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Borgman, Clyde and Kathleen Oral History Interview: Sesquicentennial of Holland, "150 Stories for 150 Years"

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Oral History Interview with
Clyde and Kathleen Borgman

Conducted July 23, 1997
by Ann Paeth

Sesquicentennial Oral History Project
"150 Stories for 150 Years"
Sesquicentennial Oral History Project
Interview with Clyde and Kathleen Borgman
July 23, 1997
Interviewer: Ann Paeth

AP: If you could state your names and where and when you were born.

KB: I’m Kathleen Bocks Borgman, and I was born in Holland, [date removed], 1918, so I'm now 79 years old.

CB: My name is Clyde Borgman, I was born on the north side of Holland in 1914. I'm 83.

AP: So you have both lived here all your lives?

KB: Yes.

CB: Yes. My great grandmother, she was here when Van Raalte came. Her grandfather on her father’s side, he came with Van Raalte.

AP: So your family has been here for a long time. [to Kats] So you were mentioning some of the things you remembered as a child. Where did you grow up?

KB: I grew up in Montello Park. I remember about the boat, when I was six years old, the boat burned. It was September 9, 1924. I'll never forget it. The bar holding the oil drum on the boat landed in our yard. It was red hot. All the people that came to watch the fire trampled on our beautiful flowers, and we had to go a couple doors over because we had to evacuate our home. This oil drum from the boat, on 17th Street, went through a basement, just missing a young boy.

We walked to school, rain or shine, we went to Van Raalte School. The teachers meant business, no foolishness, because if you did, you’d have a yard stick.
AP: How big would your class have been?

KB: Quite big. In Van Raalte there were four rooms. I worked at Heinz when I was 17, I lied, because I wasn’t supposed to be 17. I worked in the summer in the pickle season, and I worked third shift. We’d get through at 3:00 in the morning, and I’d walk up to my great grandmother’s up by River and 8th, and there was no fear. It was very safe. Of course, from Heinz to Montello, that was just gravel road, there was no pavement. We didn’t have a radio or TV or telephone. You knew your neighbors. The schools were always a good meeting place. I remember that 24th Street, south of Holland, that was country. Just plain country. There was a lot of empty space, and lots of farmland. Then blueberries came here, and that was Frank Fent who started them. That was about 63 years ago, I’m not positive on that. Then the children all earned their spending money picking blueberries for five cents a pound. My daughter wanted a bat, she was four years old. I said, you pick berries and get your money. It was 84 cents. She earned 84 cents, and then she quit. But she got her bat, and she never used it. Every year she wanted something, but she had to earn her money. We also knew the value of a dollar. Hamburgs were a nickel, deluxe for ten cents. But the wages were not very good, they were lousy. Times were tough, but then they had WPA. There was no welfare. I remember I ate oatmeal three times a day, and don’t give me anything with oatmeal today, I don’t want it. We had three theaters in Holland, there was Colinial, the Holland, and the Strand. The Strand was on 8th Street, too.

AP: What kinds of things did they show?
KB: Mostly westerns. They had somebody play the piano along with it. Now Holland is booming very good. We got married late, and we live over on Rosabelle Beach. We got married in 1949. I was 30, he was 34.

AP: What was your marriage ceremony like?

KB: We didn’t have a church wedding. We just went to a minister’s home with another couple. Then we had my grandfather’s farm. He divided it up into five, and we got one cottage. We wanted to borrow money. No way. We were too risky. Because it was too far out. We couldn’t even borrow a dime. Now all the rich people live there, the doctors, and were the poor. But now Holland is really booming. And the schools, how they have improved. And the businesses, colleges, airplanes, travel, computers, and all the advantages children have today. But they have no respect for somebody else. We have malls now, which we didn’t have. I’m sure if my grandparents were alive today, they’d turn over in their grave, to see all the advantages that they didn’t have.

AP: How was shopping...?

KB: We lived next to the North and South Alabama boats. We shopped on Saturday nights at Montello Groceries. There was Perrins Marine, now it’s Lakewood Marina. We always had a Christmas Club, we put ten cents in a week. We’d walk to town, to Woolworth, and we bought my mother a vase, a blue one, and it was ten cents. But it was beautiful, so she thought, and we did. I think it would be worth a lot of money now. We did our own drycleaning with "napths." We also shopped at Kroger and the A&P, Steketee’s and five and dime stores.
Of course, the streets are not safe now, and we never locked our door, which you have to do now. The world is full of violence. Now we have credit cards. We never bought anything after we were married unless we could pay cash. We just didn’t do that.

AP: Do you use credit cards now?

KB: I have no credit card, we still don’t believe in credit cards. We’re not that floaty. I worked at Heinz in the summer, and don’t feed me anything with cucumber in it. Then I helped pick blueberries with my daughter, and she wanted a horse, so I said, "OK, then you earn it." She was ten years old, and she earned the money, and she quit. She never worked again.

AP: Did she earn enough money for a horse?

KB: Oh yes. She earned $168 in blueberries, again. Of course, she got all my money, but she was a good blueberry picker. We told her if she earned money for a horse, we’d build her a little barn, so he had to build a barn.

AP: Did you have just one daughter?

KB: I had two, but the first one was a Down’s Syndrome, and she lived to be two days from a year, and she passed away. But this one was a redhead and a bullhead, and she still is. She has a college education from Hope. And do you know what she’s doing? She’s driving 18 wheeler trucks. She didn’t want a pencil pushing job. That’s fun. She has one son, and he’s living with us. But I worked nights at General Electric. I was an inspector. I also worked at Holland Racine Shoe, which is no more. I was a tree-er. A tree-er, you got the shoe, ironed out the wrinkles, and
polished it.

AP: What happened to the shoe factory that it went out of business? Everybody says they used to make really fine shoes.

KB: Oh yes they did, they were very elegant shoes, but that's gone.

AP: A lot of people used to work there.

KB: Yes. But I had fifteen and a half years there, and then I had ten and a half years at GE, and then I got mad and quit.

AP: So you quit before it closed down.

KB: Yes, but my daughter stayed till the end. She also worked at Life Savers. We don't see much of her now because she works out of Memphis, Tennessee. Then we take care of her 19 year old ADD.

AP: Attention Deficit Disorder? I had a roommate with that.

KB: Definitely. He's 19.

AP: Does he get treated for it? My roommate had to take medication for it.

KB: Yes, taken it since four years old. He's very active. He's had five cars in two years, that's how active he is.

CB: This car is alright yet. Has a couple of dents in it, but that's all.

KB: He goofed around, didn't work this summer, so no insurance and the car sits in the yard. So he started at work.

AP: Well you [Clyde] brought along some copies of some photos your brother took? Tell me about them.

CB: This is on the corner of Lakewood Boulevard and River Avenue. I remember that
house, that house is still standing there, although it's moved back. There's a gas station on the corner now. If you go to the back of the station, you can see the house back in the field. This here, our house stood right here, but not at this time, that was a later date. But our house was there, but this is N. River Avenue, that was dirt road. When I was small, it was still gravel road. There was no paved road to Grand Haven, that was the main road to Grand Haven, gravel. They paved that in the late 20s. I went to Beechwood School, a four room school across from where Park Davis is now, they're using that for a parking lot. They paved that road around 1924, because I was in school, and my brother was not going to school yet. He's four years younger. Later on it became 136th, that's West Ottawa. Then that was paved in the late 20s. This here, my brother took this, this is 75 years later after the first one was taken. That'd be 1975, so that'd be even 20 years ago. Park Davis has got that now.

AP: Who are the people?

CB: This is the Karux's, Mr. Kardux owned that. This is a swamp taken from where D&W is now. This used to be the railroad from Holland to Grand Haven. Where Central Avenue is now, where Holland WHTC is, that used to be the railroad tracks to Grand Haven. My dad remembered it, I don't. This is the early 1900s.

AP: So then the paper went out and took new photos of all the same spots and did a feature? And the paper's dated 1963. I bet if they did it now even...

KB: It'd be different.

AP: The paper says this is from the Observer?
CB: That's the Holland Sentinel.

KB: They had a section called the Alpena Beach Road. Now, Lakewood, you used to go to Getz Farm, and that was just cinder at first.

CB: Mr. Getz paved that in the late 20s. He paved it so it'd be one lane. If you met a car, you had to get off the road at first, then they widened it later.

KB: It was just Model-T Fords, though. When we were married, we had to take New Holland Street, and my brother-in-law called it the woodchuck road because it had so many holes in it. He said we never would we ever see the road paved, and now it is loaded with homes, so he had to eat his own words.

AP: Are there other things that have changed that you thought you would never see change?

CB: The developments, that was all farm.

KB: That was all empty space. When we built where we are not, on 17th Avenue, there were three homes, and they were all ___ patches.

CB: Just like by the mall, when I was young, it was all farm country.

KB: It has changed. Hope College, look how Hope College changed. My sister went there for $200 a semester. It wasn't very big. I worked and put my sister through college, and I worked and put my brother through college. He went to Central Michigan, he was a big wig up there.

AP: Was that normal for most people to go to college or to not go to college?

KB: No, generally they didn’t. But she had more brains than I did. I was always so bad in school.
AP: She just had different kinds of brains.

KB: Well, I had a school teacher, and she said, "Is George your brother?" And I said, "Yes." She said, "I hope you’re not as bad as he is. Is Marian your sister?" I said, "Yes." She said, "Well, I’m sure she’s much smarter than you are." So I hated school. But my brother was eleven years younger than me. That was Nathan Bocks’ dad. He’s a neat kid.

AP: I just got his interview back today. He’s got a lot of energy and enthusiasm for the city.

KB: When he went to school, his parents moved to Canada, because his dad got a job teaching, and he didn’t want to go to school. They took him to the doctor, and he said, "He’s got school-itis." So he stayed home for two weeks. But all the teachers have said, if everybody was like Nathan, there’d be no trouble because he always smiled. But Holland has just grown, because we used to take the streetcar by Heinz when I lived at Montello. When I was little, we went to town, and the street car was coming, and I put my foot in the track. Then my mother and great grandmother, they yanked and pulled. The old street car came, but it did stop. There was a lot of sweating going on before I got my foot out of there. They took my shoe off. But you’d go to town on Saturday night, and everybody went to town on Saturday.

CB: The stores were open Saturday night. That was the only night they were open during the week.

KB: You’d go to Fabiano’s, we’d get maybe a dime a week, and we’d buy a Chocolate Marshmallow Tin Roof Sundae for ten cents. Beautiful. That was ice cream with
chocolate, marshmallow and Spanish Peanuts. When we went to Van Raalte School, we’d get a penny a month. We went to, we always called it Dumbell’s store. We’d buy four root beer balls for a penny. It was a hard decision. Now the kids say, hand me this, hand me that. They don’t appreciate anything.

AP: So kids have a lot more spending money?

KB: They have more advantages. They have television. We didn’t even have radio.

When we had radio, we could stay up on Friday night and listen to "One Man’s Family."

AP: When did you get your first TV?

CB: Our daughter was in high school.

KB: She was in fifth grade, and they had lessons from school on TV, so she had to go to the neighbor.

CB: So we bought one because they had things in school that you watched on television for. Before color came out, this was black and white. But TV was invented right after the war. They had some idea of it during the war, but they didn’t have it out. It didn’t come out until after the war, World War II.

AP: Did a lot of people have the money to get a TV then?

KB: I don’t think so. But some people, TV was more important to them than food on the table, even then.

AP: Do you think it’s become too important today?

KB: No. I watch Jeopardy, Wheel of Fortune, but I’d rather read a newspaper, because we take three newspapers. I like to read books, I love to read books. I have
cookbooks by the hundred, and I glance through them, put them on the shelf, and that’s where they stay. Cooking--my stove is broken now. That’s the way it goes.

AP: What else has changed in the city?

KB: Your stores. We didn’t have malls. We had five and dimes.

AP: Do you like shopping in the malls now?

KB: No I do not.

AP: What do you miss about the old way of shopping?

KB: I don’t think I really miss it, because I’m too old to go shopping. (laughs) In the mall, the floors are hard, and I can’t take that because I have arthritis in my feet. What clothes I have, I have forever. If you keep them long enough, they come back in style. I don’t own a dress.

CB: I lived across the bridge, just this side of the bowling alley, and when I was young, you crossed the bridge at night, you had a light on that corner, and where the Burger King is now, there used to be a big billboard, they had electric lights on that, that was the only light you had on the street. The rest of it was all dark.

KB: It really has changed, because I can remember walking from Heinz when I was seventeen. My mother was out at the cottage. We stayed in town, and we walked at three o’clock in the morning. We didn’t think anything of it. We never locked our doors, either, when we were first married.

CB: Where Burger King is now, that used to be Harrington Coal Yard. They also had a coal yard on the north side, and that was their feed mill for the farmers. Of course, they had night lights on when you went home. But otherwise, the rest of the street
was dark. People in town would say you live way out in the country.

KB: Pitch dark. We were in the sticks. We were the only ones living out where we are. There wasn’t another soul around. We’re not on the lake, there’s a road between us, but we have a right of way to the lake.

AP: Are people building a lot of big houses out there now?

KB: Oh yes, there’s one that is just mammoth right on the lake. So the people that live on Lakeshore, they block their view, and they’re not very happy. To the people that own that, it doesn’t matter.

AP: Someone was mentioning that you can’t see the lake at all when you’re driving down there because of all these big houses.

CB: There always were some cottages there, but they weren’t as close as they are now. The older ones, they tore down and built bigger houses. Some of them had to because of the erosion. In the 1950s they lost between thirty and fifty feet of the bank, their front yards.

KB: Our steps went down many a time. With 88 steps to the beach, I don’t go down anymore.

CB: So then in the 1950s, I made the steps in sections, and we use ropes to pull them up in the fall, and in the spring we put them back down again. In the fall is when you get your big storms, so we pull them up before the big storms come.

KB: This one cottage was teetering by us, and they had to move back. A lady was building, and we said to her she was too close, but she built anyway, and she had to move back.
AP: They probably have a lot more regulations now?

KB: They do, but people still ignore it. I always told him [Clyde], don't leave your boat down there on the beach, because the lake is treacherous. He learned the hard way, because his boat was way down the road, smashed to pieces, a row boat he made. I've always been out that way since I was five years old.

AP: This is an odd statistic, but more accidents happen on Lake Michigan then in the Bermuda Triangle. It's a very viscous lake.

KB: I wouldn't be surprised. The Grand Haven red flag, all those people went in. They don't honor the lake, and I've always lived on a lake. I lived on Lake Macatawa when I was two. I don't like boats.

CB: Lakewood Boulevard, at one time, was called Alpena Beach Road, because a ship went down on the end of that road during one of the storms, and the name of that ship was Alpena.

KB: Rosabelle Beach, a ship went down by the name of Rosabelle Beach, and the sign came up, and my grandfather gathered it, and it was right at the end of New Holland Street. Now my nephew has that sign.

AP: Do you remember a lot of ship wrecks?

KB: No, we don't.

CB: Not a lot of them. I remember some of them. There was one out of the harbor out where Ottawa Beach is now. When I was young, we went down there, and that sat there, parts of it were all torn up with the storm. But the hull itself sat there for about two or three years, you could see it just outside the piers.
KB: The beach was always a lovely place to go. They’d have stone, and you could build a fire on the beach. Now there are too many people. Because Holland has just grown, grown, grown.

CB: Ottawa Beach was always there, but it wasn’t a state park until the mid 1930s, then they made a state park out of it.

KB: That’s progress, I think, all of that. When we went to school, it was long division. I can add faster in my brain than I can with a calculator. Because, you didn’t have that, you had to do it.

AP: Certainly, a lot of different kinds of people have started coming into Holland, rather than it just being a Dutch town.

KB: I’m not Dutch! I’m a cur. My grandfather was Irish and French, and I have English and German and Scotch.

CB: They get that from a dog. A dog named cur is a mixed breed. Now do you understand?

AP: So what did you think of Holland growing up when it was so primarily Dutch?

KB: It was nothing. There was the old saying, "If you’re not Dutch, you’re not much." But that never bothered us. We were used to it. It was a Dutch town, but now you cannot say that, because we have all nationalities, and that doesn’t bother me one iota.

CB: Do you know where the Kentucky Fried Chicken is on Lakewood Boulevard now? My mother’s parents had a farm there during the Holland fire.

KB: But when I worked at GE, I’d much rather work with some Spanish that I worked
with, or some of the black people, which were lovely, than a couple of the Dutchmen. But then you have a rotten egg in every barrel. But we are very close friends of some Chinese and Taiwanese people. They call us Grandma and Grandpa. They’re from the China Inn. We have one little girl who’s a waitress there, now she has her own restaurant in New Mexico, and she calls us up. We’re still her grandma and grandpa. And I have Spanish grandchildren. They’re no relation. But I think Holland is really a nice town, and I think Centennial Park is beautiful. Christmas time years ago they used to always gather there and sing Christmas carols on Christmas Eve.

AP: What has the role of the church been in the city, and has that changes a lot?

CB: The Spanish community, they have their churches. But otherwise, the Reformed and Christian Reformed is still strong here.

AP: What church do you go to?

KB: We go to Port Sheldon Presbyterian Church, and if we have thirty people there, we’re crowded. It’s just a small church. It’s close by us. We did go to Ventura. That was a Baptist Church that was close to us then. My daughter took dancing lessons and they prayed about her because they said she was going to hell. So we never went again. That was the end of that.

AP: Because there’s certainly nothing wrong with dancing lessons.

CB: According to them it was.

KB: So when she came home crying from Sunday School, and she was madder than all get out, we never went again. But there are a lot of churches. They argue, and then
they split. But there weren’t too many churches, but now there’s a lot of different ones. They all started from the same place. The schools are growing, like West Ottawa Schools. That is overflowing again. They’re not strict like they used to be. Teachers can’t touch a child. In any school, they could be more stern. My grandson did not like school. They called up and said, "Where is he?" I said, "In school." He was sleeping in a lounge, and he slept there all day, and they didn’t even know it, so the teachers are not on the ball over there.

CB: I had a teacher in fourth grade, she’d take your fingers and bend them back, and take a ruler and paddle your hand. Today, if they do that, it’s child abuse.

KB: Years ago when a girl got married, if she was a school teacher, she was done. Don’t ask me why. That was stupid. Really no sense to that. It was always women teachers. You didn’t have men teachers. Not in the grade schools, anyway. Men, they had in high school for printing, but the rest were women.

AP: How has the role of women changed?

KB: Well I think that was about time that they changed it. We now have women ministers, which I approve. We have a really good one, on the ball. I think it’s about time women had more say. Christian Reformed, the women cannot say anything, but they may play the piano, and they may do Sunday School, but they may not vote, and I think that’s wrong. I think women have just as much to say as a man. I think when you both work, you share work. Not all one way. Of course, I never did believe the other way. I dare to tell people what I think and what I don’t think. I might get my foot in my mouth sometimes. But it really has changed. Maybe it’s
changed for the better. I hope so. Your doctors are much better. We used to have
one doctor for everything. They didn’t know all.

AP: So health care has changed a lot?

KB: Yes, it has. It’s changed immensely.

AP: Have you seen on the news where they talking about the amount of time new
mothers have in the hospital with their babies? How much time would you have in
the hospital?

KB: Probably about four days. But my mother, when she had my brother ten years
younger, she had to stay ten days, and when she got up, her legs were like rubber,
because you never got out of bed, and that was wrong.

CB: My mother had eight, and she had them all at home, and she had to stay in bed a
whole week. After the week was over, you’d have to help her get out of the bed and
help her walk. She had to learn to walk over again, she could hardly walk she’d be
so week.

KB: Of course now, we saw one girl and I asked how old her baby was. A day and a
half. She was shopping. But Nathan’s wife, they had their little boy, and she got out
of the hospital the next day, they went to Grand Rapids to a big restaurant with the
baby. Her mother didn’t approve.

AP: They say now babies are discharged in a day or two, but if they would just keep them
for about four days, it would cut down on all the time they’ve had to bring babies
back into the hospital due to jaundice or other things.

KB: That’s true. Of course, we used to earn our money baby sitting. I sat, had to be at
the people's house at seven o'clock. They'd come home at two o'clock in the morning, and I'd get twenty-five cents. I'd save all my quarters and buy my black shoes for winter, they were $5 a pair, and then I'd save again and buy a pair of white shoes for summer. But you got a quarter, and that was really big money.

AP: I heard about some of the jobs you held [Kats], but I didn't get to hear about any of the work you've done [Clyde].

CB: I worked in General Motors before the war. Then I went in the army for almost four years. Then I came back and worked General Motors another year and a half, then I went to Chris-Craft. I worked there thirty years, and retired from Chris-Craft in 1978.

AP: What did you do during the war?

CB: I was in the army in Europe. I was with the MP's, the military police.

AP: What work did you do at Chris-Craft?

CB: I worked in the joinery department.

AP: What was it like working at Chris-Craft?

CB: It was nice work. It was something. You work on a boat, but you work on different parts of it. So for a while you start out with floors, then you start putting cabins on, then you get into the interiors with the sinks, bunks, and all that stuff that goes into the cabin. When I first started there, everything was wood tops and everything. You made everything right from scratch, you might say. Later on, when they started with faster production, they made things on jigs where you just set them in and fastened them in.
AP: Did they eventually start using fiberglass?

CB: Yes.

AP: Where you there when they unionized?

CB: They were unionized when I came there, but they weren't real strong then yet. After I was thee, then they got more members.

AP: How has Holland reacted to unions?

CB: We didn't have too much trouble. We had a couple of strikes. The Smith family owned it. They were real nice to work for, nice people. Of course, when they sold it out, then they got this here investment company, and then they keep switching personnel and that made it rougher.

AP: So in general, do you think unions are good things?

KB: I think they are. Truthfully. (tape ends) We had a walk out, and we got a better raise.

AP: Does it seems like Holland is pro-union or anti-union?

KB: That I don't know. Of course, if they'd pay good, you wouldn't have a union. Just like school teachers have unions. They get better benefits. I think if they gave good pay, there'd be no trouble. It's because they don't pay. It's like when they hire all these poor migrant people, they get zilch. And they work hard. If they paid good, they wouldn't have to get migrants.

CB: In the 1940s, my dad worked for Spring Air, which was right close to where the 7Up company was on River Avenue, down where Padnos is now. The guy that owned 7Up used to tell the guy that owned Spring Air, "If you paid your men right and
treated them right, you wouldn’t have union. We don’t have a union, we have no trouble." But when they skimp and make more money and try to pay their labor less, that’s when they have their troubles, and that’s where the unions start coming in.

KB: Another thing is a lot of places require a high school diploma, which I think is a good idea, because it gets the kids to go to school. If you don’t have an education, you’re out now. That’s what my grandson found out, so he went back to school.

AP: Are there any organizations that you’ve been involved in?

KB: That’s not my dish.

AP: What kinds of things do you do in your retirement?

KB: Nothing. (laughs) He had a garden, a big garden. It was across the road on the other side of the street, we bought that. He’d grow stuff, and we didn’t have water. I said, that’s a waist, because it would get dry. So we got water over there. Then he had a beautiful garden. So I’d work all night at GE, then come home, pick all this stuff, can it or freeze it, prepare the dinner that was supposed to be for night, get it partly done, go to bed at one o’clock, and when I could smell it at six o’clock, I’d get up, and he’d have it done. That was a heck of a life. That’s why my stove is broke. And canning. We’ve got lots of cans. He grew everything from carrots to garlic.

CB: I still do that, because that’s easy to grow. Very easy. No disease in garlic, you don’t have to worry about insects or anything with garlic.

KB: Three years ago he was going to furnish the neighborhood with corn because it was so beautiful. Well the raccoons came in there, and so did the deer. That was the end of the corn. He grew carrots. First the rabbits ate the tops off, and the deer came
along and dug them up. There's no sense in having a garden out there. There's too
many dear.

CB: Now all I've got is some tomato plants, some pickle plants, and a squash plant.

KB: We used to have so many squash, we put them by the road free. We even put the
recipe out there.

CB: I've got six tomato plants this high now, about five feet.

KB: We've got a different kind now. You know the kind you can get in the store on a
vine--those are really good. So he kept the seed and tried them. I did can one year.
I canned forty quarts of tomato juice with garlic and celery, the works. I was home
during the day and I hear, "Boom!" I look, no car door in the yard. I look over the
other way and nothing. Pretty soon I hear another noise, and they all blew up in the
basement. That was the end of the tomato juice. All forty quarts. Never canned
again. But we canned everything from peaches to plums to cherries to beans. No
more.

AP: We used to have a lot of different canned goods, and then it would come to the end of
the year, and we'd still have a lot of different canned goods.

KB: I have three cans of yellow beans from 1979, and I'm just saving them to see how
long it's going to be before they explode. I don't like yellow beans. They're still
down there.

AP: Have there been any controversies or issues in the city of Holland that you recall, like
in the government or something like that?

KB: We don't get involved in the city because we're in Prot Sheldon Township, but I
don’t agree with a lot of the stuff that’s going on. Windmill Island, I think that’s a waste of money that they spend all this money on it. They don’t use their brains, spending all that money on having somebody else tell them what to do instead of using their own noggin. I think that is wrong, but I have no voice. They waste money.

AP: What do you think about the idea of the area center?

CB: I think they need one bigger than one they have at the Civic Center, but I don’t think they need to go so elaborate.

KB: I think ice skating would give the kids something to do. And swimming is very important. At Tulip Time, they have all this stuff in that Civic Center and it’s hotter than blazes. They need that. Why don’t they put air conditioning in it then? I don’t like it when it’s going to be all over by Freedom Village. They should centralize it. I don’t know where they’d put it. I’ll agree they need one. They need something for these young kids to do. They want to be doing other things. That’s like Grand Haven, they built this skate ramp for these kids to use, and now they charge them three dollars to use it.

AP: Do you think it’s changed a lot for kids, that being a kid is a lot different?

KB: Yes. I think when children started school, they had to learn to count to ten, and they had to learn to play and get a long with somebody else. Now I read somewhere that kindergartners have to be able to write a complete sentence, and they’re not allowed to be a child.

CB: They push them too hard.
KB: They’re pushing them too hard, so that by the time they get up to high school, they are bored. Some of them cannot keep up with the Joe next door. Some of them are good at one subject, and they’re not good at another, and they’re penalized, and I think that’s wrong. Let them learn what they have the ability to do. I have a brother-in-law that’s a doctor of history. But he cannot saw a board straight. I think the kid who can do something do what he can do. Not make him do what he can’t do.

AP: We don’t give enough credit for all the other occupations anymore. We don’t respect them. Those people used to be considered artisans, carpenters, like that.

KB: He was a low man, according to my brother-in-law. But we came to do some repair work in his house: "Clyde, will you do this, will you do that." My grandson has to do math, but being an ADD, he can’t do math. He had to take government. He can’t get it through his head. But he could come in here, take a look at this table, and go out and tell you everything that was here. In one glance he knows. TV, we tried to tape a program, but we had a blank tape. My grandson comes in there, and he can do it. But he can’t do other stuff. They should give him credit in school.

AP: It seems they put everybody on college prep courses now and not everybody…

KB: Can do it.

AP: And not everybody cares. And not everybody needs to do it.

KB: That’s right.

AP: When my mom went to high school, she learned all her secretarial skills, plus sewing and all that. But when she got done, she had the skills to get a secretarial job. Now,
the younger girls where she works have a two year college degree, and just as much training as she had. So it seems like high school has changed a lot. They don't teach trades anymore, and not to the benefit of all students.

KB: When my mother went to school, she went to Ventura. Today, she'd be a very brilliant lady. They'd bring books over from Holland, because she got through the eighth grade. There was one man teacher she hated, because it was math, which she was lousy at, and she had to figure out how many nails it would take to put a roof on a barn, and she wouldn't do it. She said, why do I care how man nails going in a barn roof, because I never intend to get up on the roof and put a roof on. she didn't need to know that, and that's true today.

AP: So we don't let people excel at the things that they excel at.

KB: That's right. Like when they have the MEAP tests and all that stuff, my grandson can't do that. He can't concentrate.

AP: I just saw on the news that students are banning taking the tests because they say it doesn't reflect what most of the people in that school are going to go on to do. It only reflects people going on to college, and they don't think it's accurate and they don't see the point.

KB: No, there is no point. It is for some people that are gifted, but those that are not gifted in that line, it doesn't help.

AP: And it doesn't seem right to make people feel stupid because they're not gifted in that one thing. There are other kinds of talents. We have to value all of them.

KB: That's right. My daughter was a wonderful swimmer, a wonderful diver, and she had
to take golf and hated it. The teacher gave her a D-.

AP: I had to take pool when I was in high school, and I didn’t know how to swim. They expect everyone to know how to swim by the end. If you’re fourteen years old and you never learned how to swim, you don’t just learn how to swim in three months. That was the lowest grade I ever got.

KB: Of course, now they start them off younger. Our daughter started off when she was four. Of course, she knew how to swim because we lived by the lake. It was something we had to learn. Even my father made all of us, we had to learn to swim. But she learned to swim when she was real young. She had pneumonia one time, she got out of bed and came up to me and said, "You didn’t move your checkers." She was four years old. She always would read us all the scores in the paper of the basketball games when she was four years old. And she could knit. So when she was in the hospital under an oxygen tent, she was sitting busy knitting.

AP: I wanted to ask you, because Holland was named one of the top ten All American cities last year, what qualities do you think Holland has that earns it this honor? What do you think is special about it that made it a top ten.

KB: Well maybe 8th street. The snow melt. We have a lot of business and buildings. I don’t know if that’s what counts.

AP: Do you see any negatives or drawbacks to living in Holland?

KB: No. The only thing is that they have a lot of this crime, but then they have crime all over. A lot of that is outside that comes in. But I think it’s quite a nice town to live in. It offers just about everything, except they don’t have that big arena. But you go
to Grand Rapids, that’s not too far away. We have the lake, which is beautiful. But I like the snow melt, that’s wonderful, you don’t have to shovel. They have beautiful parks in Tulip Time, and I love it. I’ve seen the Dutch dancers year in and year out. We go every Tulip Time, I have to watch the Dutch dancers. We always went to the parades, we never missed until this year. One year my daughter was small and we had snow, she had a snowsuit on in Tulip Time. The only way Holland can growing is by growing out, and they have grown out. But then that’s not Holland. We’re still Holland address.

AP: Are there any other things that we haven’t talked about that you’d like to?

KB: I’ll remember them when I get home.

AP: Well, if you would like to add some notes on later, we can do that

KB: The hospital’s really growing, and Meijer. I don’t like Meijer because I get lost and I have no sense of direction. No matter where we go, I can get lost in Holland. I inherited that from my father.

CB: I remember when the hospital was down in 12th and Central. Like she said a while ago, south of 24th Street was country.

KB: I’d like to know what they are going to do for food when all these farms are gone. A pill? But now, going to the moon, I don’t get that. I think that’s a waste of money. But I guess it isn’t, but according to me it is. They spend millions of millions of dollars, and there are so many people that are starving.

AP: Do you remember watching them land on the moon?

KB: Yes. I was working at GE and they brought a television in so we could all watch the
first landing. I’ve done a lot of crazy work. I even counted pine seedlings. You had
to count so many, and the boss would want them four inches above the root. Then
she’d come along and say, I said four inches, you have two inches. You got paid for
your bundle. That was hard work. I wore his boots because it was all mud. I wore
bread wrappers on my arms. (laughs)

AP: So it was piece work.

KB: That was years ago. You were laid off and I did that. We liked to pick our own
peaches and apples, and we picked strawberries. That’s how we got acquainted with
the Chinese. They wanted to pick strawberries, and so we said we’d take the m
strawberry picking. Then we took another family, and that’s how we got to be their
grandma and grandfather. Then we took them with picking apples and peaches.

CB: That’s how we got to be good friends with them. They wanted to know all this stuff,
and they always asked us because we took them strawberry picking. That’s the way
it started.

KB: When we took them apple picking, they took their camcorder and they took pictures
and that was a ball. Now this one farmer saves this plum tree for them because he
likes to watch them pick, because they’re so thrilled to do that.

AP: If you could think back on all the different jobs you’ve had, is there one that you
really disliked and one that you really liked?

KB: I sure didn’t care for picking blueberries. And I didn’t like working in the pines,
either. That was awful. But I enjoyed GE, because you sat there and you knew what
you had to do and you could just forget everything else. You didn’t think about all
your troubles.

AP: Did you enjoy Chris-Craft?

CB: Oh yes. I liked it. I worked at General Motors before. Before that, then I just worked different places during the Depression. You just went from here to there, wherever you could find a job. I worked at four different furniture factories. Where Heinz is now, that was a small furniture factory. Lambert's Furniture Factory, just before they went bankrupt, I worked there for a while when they were going down hill.

KB: I remember the bank robbery in Holland. The bank was held up on September 29, 1933.

CB: That was 1932. The bank on the corner of 8th and Central. They got them later.

KB: A man was killed. That was excitement.

CB: That was a big thing that happened. The bank robbers had it all planned, that they had the car there and they'd get in their car in front of the bank. Then they'd switch cars some place and they had everything in them. When the police were following them, they had pails of roofing tacks. They through that out behind their car so the police would get flat tires. That's the way they got away. Later on when I got to be in my 20s, I went around with a friend, and it was his father that got killed in the bank robbery. They were professionals at it. They had it all planned out and got away with it.

KB: Is there anything else? I can't think of anything myself.

AP: Well then, I guess we can wrap up. Thank you very much for coming out here.