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Van Leuwen, Bruce Oral History Interview: Holland Furnace Company

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BRUCE VAN LEUWEN

INTERVIEW: 10 JUNE 1986

ON TED AND KATIE CHEFF:

Ted was 30 years younger than Katherine. He used to date her daughter Leona. His father was "practically run out of Hope Church because he was running around with Katherine Nystrom."

Ted had a super ego. "You couldn't believe it."

He was a "physical fitness nut."

BVL went twice to luncheons at HFC. It was a horseshoe room. "Every guy was half scared of him. Ted would control the small talk. He controlled everything."

Ted "encouraged" the illegal sales tactics. "Ted was guilty in my opinion." HFC was accused. . . "furnace cleaners would check a furnace and monkey around with it. They would sell them a new furnace. It was a bad business."

"Katie was on the wild side. Louise wasn't that way."

"Katie had \$150,000 in fur coats."

"Katie and Louise called the shots from the late 30s on. Louise was not as interested in getting involved in the company. The two girls had controlling interest in the company. They were the largest stockholders before it went public."

ON OTHER PEOPLE INVOLVED WITH HFC:

"It was a tremendous company, the largest employer in Holland. The people were well thought of."

"The Holland Furnace Company had sales records and inventory across the country. The branch management of this was AH Landwehr's."

AH got "all his brothers" involved with HFC. Charles later became president and Edgar G. vice president and sales manager. Selma was "top dog in the office during the 30s."

After being fired from HFC in 1933, Edgar, BVL and Adrian Van Putten went into the insurance business in the fall of 1933, the IC Cowan Insurance Agency, later named the Holland Insurance Agency. Edgar stayed with it for just a short time.

Charles and Edgar were "run out of business when AH went into a sanitarium." BVL says Louise and Katie wouldn't allow C and E to see their brother. BVL saw him once and he was indeed incompetent. In fact, AH tried to write him a check for \$1 million.

AH was invited to address business meetings across the nation. You would find him quoted in the Wall Street Journal. "He wasn't a public speaker. It was hard for him to fill that role."

Edgar G. was "a solid soul, a fine gentlemen." He and Van Putten (a jeweler) were close friends. EG had a feeling that salespeople were living high and not saving money well. Adrian Van Putten was set up as an agent for Northwest Mutual Company. Edgar would encourage the salespeople to deal with AVP and Northwest Mutual Company for life insurance.

EG also had the feeling that HFC was being ripped off by Visscher-Brooks insurance business. He then got interested in insurance. BVL's business was to deal with HFC insurance.

Eddie Landwehr (AH's son) "could have kicked himself for not standing up to Ted Cheff." His first wife Helen was injured in a car accident. He married Vic Watkins daughter Phyllis. She was "no good and took him for money."

AH's kids had trust fund independent of HFC. Wealthy.

MISCELLANEOUS:

-- Frank Klienheksel in Flint took all recruits for two to three weeks.