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Bouws, Bryan Oral History Interview: Sesquicentennial of Holland, "150 Stories for 150 Years"

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Oral History Interview with
Bryan Bouws

(unedited)

Conducted July 31, 1997
by Ann Paeth

Sesquicentennial Oral History Project
"150 Stories for 150 Years"
AP: The first thing I have everyone do is to state their name and where and when they were born.

BB: Bryan Bouws and I was born in Holland, raised in Holland, never left Holland. Grew up in Holland Heights. Pretty uneventful, I guess.

AP: Why don't you tell me briefly where you went to school, and your siblings, things like that...

BB: I started school on 16th Street. At that time it was called Van Raalte and it was on Sixteenth Street and Country Club Road. At that time, that was the school for the area. I spent one year and then they built the existing school in Holland Heights. I went one year there and I went back up to Van Raalte which was actually another school now, but we finished up there. There was no bus service. We either walked or took our bike. That whole area was pretty undeveloped when I moved up there. My dad developed it so we were one of the first ones in that area. So we kind of watched the neighborhood grow up around Holland Heights and that whole neighborhood there. From there, at about sixth grade, my older brother went to the Christian School, because he was all done. I think it was just up to eighth grade there. So he went to Holland Christian and at that time my parents switched me to Holland Christian, so then we went to Rose Park. That area was sent over to Rose Park. So I went to Rose Park and then I went on to the Christian School. I went
from Rose Park one year and then went to Central Avenue. I went to school there for middle school and then we went to high school at Holland Christian. Then from there I went to Calvin for a few years and then went to Davenport.

AP: You had some business training there?

BB: Yes.

AP: You said your dad kind of developed that area. Tell me about your dad and what that means.

BB: When I moved up to Holland Heights when he developed that, I think I was three years old when he built that house, two or three years old. He used to live down on Chicago Drive down by the...I don’t know what they call it now, it’s a used car lot down there. At the end of Highland and Chicago Drive - he lived down there. At that time the restaurant was close at hand so he just stayed there until he bought the property at Holland Heights. I’m not really familiar with how much he developed himself and how much other people did. But I can remember when we would be, that is my brother and myself, we developed a park in there for the Holland Heights area and we were kind of in charge of mowing that. At that time it wasn’t in the city yet and nobody ever maintained it. After that he did a few other subdivisions around town. Most of them are around Zeeland and other properties that he had. That was his biggest project, of course. Back then actually they didn’t have any asphalt streets, they had the tar and stone streets. I can remember that every couple of years they’d come around and they’d throw new tar and new stone down. You don’t see those kind of streets around anymore! Then we had horses and the whole family, my older
sisters would like to ride horses. I never cared for it myself but we had a pasture in close right by our house. We had a barn and a pasture. So we had to maintain the horses, whatever goes along with that. That was also our baseball diamond where we could play. We played baseball most of the time. He was a big one to get into farm animals, so we always had horses, ponies, donkeys, burros, goats - you name it. He always liked that part of it. He liked to farm and do all kinds of stuff. We had pastures also. Comparably for a subdivision we had a lot of open ground, so we got a go cart. We were among the first ones in the area to get a swimming pool. That was quite a big deal. At that time, we would open the pool up every week and have all the neighbor kids over and, oh man, that was a big deal for the neighbors to all get into a swimming pool. So through that whole association I think that's what got him excited about doing the city pool - donating money towards the city for the city pool. It probably got him excited on that project. We lived a pretty quiet life. We did not go a lot...we did a summer vacation. We liked to travel out west. We had family vacations. He bought a motor home later on, and this is quite later on, and he did like it. He liked to camp. He was an outdoors type person so that's what we all did. We did a lot of vacationing in Upper Michigan. He had a deer hunting cabin with a group of maybe ten guys and went deer hunting in the area around Ontanagon County. So we would go up there as a family and every year we'd go up there for a couple of days at least. It was kind of unique; no electricity. It was a nice family outing. As far as working at the restaurant, I started working at the restaurant probably before I can remember. Saturday night was a night that our family all
worked when we were around. Of course, I was the youngest one. My sisters were probably eight years older than I was, so by the time I started remembering what was going on, my older sisters were probably dating and what not - so my brother and myself, we would work in the restaurant every Saturday night. My mother would be on the switchboard for the car service and then we would be in the dishes or wherever needed. Usually on dishes or cleaning trays or doing something on that order. We did that as long as I can remember. I would think I would have been at least eight or nine. And it was just understood that we would always do that. My dad always worked Saturday night, so that was kind of his schedule. At that time car service was the thing and that's what I kind of grew up with. Sixties and seventies at this corner over here was the place to be.

AP: Eighth Street would have been like the strip, right? Cruising and stuff?

BB: Yeah, they cruised Eighth Street and they’d come all the way down here and they’d make the U and then go back around through Eighth Street again. After basketball games I know it got pretty rowdy outside. We had one manager who insisted on trying to keep everybody in line. He would shut all the lights off for a while. Back then you really didn’t get anything serious happening. Once in a while you’d get a little bit…nothing really too serious, that I can remember at least. People back then were accustomed to eating in their car much more so than now.

AP: Now we eat while we’re driving. (laughs)

BB: Yeah, back then we didn’t do that. I can remember families coming in, and this was their Saturday night out and they would take the whole family, and they’d all eat in
the car. They wouldn’t think anything of that. This was their evening out and they sat right in the car. I know I can remember a couple of people, they’d bring their Bible along and they’d have the whole thing, devotions right in the car. You can’t imagine even thinking about that now, but that’s the way. It was just the privacy of their car. I guess it worked pretty good. I know a couple of years ago somebody tried it up on Washington Avenue. It really didn’t...You know, it’s funny how trends start and go and you can’t go back to where you were! (Laughs). People aren’t accustomed to it; they just don’t accept it. Yeah, it was quite the thing back then. But slowly on in the seventies it kind of tapered off, I don’t remember exactly, but then it slowly on kind of tapered off, you know, the drive-ins were going down and McDonald’s was coming in with a drive-through. So then my dad saw that coming and he switched over to more inside service and that kind of stuff. But it’s kind of the way the business has gone the last couple of years. Back then probably 80% of our business was done in the car.

AP: So the advent of fast food restaurants kind of...

BB: Yeah, that’s right. But then all they had on the menus was hamburg, fries and a drink. And sundaes and pies - but basically that’s all you had was a real simple menu. And then slowly on, you start with fish sandwiches and then you start with two hamburgs, just a single and then you went to a twinburg and then you went to a, you know, a big deal, our Big Dutchman which is a third pound and then you have a fish sandwich and the last ten years you had chicken sandwiches. Way back when I was there, it was just single, and then we had rusk buns and that was a big thing.
You still get a couple of old timers that wonder why we don’t still have rusk buns, but I don’t know if you know what a rusk bun looks like...

AP: No.

BB: You bake it in a pan that is similar to a muffin shape where it’s flat on the top and it’s completely formed. It’s like you have two bottoms. And it was a little sweeter dough. There was one company, Hekman Rusk, in Holland that made it, the only people around that made it. So you really couldn’t buy it and these people went out and that’s why we stopped serving it because they went out of business and once they went out of business it was not available to buy and we weren’t capable of making our own. And we’re still not capable of making our own. It’s a whole procedure in itself, so we just kind of left it die. We started making our own homemade buns at that time and that was just as good a product if not better. But, you know, old is always better to some people. (laughs).

AP: I think somebody explained to me that the Russ’ Restaurants have a separate building where all the baking is done.

BB: Right. In the sixties we opened a restaurant up in Muskegon, and they started making their own stuff. Their own soup and all that. And we found out we couldn’t get a consistent product like we served in Holland. So at that time we decided that the person who went up there hired people out of Holland and they drove up to Muskegon every day. So what we started out doing is we decided we’d make the product in Holland and have these people take it up with them. And that worked out fairly well. We did that for quite a few years. And after a couple of years we
bought a car and started doing it ourselves and it developed that way and we did everything in the basement of our original restaurant. We just made bigger batches of whatever we were doing. Also the rusk bun was a problem back then because nobody else had made rusk buns and this company we were buying it from didn’t have trucks. We were the major user of their product so we had to get our product up there so that almost made us a necessity to truck up from Holland. So through that, we’ve kind of developed the commissary type situation in our restaurant, and slowly on through the years we added on products and we found out that by doing it in one place we had consistency with our products. When Grand Rapids started they had the same thing. They had people out of Holland that went over to Grand Rapids, so we did it that way and slowly on we developed the commissary system. About twenty or twenty-five years ago we built a commissary building and then we added onto that then a whole series of additions. About every five years we’d put an addition on it and that’s where we are today. Now we’ve been trying different ideas of selling products in grocery stores and we’re just trying to feel out another market, but that’s kind of the future I think and it’s going to happen. It is kind of an unusual thing to have a commissary. A lot of restaurants don’t have...a few of them. Bill Knapp’s has one. But what happens is, Bill Knapp’s isn’t too big yet, but you get like a Big Boys they do their own. But I guess its almost like a processing plant. But we’ve kept our product pretty consistent. Actually what I ought to give you is I have a tape of about a couple years before my dad died. We did an interview with him on the whole restaurant. How it started, why it started. It would actually be an
interview like we’re doing right here. A lot of his life and what he saw happen and what he did with the restaurant. I could get you a copy of that.

AP: That would be great. I think they’d really appreciate having that in the Archives.

SS: When we lived in the Heights it was pretty low key. Of course back then everything was, you know. It was a growing town, but it was real small. Holland Heights was a long ways out of town.

AP: How have you seen the city change then in growing up?

BB: It’s such a slow growth, I don’t know if you actually notice it. When we were kids everybody used to go to the movies downtown, but back then our generation was just starting to go to movies. People before it was kind of "iffy" whether, religiously movies were accepted. And now people don’t even think about it. They just think of what kind of movies you thinking of going to rather than going to the movies at all. When we grew up it was the issue of the movies. My wife talks about that, how at Holland Christian, you couldn’t wear jeans. All the girls had to wear skirts, dresses. Went to basketball games you couldn’t wear jeans...

AP: Did they have dances?

BB: Oh, no. No dances. Well, actually, private dances. My wife’s parents were quite progressive in that. She would put on dances. Her and some girl friends would put some on and then we’d go out and they would rent like Fish and Game Club or places like that. And at that time you didn’t have to worry about security. You didn’t have to worry about half the stuff you have to worry about now. So it was just a real low-key...and actually our class had their own band and they had a group play called "The
Waysiders". And this was during the Beatles and this kind of stuff going on so they would sing those popular songs and it was kind of fun.

AP: Were you discouraged from listening to certain kinds of music?

BB: No. My parents didn’t really take a stand on that. They were pretty open minded with even movies. Back then, I can’t remember, but we really did not go to movies just because we couldn’t go. I mean, they would never say, "You can’t go to that one or..." I know one thing we did that was kind of comical. We could not watch Superman on TV. They just didn’t want us to watch Superman because it was a god-like image. (Laughs) And they didn’t think that was right.

AP: Well, that’s like some parents don’t want to perpetuate Santa Claus for their kids.

BB: Yeah. That’s the same kind of thing. I think they got on that Superman thing and no you can’t do that. My parents were not extremely on the conservative side. They were pretty open minded. In today’s book they would probably be conservative (laughs) but compared with other kids we went to Holland Christian with, I would say we were kind of the average. Not too liberal but not too...

AP: What was church life like?

BB: Church. We had catechism on Monday nights. Of course you always went to catechism and young peoples I think was on...I’m not sure. It was on a Wednesday night or something. Our church was different because we had a Monday night catechism at that time and that was real unusual.

AP: Yeah. Because most is Wednesday? Most churches schedule...

BB: Yeah. Because we have trouble getting people to work Wednesday nights. But, we
went to church twice and Sunday and we couldn’t swim in the pool on Sunday.
Pretty low key days.

AP: How was it that you had two services on Sunday and now everybody has one service. Why was that? How did that switch?

BB: Actually, they have two services yet.

AP: But, did everybody attend?

BB: Oh yeah. The attendance was real good. You know, a lot of that too is so gradual that I don’t know if there was a time. When I was in Holland Heights yet, I went to Holland Heights Christian Reformed when I grew up. And then when I got married my wife attended Maplewood Reformed so we switched over there. When I went to Maplewood, and that was when I was twenty-one or twenty-two, so that was twenty-five years ago, thirty years ago, at that time attendance was going down at evening services. But I think Holland Heights attendance stayed better than what we did at Maplewood. But I think it varied per church. A lot of them still have pretty good attendance at night. I don’t know how theirs is. Since then we’ve switched to Christ Memorial and they do a musical program more than when I went to church. Then it was just another service like the morning service. You just had an evening service exactly the same as the morning service. So the services themselves have changed, but I think they do that to try to get better attendance. Try to work on that part of it. But to say there was a certain point where...I don’t think there was. As the older generation died off the younger ones didn’t want to go I guess on Sunday night so...

AP: Let’s talk about what else has changed in Holland like the size or...
BB: Let's see. Actually, since I can remember, downtown was about the same size as it is right now. I don't think it's changed that much other than the improvements of course in the last ten years. They really improved downtown. But as far as number of buildings downtown, as far as the basic structure of downtown other than the one-way systems and what not, it hasn't changed too much. They built the industrial park and you can go into the industrial parks and you can see the malls, but I think most of the big changes in the last thirty years have been in the surrounding areas. Actually, downtown Holland has stayed pretty stable. Businesses come and go and there's a few businesses stay but the theaters are all moved out. It's a whole different atmosphere downtown. My wife's family was in the grocery store business and they used to have...He started Family Fare and he used to have a grocery store, I think it was on Eighteenth Street, it was just a little corner grocery store. And at that time that's what you did. You just went to the corner grocery store and then you just follow Family Fare. The way they went is how pretty much everything has gone. They went from a little corner grocery and then they built a little bigger grocery store and then they added on to that grocery store and now they're building...D & W just opened up a 60,000 square foot grocery store. It seems like everything gets bigger but you lose a little of that personal touch. You probably see a big cycle where you get small grocery stores opening up again. I don't know (laughs). It's kind of a vicious circle. As far as downtown, I don't really remember...Of course, we didn't get downtown. Back when we were home my mother would go buy clothes downtown but we would never go with her. I know our typical Saturday would be
you have to and wait for your hair cut. Saturday morning you go sit in the barbershop for a couple hours. Everybody. You'd have ten, fifteen guys standing in line to get their hair cut, and you don't see that any more. We had a Maple Grove Dairy. They had a snack bar in that little mini mall out there. Now it's a real estate place. We would hang out there and there was a gas station on the corner and you would go down there and buy your candy or whatever. That was our whole world, I would say. A couple of summers I went to sports school and that was pretty scary! You're out of your domain. You're way downtown, who knows where. I don't even know where it was to tell the truth. That was quite a ways. That was a big deal. We had pretty much all family things going on. Everybody didn't have cars so it was pretty low key.

AP: Do you have children?

BB: I have, yes. I got married when I was twenty-one and we started out young. I think my wife said we had all our kids (she remembers better than I do) before she was twenty-seven or twenty-eight. We had three kids. So in today's world that's pretty young. Back then most of the people had them younger, had their kids younger in life. I have two girls and one boy. I have a girl that's a teacher at Holland Christian. And I have a son that's in college up at Northern University, and I have a daughter that's going to Hope. She's a sophomore at Hope.

AP: What was it like raising kids in Holland?

BB: When we got married we rented a place on the near northside there right by the Thrifty Acres area, used to be Meijer's; now it's D & W, in that area. We were
there the first year and then we rented a house on the southside for a couple of years. Then we started our family, so then we bought a house by Providence Church and that was quite a big move. Of course, we had been married three or four years, five years, I would guess. And we had rented from my in-laws, so we had pretty good deal as far as rent our own house because we saved a little bit of money and then when we bought that house that was a new house just being built. The whole subdivision was just being built right on Thirty-fifth Street near Holland Christian. And that’s where our kids really grew up. It was a nice area to grow up. Real low key. It was a nice family subdivision. We still see a few of those families. And from there we moved to Thirty-seventh Street and that’s right near South Side Christian now, in that area, that dead end street. At that time our older kids were starting to get in high school and they were buying cars so they were gone a lot. But there were a lot of kids on that street. As far as bringing up kids, we didn’t have the problems you have now-a-days. At least, that’s what you hear. I don’t know how much of that is true. I guess when they’re younger they pretty much stayed around the house and played with the neighborhood kids. I can’t think of anything that really is outstanding. It was a great place to grow up. A nice little community. It’s funny, you can get into one community like that, and when I say community I’m referring to a street, and for kids I think that’s pretty much their whole... On Thirty-seventh Street it was really nice because there was an empty woods behind us. And they would build their forts in the trees and they had an empty area to work in. Around Thirty-fifth Street they had an empty lot and they played in that too. And we would get
flooded out there. It was poor drainage. Every time we'd get a rain there would be a flood that comes through and everybody would hate it but our kids they thought it was great. They'd go out there and there'd be a big lake they could play in.

(Laughs). But now that's all been taken care of, I think. No, I think those were pretty good places to grow up. It all depends on the neighborhood you're in. You have a family and you move into one street that's nice, that's their world, you know.

AP: Have there been any activities or organizations you have been involved in?

BB: I've been in World Wide Christian Schools, I'm trying to think farther back. I've been on a number of Christian School band parents and that kind of stuff but those are just committee meetings type things. My World Wide Christian Schools which is an organization that puts Christian schools in kind of missions schools around the country, around the world, and they have probably a hundred or so...They put up the buildings and somebody else does the teaching part of it. We partner with other organizations. We put up schools and they carry on with the organization and maintaining of the teaching. I've been on the HEDCOR Board for a number of years. I've been on consistory of the different churches, the ones we've been in.

AP: What was your involvement with HEDCOR?

BB: I'm on the board of Directors of HEDCOR. I've been on that for five or six years. I'm still on it. It's a pretty easy board. You probably meet four times a year and we just hear what we approve or disapprove of. Lou Hallacy does the main work behind it. We approve selling of the lots, and then if we want to do any further developing, it's more or less brought to the board whether we want to buy this piece or we don't
want to buy the piece. So it's not a real time consuming thing. It's kind of a nice board to be on. And lately I just got on the Windmill Island advisory committee and that's been interesting with the projects that are going on with the Windmill Village and all that stuff they're talking about. So that's been kind of an interesting one. I've only been on that one for six months to a year, so I've just been catching this a little bit.

AP: What do you think will come of all of that?

BB: I don't know. I think it will be a good project for Holland. I think we've got to do something with the Windmill. I know one of the people running for mayor says we should just lay back and make it into a park, but I guess that is an option. I'm sure when it gets down to it that's going to be something you're going to have to consider. I think he's probably thinking that because it's going to save the city money. People also have got to remember that even if it's a park we have to maintain it and we have to maintain the windmill and we have to maintain all this, so it will still cost the city of Holland money. They say, "Let's not do anything. It won't cost us anything."

Well, it won't happen, that part. It's going to be, "It's there and we're going to have to maintain it." I think it's a good option. I think it will be good for the city of Holland as far as bringing tourist money in. Myself, I don't care to see Holland get that much bigger, but there's not much we can do about it. I often wondered if you can have no growth and still maintain what you have. I don't think that's possible. It's just like downtown. For a long time it was just status quo. Then all of a sudden you have to move ahead or you don't grow. That's why I think the Windmill project
would be a good project. It creates a lot of interest. It gets your name out. Tourist money coming in. I was surprised. I talked to somebody at the Chamber who said that Holland is the second most requested information of the area in Michigan. That really surprised me. Mackinaw was the first and Holland was second.

AP: It doesn’t really surprise me actually. (Laughs). What would you pick as second? Maybe Traverse City with the Cherry Festival…

BB: Frankenmuth with their stuff maybe. But I read that.

AP: Maybe Frankenmuth.

BB: Yeah. Christmas stuff.

AP: Years past it hasn’t been too…

BB: No, that’s what I heard too. I haven’t been there in years.

AP: I live about twenty or twenty-five minutes from there. We never go in there. We used to go there on field trips. What was funny was they would have on the field trips the brewery. And we’d get like a tour of the brewery. And I went through a parochial school. I thought that was really odd. But I figure that was their standard tour. (Laughs)

BB: My personal opinion is that they ought to approach the state of Michigan. I think they should get funding from the State of Michigan because I think it would be a real drawing card for the state to have something like this.

AP: Because nobody has to go through Michigan. You have to bring people here. You have to draw them.

BB: Yeah. That’s what I mean. The state of Michigan would really benefit if Holland
would do that, and I think they should be willing to chip in towards that.

AP: That’s why we’ve never been able to have like tolls on our roads or anything because people don’t have to go through it to other states.

BB: They’re at the beginning stages of some of this funding stuff. They just got the numbers and that and I’m sure that’s going to be taken up in future meetings. I think it will be good for everybody in the area just to get exposure. I’m kind of sorry to see Prince sell out. I wish they would have gone just public as a company in itself, but I guess that’s their decision. I hate to lose ownership for the community on that. It’s probably something you’re going to see more of. FMB sells out to outside banks. You’re losing a lot of ownership for the area. That I guess is a sign of the times. That’s what happens. That’s too bad.

AP: Are there any controversies or issues facing the community or that you can remember in the community?

BB: I can’t really think of anything right off. I know my dad got involved in a little bit of the Windmill when it came over and he was quite enthused about having the Windmill here. That’s one of the reasons why I got on this Windmill thing. I thought it would be kind of a nice project my dad was interested in and I would continue. I can’t really think of any controversial things that stick out in my mind.

AP: How has the changing population affected Holland as far as people of different backgrounds coming in?

BB: Holland always had, I don’t know what the percentage change is, probably bigger now. But I can remember back when I was young and the Hispanics were always big
population compared to everybody else. Holland always had them. I think the percentages are getting greater, but I don’t know how you can do anything else. I mean, you’re not going to pick up too many more Dutch people and so then they start moving in (laughs). To me that isn’t upsetting. I wish they would get more involved with the city stuff. They don’t tend to get involved and that’s too bad. And the ones that do get involved get worn out from being asked to be on everything. I wish there was more representation from that group. I can’t really say it bothers me too much. A lot of our customers are Hispanic and they’re good customers. But I think Holland has always had that mix. They’re going to lose their Dutch background and that’s a good background too. That’s why this Windmill thing would be nice to perpetuate that over the years so that you have that. But, no. Tulip Time is always a nice time of the year for us as far as businesswise. It brings in a lot of people. And it’s nice to have a festival sometime. I see other cities trying to struggle with them. Sometimes I think Holland is trying to make…they want to make it bigger and bigger and bigger, and I almost think they ought to leave it the size it is. They’re trying to expand it a little too much. Making more out of it that it is. Don’t try to fool people to come in. And there again that would be nicer if you had a Windmill Village. You’d have something more for people to see. On the committee you hear the tour people say, "Give us something new that we can tell the bus people that are bringing them in." They don’t want to see the same old thing. They want to see something new all the time so. But they probably would have the same. But I think it’s a big enough project that you wouldn’t have to make it new. Because it’s interesting just to
walk through and the ideas that are coming up are great ideas. It would take a number of years to get it done. Completion is going to take five, six, seven years, so it's going to be a long, long deal, long term.

AP: Definitely. What characteristics do you think stand out in the City of Holland? For example, it was named a top ten All America City last year. What kind of things do you think set it apart?

BB: Well, I think probably we've had good government leadership. I think there's a lot of volunteerism. Matter of fact, I was just at Rotary and the guy at Rotary was the head of Habitat for Humanity, and he said he's been (of course, most of those were big cities) he named like ten different cities he was in and then he came back to this area because his family was from here. And he said...(what were his impressions) and he said "a lot of volunteers." He comes back here and he says he gets more volunteers here than he could in any of the other locations and he said, "That's what makes a community." You got to have people involved. He kept on bringing up some of these cities, bigger cities, but they built walls to separate their houses. You don't live in the community. You're living in your own little confines and I agree, you've got to build a...That's why when you talk about your minorities and what not I think you are always going to have to include them in. You don't want to try, you know...

(Side A of tape ends)

AP: Do you think that the problems or the concerns of the average citizen have changed over the years? Or what kind of things would make life different?

BB: I can't really say it has changed a whole lot. You look at crime rates and all that and
I guess it’s gone up. But yet I think they pay too much attention to the crime rate because most of that happens in such a small little area that it doesn’t affect the city as a whole. It seems like it happens to the same people all the time. I think it’s always been that way. You’ve got your criminal sector type and they’re always going to be in trouble and I don’t think...and that area is going to grow. As the city grows that’s going to grow with it. But I think it was always there. Course, I don’t know the facts. It’s just my opinion. Unless I just don’t have the contact with it and I don’t care to have the contact with it. I tend to stay away from that type of thing.

As far as my kids growing up, I don’t think they grew up too much differently than I grew up other than I had a little more space to work with when I was younger. I watched Holland Heights grow and my kids were in subdivisions all their life so they really never had...they could never ride horses around the area and they could never do that kind of thing but everybody has their own...I didn’t care for it. I didn’t care for horses, (laughs) so I didn’t ride them. So I can’t say its grown that much different. It’s a little more big city I guess. But, I don’t think too much. I don’t care to see it grow, but there’s nothing you can do about it. It’s going to keep growing.

AP: I wanted to ask you how many Russ’ Restaurants there are today.

BB: Fourteen. It’s in the Kalamazoo area, Grand Haven, Muskegon, Grand Rapids and Holland area. The one in Grand Rapids is a franchise and that’s Howard De Haan. He has all of them in the Kent County area.

AP: What do you think has made them so successful?
BB: That’s a good question. If I can answer that...(laughs)

AP: You’d write a book about it!

BB: That’s right! (laughs) Oh, I just think you try to serve a good quality food, good service, clean atmosphere. Make it nice for people to come in and keep it at a reasonable price. People come in to see people and if you can get the right combo going you can keep it rolling. And that’s more or less what we try to do. It seems like people are much more oriented towards malls and what not. So things change and we got to change with the times. You have to constantly be in touch with what’s happening. And we try to do that. We haven’t been affected too much. Most of ours are in smaller...other than in Kalamazoo, we have two of them there that are quite close to the malls. Our locations are pretty good where they’re at. Muskegon is actually...we’re on Henry Street...Muskegon doesn’t have a main mall area. We try to get the same people coming back and its probably 80% of our business is just repeat business. Tourist business goes up a little bit in the summer, but mostly the same people coming back.

AP: Are there one or two things that you are most appreciative of in this community?

BB: I look at the surrounding community and I think Holland has been...We’ve had a good business base. We’ve never experienced a lot of unemployment, a lot of hard times as far as that goes. And I think that’s always been good. We’ve had a pretty good diverse base, not a whole lot of cars, industry, not a lot of, it’s kind of broad based. As far as I can remember back because I was in the restaurant business which would be affected by that but if one sector was in really bad shape. I can’t think of
really hard times in the City of Holland. And so you can do a lot of things. If you have a good economy and you have good leadership on the city council you know they can get a lot accomplished. I think they do take advantage of it and they run it pretty conservatively. I think that’s all due to a lot of people getting involved in it. 
You look at how many committees that the city has. Look at Tulip Time how many people get involved with volunteering with that. It’s just like when people join your church. You get a new person in your church and they don’t give money as quickly as does a person who’s been in church for years and years and years just because they aren’t used to it. They aren’t used to tithing. They aren’t used to giving money and I think it takes years to develop community volunteerism, and I think Holland over the years has been a good community for volunteerism. And I think that’s what makes Holland a good community to live in. No doubt about it. I think that’s an important part to maintain. I know the Senior Center. I remember when they were building that thing, and we were friends with one of the Prince kids who were big pushers behind that at that time and I think he funded like half of it or something...I don’t know what it was. But I said, "You’ve got to be nuts if you think you’re going to run that whole building with all volunteers." And I think they about do. Over the years they’ve put on more full time people but they do get a lot of volunteers and that’s really nice for the community to get involved with. My wife is on the board at Resthaven and there’s one organization that used to get more volunteers. Now they don’t get as many as they used to. Now they have to put staff in and you can’t provide care that you could when you have volunteers, and it’s a good example of
you have to have people out there willing to volunteer to get involved, to better the whole community. And I guess that’s what worries me about having your minority groups. They’re not getting involved with the volunteerism and you’re going to get a smaller and smaller base. And that’s what we should try to work for, to try to get everybody involved. It’s just a good place to grow up. Where’d you come from? The other side of the state?

AP: I’m from Bay City.

BB: Oh, that’s a good area. That’s a farm community, isn’t it?

AP: Yeah. There’s a lot of farmers there.

BB: Bay City. Is that near Imlay City or is it...

AP: Bay City runs into Saginaw-Midland.

BB: Close to the big cities there.

AP: Yeah. They are pretty much are about the same size and they pretty much are one big city in a way.

BB: So, where do you go to school?

AP: Hope.

BB: What year are you in?

AP: Senior.

BB: Senior? My dad and my daughter did a project for Hope in the summer. They did an Upward Bound. She was in the Upward Bound project and she was responsible for collecting all the information that had been collected over the years. They had never gone back and interviewed people that were in Upward Bound of five years
ago. So she had to do that. She called people wherever who had gone to Upward Bound years ago and they interviewed them to find out if it benefited them or not. And it's funny, they'd never done that as long as their project has been going. They just keep pouring money into it and they never knew (laughs) if was a good one or not. I always kind of laugh at that. I thought - that's a good government project! A typical deal!

AP: What were their findings?

BB: I really never did hear! (Laughs). You know it takes so long, just like this. You get the stuff together and once you get back to school its' so hard to get back together again. But they finally got a report together but I never did get a chance to hear what the whole situation was. I'm sure it's like anything else. It's going to be mixed reviews. What are you, an English major?

AP: Yes. Are there any other things?

BB: Not that I have. No.

AP: Thank you very much.

(tape ends)