnicked. We were close by the park. We always walked over to the park with the kids. Then we picnicked.

DR: What job did you work in Holland?

NW: I worked for Bil-Mar Foods. I started as an accountant, and pretty much took the books over out of a shoe box, because it was still a small company. They were selling about seven million worth of goods. It kept on growing and growing and I became controller. Later on they were sold to Sara Lee, and then by the time I left, the accounting department and data processing was about forty people. And instead of seven million, they were selling three hundred million. You can see how it had grown.

DR: Did you come in contact with a lot of other Dutch immigrants here in Holland?

MW: Yes, but we didn't ever really go around with them that much. We had some from Neal's town that we once in a while get together with

in Grand Rapids, but not with the Dutch people here that much. We see them in church and visit.

NW: No, there are some from the old country in Grand Rapids who also came from the same area, and we had a group there and the other Hollanders mostly we met here were in church.

MW: When you're younger you do more entertaining. When they have children, you have children, and you entertain more. You don't know that yet, when you're a young girl, but when you get older it becomes less and less. First we had all the birthdays with the Dutch ones in Grand Rapids and Wyoming, but slowly they're all getting older and quite a few have passed away that were Neal's father's and mother's age. We still have some left but some have gotten sick, the regular stuff, when you get older you have all those problems.

NW: But then there was another group. Going back to the church again, the Christian Reformed Church said it was okay to go dancing now, believe it or not, and we associated with one of those groups from the Netherlands who had long since set up a dancing group. They happened to be in Grand Rapids. They had some parties that we went to. They were all Hollanders.

MW: But we quit that because they smoked so terrible and drank so much. We didn't really care for that. Their smoking was so bad. Now we have Evergreen Commons we go, and we go to the dance in Grand Haven. They have it at the waterfront. They have a big band and they dance there every Wednesday night. Whenever some things are going on, we go.

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

NW: I would say so.

MW: It becomes a little bit more Mexican and Dutch probably. It's slowly changing, which is good.

DR: Would you have considered it to be more of a Dutch community when you first came?

NW: Yes.

MW: Yes, I do think it was more so.

DR: Did that have any impact on how you responded to it?

MW: No, I think we're open to almost anything.

NW: You grow into whatever your community does. There may be certain things that you don't like but you have to take them as they come along.

DR: How do you feel about Holland becoming more culturally diverse?

MW: I think that's great. America is a melting pot anyway. Let them all enjoy Holland. It's a beautiful city to live in.

DR: Do you see any parallels between the experiences they're having and the experiences you had when you first came here?

MW: We were alone. That may be a little different. They come always with a lot of family. The Mexicans, in that sense I give them credit. They are very family oriented, which I think we could learn a lot from. They're close, which I think is marvelous.

NW: But you have to go on. Mary always complains about them talking Spanish.

MW: That's a hang-up with me, and it was always my mother's hang-up. We got in the post office people that were speaking only English or

speaking only German. Then she always said, how come they take all the benefits of our country, but they don't want to learn the language. That bugged her. Now that bugs me, too. When they are all coming in the store speaking Spanish, little kids talking Spanish. Why? If they want to speak the language, go back. That's my feeling.

NW: Those things you can't say out loud anymore because you may be ethnically incorrect. But we felt that we certainly didn't have any help with our Dutch language. They weren't helping us in Dutch, we tried to get out of it. We feel the others should do the same thing, but they have a different feeling.

MW: They take all the privileges.

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

NW: I feel they should have a teacher to help them out if they're in need, but to actually coach them in a Latino environment and culture just because they happen to be here now and there are a good many of them, no I don't think so because then the Vietnamese might have the same request and the Koreans, etc.

MW: I think when they come here they have to learn the English language. There are schools, there is community ed. You have everything here. They should take advantage of all that. They shouldn't be in school with special teachers. I think it's good that they know their language. All of them, when they learn the Spanish language, I think that's great. But not only the Spanish language. That's just my opinion. I've always been bothered with that. In the store I would like to say, please just speak English. But now you can't say

that.

DR: Do you see any problems developing as more and more new immigrants move into Holland in the future?

MW: I don't think so, do you?

NW: Not just because our city is getting larger and more diverse. The general trend of the times anyhow is one where people are more liberal and they have different opinions and they are more aggressive. There's more crime and there's more poverty and those things probably happen wherever you go. It's a matter of trying to solve those problems rather than fighting with different groups.

MW: The leadership has to be firm.

DR: Do you see Holland being able to solve those problems successfully?

NW: I believe so. If you don't get into a situation like in the inner cities where we simply leave the poor to their own devices. Then they kind of blow up. Provide opportunities of some sort for them. Holland is a good community because it has a lot of industry and it's growing in its opportunities.

MW: And they should become part of the leadership in the city so they're represented so they can open up and express their views, and get help one way or another.

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

MW: They're great.

DR: Have you always felt that way?

MW: Yes, I've always thought it was great. It's enjoyable.

NW: Every town has to have a festival.

MW: I like it better than having a dandelion festival. It is neat. I

really love it, and we are both in Showstoppers, at Evergreen Commons. We get a lot of enjoyment out of that.

NW: Showstoppers is a senior show, a variety show which is put on at Evergreen Commons, and we help raise about \$40,000 for Tulip Time and Evergreen Commons. It all helps.

DR: Do you think Tulip Time at all reflects what life is like in the Netherlands?

MW: No, not particularly. The costumes are all made according to the climate here. If they had to wear the costumes they wear there, the original would be too hot. It's too heavy material. But it looks kind of like it. And they don't wear those there anymore, though. It's only for tourism. There is hardly anybody around who works in wooden shoes. But because they see them in wooden shoes, they think everybody works in wooden shoes. Maybe if you're a farmer you use them yet because it keeps you're feet dry. You [Neal] used them some, but I never wore a wooden shoe.

NW: Oh yes, I went to school in those things.

MW: Never wore a pair of wooden shoes, thank goodness.

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

NW: Six, seven times maybe.

MW: I probably went two more times than Neal did. You went alone once. Not often enough, it is an expensive trip, especially when you have children yet at home.

DR: What are your impressions now when you go back?

MW: It is an enormous change. I feel the church life is a lot less. Very few young people and very few children in church. You don't



feel so comfortable in church service there; it's different. But the people are just as nice and friendly.

NW: It's very crowded now. I used to live in a polder. There was one big long street, actually two, one crossing over. There were houses on each side. I don't know exactly how many people lived in that polder, but maybe two thousand. Now it's just completely filled with houses because people of the cities use it as a bedroom community.

MW: We get lost now.

NW: I got absolutely lost in my own hometown a couple years ago.

MW: We visited the city where we went to school, Alkmaar. I said to Neal, let's make a short-cut because that's what we did long ago. We got so completely lost. They built and the changes, we didn't recognize anything. We got out of it, but it was a miracle. Everything has changed. Where I grew up, the town, that has also changed. The city where I was born in, Enkhuizen, on the lake, which was a sea at one time, that is more or less the same. I feel comfortable there. The city and the lake, Yselmeer.

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

MW: I went first to a public school in a village and then to a Christian school in the city. That was a sacrifice because bus and school had to be paid by the parents then, too. Just like here.

NW: I went to a Christian school, but Mary, I thought Christian school is paid for by the Netherlands government. They have a little support from parents, but it isn't nearly what it is here. It's not near such a burden. It's basically supported equally.

MW: It was not paid by the government.

NW: Shows you how little we've talked about that before, we both have different opinions on that. I went to high school then, and that's all you'd get. High school in the Netherlands is probably equivalent to about a year and a half of college here, or maybe two years depending on the subject [end of side one]. Afterwards here I did not take the G.I. bill because we were married and had children. I got my schooling in an accounting firm.

MW: That was tough. It took about four or five years. He had to do it at night. So we never did any visiting, we just picnicked a lot, and he studied.

NW: I was also selling flower bulbs house to house on Saturdays and evenings, which I enjoyed, but it took time away from the family. I was really working hard in those days. So I got pains all over my body, and I went to the doctor and the doctor said you are just working too darn hard. If you don't slow down, you're going to kill yourself. So I decided, let's slow down and enjoy life a little bit more.

DR: How did your Dutch heritage influence the way that you raised your kids?

MW: They weren't in bed late, I can remember that. Our kids went to bed early. They were up early, but they were in bed about seven-thirty, eight o'clock, when all those kids were still playing outside. But they didn't know any better. They could read a little while and then the light went out and they fell asleep. I didn't have any problem, because we did that right from the beginning. Later when

they got older they thought they were cheated out. But they were terrific students, they got plenty of sleep. We never had a problem on that score.

DR: I'm through with my list of questions that I have prepared. Is there anything else that we haven't talked about that you'd like to talk about?

NW: No, not particularly. Of course, if we'd had a list of your questions maybe we'd been able to elaborate a little more.

MW: I think she got a lot of information.

DR: Yes, I did.

MW: We have nice kids. Two married. Five grandchildren. It's great. And our Larry is not married yet, but someday he might be.

DR: Do you have any regrets or any reflections on the years since you've moved here?

NW: I've never had any regrets except that I had thought maybe in the beginning my family would come over and they didn't. My mother was a widow and she had her own problems trying to raise the other children, who were all younger than me. I've had some feedback from them telling me to my face I never should have done it. You feel some guilt, but you cannot keep living with that either. So you have to say to yourself that the way you went was the way you thought was best. You pray for them, you pray for yourself, you pray for guidance and for light in the future, and then you have to take it as it comes.

MW: I felt bad, too, that my folks only twice saw their grandchildren. They missed a lot. I was the only one that had children. My sister

never had any, and my brother didn't have any. They missed a lot, and I feel that's bad.

NW: You talk about possibilities and when you're bringing up family no one really doesn't have all that much money. Then you figure this great country has this Christian school and that's where we wanted to go, and that's where you're supposed to go, but it takes about as much out of your budget as you could every year have gone over to visit your relatives with. This is the kind of thing that you run into. In retrospect, yes, what would you have done? Everybody thinks about it a little bit different. A lot of Christian school parents today say it's getting more and more expensive, and they have a hard time. We had a hard time then, too. Not to say that if we would have had our children in the public school that we would have gone there every year, because lo and behold, we might have been as foolish as to buy a boat or what have you. Then that would have been very materialistic also. But I just wanted to make a comparison. If you immigrated a hundred years ago, you just cut yourself off from everything, because you knew you were never going to get back.

MW: That must have been worse than anything. They never could go back.

NW: In our day, we could have gone back every year if we wouldn't have spent it on other things which we thought were more important yet. But as far as going back for good, I've never thought about it, no.

MW: Oh, no. I would never have been able to keep house. Everything is so expensive there, and you've outgrown it. I'm really happy here.

NW: By the same token, because you come out of this background, if they

were to say today, do you live happier over there or happier over here, either would be fine with me.

MW: Not with me. I could never do that.

NW: That's true, the grandchildren would be far away. But as a matter of being able to is what I meant. I would have no problem with it.

MW: That's all we know probably.

DR: Well, thank you very much for taking the time for this.

MW: We appreciate it. Hope you can make something out of it.