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Dalman, Jessie Oral History Interview: Sesquicentennial of Holland, "150 Stories for 150 Years"

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Oral History Interview with
Jessie Dalman

(unedited)

Conducted October 27, 1997
by Larry Wagenaar

Sesquicentennial Oral History Project
"150 Stories for 150 Years"
L W: Could you state your full name and date of birth for me please?

JD: Okay, my full name, you mean all my names? (laughs)

L W: That's fine.

JD: My full name is Jessie Sabina Fezelman Dalman, and I was born in Detroit, Michigan, [date removed], 1933, the bottom of the Depression.

L W: Did you grow up in that place?

JD: Oh yeah, I grew up in Detroit. Lived there for eighteen years until I went off to college and essentially never lived there again. I met my husband, Ron Dalman, in...well actually, we both went Michigan State, but he was pinned to somebody else and so was I. He ended up in graduate school and law school at the University of Michigan, and I ended up in graduate school at the University of Michigan in '56. He started in the fall of '55 and I was there starting in '56. I stayed out one year to work for my dad in Detroit, and I went to graduate school at night at Wayne State University. Then I decided to go back full time to graduate school. So then I went to the University of Michigan in economics which is a stand alone major. It's not part of the business school at University of Michigan and that's where I met my husband.

L W: For a second time.

JD: For a second time. And by that time he was no longer pinned and neither was I. I rented an apartment with two other women in graduate school and came home from
registration and there he was sitting on my front porch. He said, "Gee, I heard you're here!" And so (laughs) from that point on we started dating, and we really had a good time. It was a wonderful experience for us. And you know, it's not that I'm disloyal to Michigan State, it's just that when you meet your husband some place that takes on much more importance I think. And you have a lot of friends that you met together, and in fact two of his groomsmen were men that he knew in law school and I did too.

LW: Had Ron grown up here in Holland?

JD: Yes, Ron is native (laughs). Both his parents grew up here...well, no, his mother grew up in Forest Grove, but both sides of his family are Dutch, a hundred percent. Whereas my family is not that...that's not the case. I'm not Dutch at all.

LW: What was your first impression of running into these very Dutch people with your future husband?

JD: Actually, when you grow up in a large city like Detroit, and really at the time I grew up in Detroit, it was fun. We really had a good time. I went to a very large high school, Redford High School, and there were like...we graduated classes in both January and June, and there must have been three or four hundred kids in my June graduation class. So everything was big and you learned to live where you grow up in a big environment like that, to move to a small town like Holland particularly...We moved here after Ron served in the service at Fort Knox, Kentucky, so we came back here, oh I guess in '59 or '60 I think it was. It was a cultural shock.

LW: Tell me about the kinds of things you ran into in 1960 that caused that shock.
JD:  Holland was not doing that well economically. One of the reasons we came back here was that there were very few lawyers in Ottawa County. I think there were only like twelve or fourteen lawyers that practiced in all of the county, and we'd like to have stayed at Ann Arbor because we had so many friends but they had like at that time fifty or sixty lawyers. So we figured it just made a lot of sense to move away from that. But Holland wasn't doing very well at that time. The town was dominated by two or three families, those that were connected with the Holland Furnace and were very dominant as far as social and economic impact, in my view at least. And also the Van Tongerens who ran the Wooden Shoe Factory. They were also very prominent socially. So, other than the social life that you had with the church here in Holland there really wasn't much else. Things were closed on Sunday, definitely. And that was another shock. Everything was closed on Sunday, even the bowling alley at that time which was the first thing that opened on Sunday.

LW:  I remember that controversy.

JD:  (Laughs). You never hung your clothes out if you hung your clothes out to dry and didn't use your clothes dryer. Absolutely never cut your lawn. We had a real disagreement after we were married and moved back here with Ron's mother. Ron had a sailboat and she was opposed to us sailing on Sunday. After a while we convinced her that there was no money exchanged for this, we had our own little mooring and we didn't have to pay anybody, so nobody essentially had to work for us to sail on Sunday. So we convinced her finally - after two or three years it was okay. (laughs) But you know, he worked every day, five and a half days, and he still does
actually, so there wasn't a lot of time to use that sailboat. It became a kind of a little sore point, I think, with his parents. But that was kind of a shock to me because, of course coming from a large city, we never had any of those restrictions. On the other hand, what I liked about Holland was that everybody cared about you. Maybe they were a little nosy, but that's okay. It seemed like your neighbors cared about you and you didn't get that in the large city. And I always thought that was pretty special. There was also goodness of heart here. I don't know if it was driven by the church influence or just the people themselves, but I liked that very much.

LW: Tell me a little bit about that church involvement. Did you have a particular church that you came back and joined?

JD: That was another compromise we made as a couple, and I think couples have to do that. We've been married forty years and so that's what you do. You make compromises. But Ron belonged to Trinity Reformed Church and I was Episcopalian. So we had decided that when we moved back to Holland we would find a church we both liked, if that was possible. So we went to the Trinity Reformed Church and I was really not comfortable with that church. I won't say it was really so conservative, but it was just...I don't know how to explain it...plain in some ways. And yet when we went to the Episcopal Church it was a High Episcopal Church where they had incense and that type of thing, and I never went to it. I went to what they called a Low Episcopal Church and it was a neighborhood church. My sister and I went there. My mother actually didn't go there. She was a Congregationalist. We had a very interesting family, religion-wise (laughs). And my father was Lutheran because
of course he was German but he never went church. My mother went to church. But it was a long ways away, so my sister and I, we'd go up to the neighborhood church and we were very active there. We were in the choir. We joined the church and became confirmed in the church. I loved that church because they always had teen dances in what they called the Undercraw. They did that Friday nights. Now this is a long time ago. I mean, we're talking '40s. And they had teen dances and it was wonderful.

LW: A big change when you came here! (laughs) The Episcopal Church probably didn't have dances.

JD: No, they didn't have dances either, but it was a High Church and I was not comfortable with that. And you called the minister "Father" and I just never grew up in that environment. So we started shopping and we ended up at Hope Church. It seemed at the time that it was a good compromise. Bill Hillegonds was there and he was wonderful, and he made a big impact on our lives.

LW: What kind of impact did he make?

JD: Well, he was always challenging you as a Christian to use your faith and not just study and believe, but actually act on it. That's what I liked about him. In fact, one night he came over and I don't remember why he was at our house but I think it was just one of those parish visits that he did with several people. I imagine he did it regularly with people in the church. He talked to us about possibly joining the Peace Corps. Of course by that time we had our first child and I wasn't interested in traveling the world with the Peace Corps. Maybe if I had done so before we had the
child, we probably would have...at least, I would have. I don't know where Ron is on that one. (Laughs) But that made a big impact. He made a big impact on our lives and I was very sorry when he left Hope Church. He went over to Hope College - the chaplain there. So I have a fondness for his son because of the father really. It's always stuck with me because I liked his father and his mother, Libby, very much.

LW: What other organizations were you active in at that point? Were you sort of getting yourself established?

JD: Yeah. Well, that was the hard part because a couple of things...I've analyzed this over the years that when I...because Holland was not really economically viable, a lot of particularly kids who went to college didn't come back because there weren't any jobs. And Ron came back. Of course, he was professional and he found his way into Lokker and Bater Law Firm, but that was not the usual at that time. Most everybody went to college and left. So for us we didn't have a lot of friends. We didn't meet a lot of friends our age. The best thing I thought as a total newcomer (and I wasn't considered a newcomer, so I couldn't join Newcomers because my husband was a native Hollander) so for me it was to get involved in organizations. And that's what I did. I became a community volunteer. I think I joined AAUW, American Association of University Women first, and I maintained that membership for a number of years. I'm no longer a member there. I just don't have time for it. Then I was in Junior Welfare League all the way until I was thirty-five or thirty-six years old, and I was president and I was treasurer. I was very active in that group and we
had a wonderful time. It was a wonderful way to meet young women in the community. And some of those friendships I still have today.

LW: Did you start to hone your political skills at that point already?

JD: I don't know (laughs)!

LW: Given the career path you have now.

JD: Yeah, maybe so. I always have had leadership jobs though. I mean, in high school I ran for class office and I don't remember if I made it. I don't think I did; my best friend made it. But I was president of some of the high school clubs. Then in college, because I was the only one who had accounting and had some money moxey, I was treasurer of our sorority which was a big job because we lived in the house so we had to do the payroll and all that other stuff. I learned to do that at a very young age. Well, I must have been nineteen or so. And so somewhere along the line I've always had leadership jobs, because I went on from Junior League to Cherry Lane Nursery and was president of that. Then we started League of Women Voters and I was never president of that. I was treasurer of that. I was the first finance chair of the League of Women Voters. But I did a lot of other things. I was on Mayor Lamb's committee to look at changing the charter with Helena Winter and Vernon Ten Cate. We had a real discussion and what that discussion centered on was at the time all the council seats were, let's see, were at-large, so that no precinct really could vote in their own person. That prevented really any outsider from ever getting on City Council. And it was, you know, whether or not to change it and at that time we didn't change it. I just didn't have the votes and that was not a subject Helena and
Vernon really wanted to tackle. But it happened later. It was just too new and too soon, and I understood that.

LW: Do you think that charter, the way it ran, was deliberate on the part of those people?

JD: Yes! I do. I think it was deliberate. What has changed Holland in my view is the fact that the home grown industries have really expanded and brought in middle management. When you start bringing in all these people from outside the Holland area it just was a natural that change was going to occur. I don't care whether it was agriculture or manufacturing or whatever, you needed hands to help you and you couldn't keep them shut out for ever. But I do think at the time, when I was still relatively new in Holland, that it was really meant to keep control.

LW: Let's go back to that early period again when you first came to town. You mentioned there were three or four families that sort of dominated the community. What was obvious that excluded others? I'm thinking of the Padnos family for example. They've been in town for a long time and I've heard some comments from them about some of the things they experienced. Did you witness any sort of exclusionary tactics that some of these people of influence did to keep people out of the inner circle?

JD: No, I really wasn't in the inner circle to know that, so I don't know. I think in the case of the Padnoses who I've known...in fact, we lived next door to Seymour and Esther one period of time when we lived on Twenty-sixth Street. By that time, I don't think they were excluded from much. I think a lot of the hurts they talk about was as growing up in Holland and being the only Jewish family. And then of course
they have done very well financially and that sort of changes the dynamics. A lot of people think not, but you know if you go back to *Fiddler on the Roof* there's a line in there about once you become wealthy people pay attention to you then. Something like that. I think that's true of a lot of people. All of a sudden because you're wealthy, you're enormously intellectual and smart and whatever. You are to a certain extent because you have achieved that success, but not the extent that I think people think it is, in my view at least. But no, I think most of their hurts were when they were growing up because by the time I came across the Padnoses, they were very well respected in the community. Their kids grew smart and Barbara Padnos I have an enormous respect for because she really opened the door for a lot of us who had kids in Holland High School because Jeff was her oldest and was very bright student and he was going to public schools. They didn't want to send him away. She convinced the Holland High School principal that Jeff could go part-time to Hope College while he was at Holland High, and he really was the first person to do that. After that, of course, looking down the road and looking where my kids were going to go and we were going to stick with the public schools, I thought that that would be great. And in the end my sons did the same thing. But there were other people before me. The Trasks sent their Bob there and David there. These were older folks but I always kind of watched what they were doing. Barb Padnos was the one who started that. She made such a push and such a noise about this, that Jeff was not being challenged at high school, and I think he probably wasn't, that she did something about it.

LW: Was there a lot of tension between the public and the Christian schools as you
remember it? Was there pressure to go one or the other?

JD: I think there was more tension then than there is now. It was a purer Holland Christian School system than it is today in the sense that everybody who went there was Christian Reformed. I don't see that today. I see a lot of former public school students who are now parents who are sending their kids to Christian Schools who are not Christian Reformed. I think a lot of that has to do with the perceived violence in the public schools and some of the other things they don't like. It's natural that they want to protect their children. So they'll either move into a different area, such as the small school districts as maybe Zeeland or Hudsonville, or they'll move them into the Christian School system. And a few parents have sent their kids away to school, boarding schools and stuff like that. The only people I know who did that prior were the Padnoses...Well no, I think Kay Donnelly's oldest daughter, Susan, went to high school in Grand Rapids. Remember there was one run by the nuns? That's where Sue went to high school. John and Joan didn't, but that's where Sue went. Holland Christian, at that time when I was here, was definitely...everybody who was Christian Reformed sent their kids there and there was a definite line. The rest of us went to the public schools. That's just the way it was.

LW: Did you perceive a lot of tension between those two dominant churches?

JD: I think there was some tension but nothing that was ugly or anything like that. I think there always was some tension.

LW: Undercurrent.

JD: Yes, there was an undercurrent.
LW: You mentioned the sort of explosive growth of homegrown industries here in town. What do you think fueled that growth? I assume the late sixties was the period that we're talking about.

JD: I really think it was started by HEDCOR. Honestly. Because HEDCOR took a look at...The gentlemen who were on the HEDCOR board, and that must have been an exciting time. I know my father-in-law was involved with that and I know my husband was involved with that at a later period. But the gentleman who started that really had vision and they put money on the line. They never got it back and opened up, without government help, that whole industrial park and then started shopping and talking to local industries. And then, of course, trying to pull in a few that weren't local, but mostly all those were local when you think about it what's out there in the industrial park. And I think it was a bootstrap thing. That's one of the things I'm most proud about Holland is the fact that they, especially in the legislature when I find out that so many other communities depend on government handouts, that Holland didn't do that. It's unique in this state. I think the national economy helps. There probably is a parallel there. But it was the willingness of the Holland folks to do something about their own problems that really made a difference. One of the other things I have to tell you about though which was troubling to me when I first came here was...Remember that TV program (you're probably too young)..."Harvest of Shame." It was CBS. It was about migrants. My husband, after he served in the army, he belonged to the reserves for eight years, I think. His reserve unit would have a picnic in the summer out at Tunnel Park. You know, guys aren't going to...
cook so they’d pick up hamburgs or something and bring them all out, and we’d have a lot left over. One Saturday, Ron and I after one of these things, delivered it out at the migrant farm. We had a lot of migrant farms. More than we do today because we didn’t have the mechanics to pick particularly blueberry crops. We still do. You know the evergreen nursery stuff, a lot of hand labor. But the conditions were really bad and that sort of shocked me. Then at that same time, CBS ran that "Harvest of Shame" thing on TV and you really felt that you’d rather pay more for a pint of blueberries than to see that continue. There were a lot of people in the community who felt bad about that who didn’t make their living off the agriculture but they went out and volunteered their time. One was Vern Boersma, the pediatrician, was my kids' pediatrician actually. Just a saint of a man. He’d go out on Saturdays and on Thursday afternoons and treat those kids out there. He’d have a little clinic out in the fields on his own and use his samples and stuff like that. Just a wonderful thing to do. It was his form of Christian outreach. Then a lot of other church groups tried to help those kids out there. But that was kind of shocking to me. It was something I never saw before until that day when we delivered some of the leftover food from the picnic.

LW: Tell me about what you experienced. Walk me into that experience.

JD: Well, it was just like a whole different culture. It was like I was taking a step into a totally different environment. People were very poor. I mean, that’s it. I don’t want to make any judgments about how well educated they were or not, but they were just really poor. Living in just one room and it was really quite shocking. It was very
hard and you felt bad about it to think that was happening on the outskirts of Holland, this very clean and wonderful little tidy town. But fortunately, as I said, they were individuals who were so committed to making a difference that they'd go out there and try to help.

LW: That brings in the issue of the migrant community. What kind of influence do you think the migrant community has had on Holland?

JD: Well, more now than they did then. Really didn't have much of an influence and I think the reason that we have a lot of Hispanics here is because the churches helped to settle them out, got them jobs at Heinz so that they wouldn't have to follow the crops. I think gradually those communities grew and there are a lot of second and third generation Hispanics here today. And they have formed their own culture within Holland. But that really wasn't true then. You just didn't see them that much or you didn't see their influence in the sixties, even in the seventies too much, like you do today. Although the numbers when you look at the census figures, they're really not that great. They are all concentrated in the Holland area, but when you look at the county as a whole I think it's only three or four percent of the county as a whole is Hispanic. And less than one percent black. Right now today in 1997. But there's a large concentration in the City of Holland.

LW: About fifteen percent or so?

JD: Fifteen percent, yeah, something like that in the city of Holland - which is really not a lot either, but it is certainly a force to be recognized. And I think they have. I think Holland's done a very good job of assimilating Hispanics, and I think the difficulties
were over the years that I've watched this is that Hispanics have a different culture
and they bring that culture with them and it was hard for them to understand why we
just didn't embrace that culture. And as I said when I came here...I'm not Dutch. I
didn't expect to change Holland. I expected that I'd fit in somehow. I didn't want to
change the Dutch culture. I liked it, a lot of it. And there's a lot of real strengths to
it, so I think it's just a different point of view. The other thing is, a lot of people
don't know this, but I am an immigrant child's daughter. My father came from
Germany, my mother came from Scotland, and we grew up in a era when my father
wanted me to be an American. He didn't want me to be German. And my mother
never wanted me to be Scottish. And although I have had family back in both of
those countries, the ones in Scotland are all gone now. I still have a second cousin in
Germany. But I thought that was a real gift in some ways because I just fitted in and
became American and very few people know I am a daughter of immigrants. They
wanted me to have good English and my father didn't have that "Henry Kissenger
accent" ever. Of course, he came over right after World War I and there was a really
bad feeling about Germans anyhow, so he worked very hard to get rid of his accent.
There were only a couple words that you could say that were not well-spoken English.
But today's attitude is different. It's let's have everybody retain their own heritage
and that's troublesome to me that that might become a dominant force, because then
you get a sort of balkanization of America. And that's totally opposite of the melting
pot concepts. I guess I'm a product of the melting pot concept and I like it. I'm very
proud to be American and it's nice to have those other roots, but I'm definitely
American.

LW: As you look at the Hispanic community, obviously some of the difficulty they've experienced has been racial in nature, not simply cultural. What kind of things do you think they have experienced in Holland in that vein over the last twenty years? Or do you think they have experienced that, that ought to be my question.

JD: Well, one of the things I've learned as a state legislator is that Hispanics is not a race; it is a culture. Because people from Mexican can be Indian, they can be Spanish, there are lots of different races involved. So Hispanic itself is not a race. There's only black, brown, yellow, white and whatever the other one is, and so I do think it's cultural and I wish that we would deal with it at that level. But obviously we're not in that era when people are willing to look at it that way. They'd rather look at it as a race issue. Maybe it's just from my side of the line or something, but I just don't know if there is a real race issue there. We have opened our doors, they have obtained jobs and they're good workers, and they've helped this community grow, they've been part of that effort - and I think we've recognized that. But Holland itself is a product of a lot of people's efforts, and so in proportion to who they are now and what they've contributed as well as the prior heritage, I don't see the problems. I actually don't see the problems at all. I can see individual problems. I can see community problems of violence and that type of thing but...which we never had before but then we're in a much more violent society today just generally speaking.

LW: With growth comes both good growth and bad growth.

JD: With growth comes both good and bad. But I don't see the issues that they seem to
Holland has been recognized as one of ten All-American cities. What qualities do you think earned Holland this honor?

It's a community that pulls together. I've always felt this town is almost overly organized. Everybody's pitching in, and what makes communities work is that people are willing to share part of their lives and their talents in helping the community as a whole. And that's what happens in Holland and it's still happening. I hope we never lose that. Because that's what has made this place very special in my view. That there have always been people willing to roll up their sleeves and fix that or whatever. Or be in a Neighborhood Watch group or work like the Holland Garden Club, unseen heroines as far as picking up pieces for different organizations and contributing plantings and stuff like that. Or in the case of getting the Cappon House going, getting people there who were willing to work with me and others to actually steel wool the woodwork and that sort of thing when we first got in there because it was really bad. And I don't think that they ladies of the Cappon House today would recognize the place as it was when we first got that place going. It was bare bones plain. I mean if there was anything that looked almost Amish it was that Cappon House interior and it wasn't very well taken care of. But the fact I could get people and an organization going with the Cappon House, and I didn't talk about the Holland Historic Trust because I've really been involved in a lot of that. But the fact I could get those people to come down and work on their Saturdays, work for no personal gain! I mean, they just wanted to do it because they thought it was important for the
city. That's what I'm talking about. For the City of Holland and the community as a whole and the cultural heritage of the community. That to me symbolizes what Holland is all about. I'm kind of surprised we haven't gotten that sooner frankly, the All-American city award. But I hope we keep on getting it.

LW: What do you think Holland still needs to work on? We talked about all the things that are good about it. What areas do you see need to be focused on?

JD: I guess as the city matures and there's no new areas that will be built in the city, it's very important that they keep the city safe and the retail section of the city vibrant and make the city safe, not over on 25th, 26th Street but all the way starting at Ninth and Tenth and Eleventh and Twelfth. It's got a lot going for it in that it has Hope College which has been a wonderful addition. A small town without a college I think would be a cultural wasteland in lots of ways. But Hope has helped Holland in ways that I'm sure there are a lot of people outside of the Hope community don't recognize. Not only have they added culturally to the city, they've also been there, urban renewal institution, tearing down old places and really making it a beautiful spot in the town. But I think that Holland has to work very hard to hold on to, and I almost hate to say it, the original members of the community so that they don't move out. Because I came from Detroit where everybody left and the city is like 85% black and all the white people live out in the suburbs. Holland's got to be able to hold on to those people to keep them there, because they are important to the community, they're important to the economic health of the community, plus the cultural health of the community. And if they were to all move out, that would be very negative for the
City of Holland. I do think that’s a big challenge. In the next twenty years, I think that’s going to be the important role. So while we welcome newcomers and we want them to be here, we have to remember to hold on to the people who were here and make it just as nice for them to stay here as it has been for the last forty-fifty years. That’s a real tough thing to do, but the cities that I see, and I travel a lot in the United States now with my job as well as because my kids are scattered. The cities that work well are the ones who are able to hold on to their population and keep them within the city. The ones who are contributing to the city, but the original people that lived there. They were able to do that, and that’s really very important.

LW: How has the role of women changed in Holland?

JD: Oh, I think that’s the story as far as I’m concerned! (Laughs)

LW: Tell me about that story.

JD: Well, that’s kind of a difficult story to talk about (laughs).

LW: Not everything is to be easy! (Laughs)

JD: It was really tough in some ways to come here as an outsider. First of all, I wasn’t Dutch and I was female and I grew up in an environment where basically my mother and my father both let me just say what I wanted to say. I’m not disrespectful, but certainly I had opinions. My father and I used to argue a lot about everything and it was just sort of an exercise in freedom as far as I was concerned and he tolerated it. So that was okay. It was not something we got mad about. I came to Holland...women were really not all that active politically. I don’t think it was encouraged. There was one, I think...Mrs. Bishop was in something and Sadie Grace
Winter was on the school board at one time before my time I think. They were more apt to be on the school board than anything. What I found was that if I went to meetings that were not women's groups but just everybody mixed in that often I'd get up and say something. I had a point of view and I thought I had to tell everybody about it (laughs) but I often was the only woman who would do that. Running for political office was tough. I still think it is tough, frankly. Maybe not so much in the last five or ten years, but prior to that I think it was really tough. When I ran for the county board...Well actually, back up a little bit, I did run for the school board and I was defeated. That was the year that Deanne De Pree got on and I didn't, and I'm trying to think of who the gentleman was. Bob Gosselaar I think it was that got on with her. The reason I ran for the school board was because my kids were in public school, and I was very active as a parent in the public schools, PTOs and things like that. I really felt that the PTOs were not asked to do enough or were not really allowed into the real school management and governance which we've tried since then in the legislature to change, since I've been there in the legislature. I've always carried that experience with me. We could make the submarine sandwiches and do the spaghetti dinners and give them the money, but beyond that you weren't welcome particularly in the school environment. So I really wanted to change that. Ran for the school board and was defeated, partly because I have to say I wasn't as well known as maybe some of the other people and I didn't know how to run a campaign. Then through the League of Women Voters I got going as an observer at the county board. Now when I did that, I just started going up to their monthly meetings sitting in the
back of the room and recording. The Sentinel was not sending anybody. They didn't
cover the county board meetings and neither did WHTC, and so it was really an
unknown. It was up there in Grand Haven. That was the attitude. It was up there in
Grand Haven and, yeah every once in a while the county does something. You sort
of hear about it, but it was not really...so I went up there to observe. And when I
was there, I had decided I could probably do as well as the guys that were on the
county board. There were two women on the board at the time, Marilyn Sherwood
from Grand Haven and Eunice Berum from Spring Lake. None from Holland. None
of the seats from this southern part of the county were held by women. And that's
true. I've been the only women that's had one of those seats. We're talking eighteen
years when I first finally won. I ran one time. The first time I ran, I ran against Don
Williams who was the incumbent and of course I didn't know any better and it was a
pretty stupid thing to do and I lost, but not by much. Only about 46 votes. So the
next time, it's an every two year election, he knew I was going to run and I told him
early so he decided not to run. So that left the seat open which is a much easier race
in some ways. So myself and Tom De Pree ran for that seat (both Republicans, it
was a Republican seat) and I'd meet Tom out going door-to-door and I just went to
more doors than he did. I beat him in the end and I'm not sure that we've been
friends ever since. (Laughs). I think he thought he should have had it because he was
chair of the county party, but I really wasn't into county politics. It was really issues
that drove me. I felt that Holland wasn't getting their fair share and all the money
that we were sending up there was being concentrated in the Grand Haven area. So
when I finally won that seat, in '79 I think it was, I wanted to be a force of some sort on that county board. My friend, Marilyn Sherwood, who was on the board and was hoping I...and she's the one that by my sitting in the back of the room encouraged me to run and be active. I'm forever grateful to her because she's the one that really got me going. But she lost. She got caught up in a local issue on parks up in her area and the guy who led the campaign against her was really angry, which is always a political real negative, and she lost. So when I got on to the county board, she was gone and Eunice Berum was only on for a month or two because the treasurer died or something like that and they she got appointed to be the county treasurer so then her seat opened up. And I can't remember who took it. I think Jeannie Lowe took it who was from the Coopersville area and so she and I were on the county board together. Coincidentally, Jeannie Lowe and I were sorority sisters in college and hadn't see each other since we graduated in the middle fifties, so that was really kind of fun. But at the time, I decided that Holland was going to have a strong voice. So I went up to talk to Jack Smant who I figure probably wanted to be chair of the board. I would have liked to have been chair of the board but I'd know what reality was and since there were only two women out of the eleven members and there were nine guys, I knew that was never going to be.

LW: And you were new.

JD: And I was new. But he was new, too, and a lot of new people came in - I think we had six new people coming in at that time so it was easy to sit down because we had the majority as far as...we didn't have to buy into the "good old boy" necessarily.
But we had some real big fights. (Side A ends)

LW: You were saying...?

JD: Well, I told them that I would support him as chair if he would appoint me chair of finance and he said, "It's a deal." So he became chair. Because at that time chair of finance and vice-chair were the same, so I became vice-chair and chair of finance. And I did that and he was chair for eight years and I was vice-chair and chair of finance for eight years. That was a wonderful period for us because we had our nucleus of six people and we could make some very big changes as far as bringing the county board into the 21st century.

LW: What kinds of things were they doing that you wanted to change?

JD: We had no mechanization. We had no computers, nothing. We never had an outside audit of books. We started that. We started a budget stabilization fund. We had line item budgets and regularly during the budget session we'd bring in department heads and go over every line which I'm sure they hated, but on the other hand it gave us better understanding and control of how the money was being spent. The budget stabilization was very positive. But also what we did do as we moved on through the years was we set up our own self-funded health program which they still have today. It not only provides a wellness program as well as it picks up extensive health care for everybody. But it has saved us a lot of money over the years in the county. We also managed our insurance. Previously, we just kind of contracted the whole thing out and let the insurance agent just take care of it. But we ended up managing that ourselves and we would bid out portions of it. We also saved more money. We got
into that because of rising lawsuits against counties and governments that came about in the early eighties and it was in answer to that because our premiums were sky rocketing and we couldn't understand that because we were very...as our experience showed as a county we were pretty conservative and we didn't have a lot of claims against us. Yet we were paying these huge premiums. So we decided, "Wait a minute, we're going to start doing this ourselves and get control of that," and we saved the county a lot of money. I have to say that I think the county board today is really still floating on a lot of that financial underpinnings that we put in place.

Remember when Nixon had revenue sharing for counties? Well, what we did with that money was not to put it into programming. We built buildings with cash. We built that health building on the north side with cash. We never used any loans or whatever. We used a lot of the money to computerize the county. We put in a central computing system and then began computerizing every department. That, I think, is what President Nixon really intended for that money to be used. Not to expand programming as such because when the economy turns down and your revenues fall off, you have to cut those programs because you can't maintain them. This way we kind of put it into infrastructure. And indeed when we went through the recession of '82-'83, we did close one department which was an in-house printing department and we privatized it long before privatization became a fancy thing that everybody wanted to do. We did that, but we never laid anybody else off. We really did have tight going. We didn't have a stabilization fund at that time. We added it afterwards as the economy picked up and the revenues starting coming in. We had an
excess of revenues and we put in the stabilization fund. But I feel very proud about the fact that we were able to maintain services even though revenues were dropping dramatically. What we did do was just make everybody more efficient and effective and cut out the big coffee break in the morning that government was so used to having and the one in the afternoon. We weren’t popular with the employees, but on the other hand, I think we did a good thing for the people.

LW: What other things did you do while you were on the county board? You were on it for such a long time.

JD: I was! I was on it for twelve years. Well, we had some real knock down drag outs. I should tell you about me being chair. My biggest opponent was Ray Vander Laan from Hudsonville, and he was pretty determined that I would never be chair of the board. He was part of the "good old boys" I considered that group. And one time...we always organized in January and we had to do it every year. So every January came and we had to organize the board, elect the chair and the vice-chair and then all the committee chairs were appointed by the chair of the board. I can’t remember the year, but Jack was going to step down. He was getting pretty tired of that job. And so I wanted to run. So did Ray Vander Laan. What happened was that we got to the January meeting and Jean Lowe was in Florida with her...she was divorced and had remarried Jack Carroll and she was in Florida with Jack over the holidays and he convinced her to stay down there, so we had a tie for between Vander Laan and myself - five-five. I only had five votes and he had five votes. We started out in the afternoon of that winter day in January and we were still there at two in the
morning. We could not break the tie. And I don't remember what happened. If my memory serves me right, I think what happened was that Jack decided that he'd stay on as chair and that Vander Laan and I would be co-vice chairs because we couldn't resolve it. Jeannie was in Florida and she would have been my sixth vote. And to this day I don't know if she did that purposely or not. I haven't figured that out and I've never asked her. I decided, you know, let bygones be bygones. And then the next time that we voted, I became chair.

LW: Was this a year later or was it the next meeting?

JD: No, I think it was the next term because Jack was then for another two years and Vander Laan and I were co-vice chairs. Then the next term I was elected. So I had a full two years or one term, in other words, I was elected twice to be chair of the board. I feel very proud of that. I'm the only woman that's ever been chair of the board, and since there's no women on the board right now, there isn't going to be another woman chair for quite a while. Then after that Ray Vander Laan became chair. When I left the county board, then he was elected chair. Then he died. After I left he kind of worked to reverse some of the things that we had done. He didn't get rid of the county manager. That was another we thing we had, a county manager, when Jack and I were in charge. We hired Kurt Humphrey. But when Ray was done and had died and Bob Semple came in (that's an intrigue of politics, he had been the deputy sheriff and didn't like Kurt Humphrey because he kept such a tight reign on the budget), he managed to force Kurt Humphrey out.

LW: That's what that whole thing was about!
JD: Yeah! It was.

LW: It didn't get played out in the media.

JD: No. The media didn't have any clue. The media has no clue. And it's worse today, particularly in local politics, because most everybody who works at the Sentinel or even the Grand Rapids Press, are not local.

LW: They're relatively transient.

JD: And they're young. And young people are wonderful and they have a lot of enthusiasm, but they have no knowledge. It takes a while to understand politics and to sniff around and pick up the clues. And that's what they don't do. They just have no clue. But that's what that was about.

LW: I always wondered.

JD: Yeah. And Kurt Humphrey was so good! He works now as the county manager for Newaygo County, but he was so good for us because before him we had what we called a controller by the name of Nate (and I can't think of Nate's last name now), but I had to let him go. In fact, if you promise no one hears this but...

LW: If you want me to...you can say it!

JD: (Laughs) Okay. It was like the first two years I was chair of finance (I think it was first two years or maybe it was after that) when Bill Van Regenmorter was on the county board with me. Of course, he wanted to be chair of the board and we fought him off. So he became chair of the criminal justice committee. Jack gave him that as kind of to appease him. That was a smart move on Jack's part. But Bill Van Regenmorter came to me one day and he said, "I don't want Nate to do any more
speaking for the county." First of all, he never was a college graduate or had a CPA or anything like that. He was basically a bookkeeper and we're talking about millions of dollars. So he came to me and said, "Look, either you fire him or I'm going to challenge you publicly, because this guy's incompetent."

LW: Was that was indeed true? He was not competent for that job?

JD: Yeah, he just didn't have good enough skills. He was not dishonest or anything, but he just didn't have good enough skills for a county which was growing and had budgets up in the millions and millions of dollars. It was a big deal! And so (sigh), I didn't want to do that. I liked Nate. I worked with him all the time being chair of finance and I thought how can I do that. So finally I told Nate. I said, "Nate, don't kill the messenger, but I'm coming to tell you that I think you ought to move on, that you look for another job because I think your time here is limited. I don't know if I'm going to be finance chair forever, but eventually you're going to be removed from this job. So I would start looking." Well, he did. And he found a job out in Great Falls, Montana, and that's where he went and that's where he is today. But when he left, we had to start finding somebody. I wanted somebody better trained and more able to do the job. So Kurt Humphrey came for an interview from Muskegon. He was the deputy controller of Muskegon. He came down and we interviewed him. We did a big search, but in the meantime there was that like ten month period we didn't have anybody. So I put together the budget with Mark Scheerhorn. And I got criticized for being in the county building every day because that needed a lot of work. And I was - I had to be up there every single day because to lead up to the
budget and the whole process, and Mark had been just new to that job and he was the
deputy controller and he didn't have any more experience than I had, so the two of us
cobbled it together and (telephone interruption)

LW: Let's pick up with your story about the finance...

JD: So we put this thing together and then we finally hired Kurt Humphrey. But it was
not an unanimous decision. There were a lot of people there on the county board who
felt threatened by this guy who was a CPA and actually had the training and whatever.
And a lot of county departments didn't like him either because he could figure out
where some of the fudge factors were and brought it to our attention, and of course
we eliminated them when we found out about them. So in a sense he was always at
risk. The laws in the state don't protect county managers except for an executive like
Ed McNamara in Wayne County which is an elected position. But unless you elect
your county manager or county executive, they always serve at the pleasure of the
county board. So it makes it a very weak position and they're always at risk in lots of
ways. But Curt did a wonderful job for us. He really brought knowledge and
professionalism to the county. I think that it was unfortunate that some of the people
that followed us did not understand that and got rid of him. To this day I don't think
we have...Fortunately, as I said, we put in this financial base which pretty much keeps
the county immune from any disaster, plus we've have had a great economy so the
revenues and taxes have been great over the last eight years or so and they haven't
had to worry about it. But when the downturn comes, that's when you need really
good people to understand how to make things work and run well. But that was kind
of some of the intrigue. County politics is like the, what do they call them, the courthouse dogs or something. That's a real tough fight. Usually there a lot of older guys that run county boards in this state. We have eighty-three counties in this state and when you go to a county convention that's what you see for the most part. I'd say about fifty percent of them are what I call "the old guys"…

LW: The "old boy network…"

JD: Yeah, the "old boy network" and (laughs)...I'll tell you, it's tough to work with. Whereas when you go to the legislature that's the other side. Everybody's younger than you are in the legislature. It's night and day difference. But it's very hard as a woman in politics, and I have to say that I've encouraged a lot of women to run for politics in this area since I've been on the county board. But more importantly since I've been a state representative. Sally Gruppen is now on Zeeland Council; she's the first woman. And Crystal Unema in Hudsonville - she's the first woman to be on that board, and she has the same fights with the guys that I've had on the county board. It's the same story really. Until we get more women on, and you're not the "lone wolf," it makes it tough going. I went to a convention for women in California about three or four years ago, and it was for women legislators, Republicans and Democrats. So we shared a lot of experiences. One of the more interesting sessions I went to had pollsters from the Republican Party and pollsters from the Democratic Party, and it was the Democrat pollster that said it was not difficult for women to get elected in urban areas. So that's why you'll see more women on the Holland City Council today. But it's still difficult for conservative rural areas to elect women.
And I think that's right. I really do. I mean, get elected clerk maybe on the township board, but just to be elected a trustee its really tough. I think nationally and state-wide, the pollsters tell me that a woman on the ballot at this point in time is ten points ahead of any male opponent. But I don't see that in Ottawa County. Not yet. But we're going to get there. I think that most of the people understand that we run really on issues. It's not the game, whereas lots of times people run because they like the game of politics. I see that a lot in the legislature. And that doesn't interest me at all. In fact, that really turns me off some times. I'm really there for the issues, and I think people understand that most women do run on issues.

LW: What led you to make the change to run for the state legislature?

JD: What led me to make the change? Well, there's a couple things. First of all, I learned my lesson about running against an incumbent, so when Bill decided to run for the Senate (Bill Van Regenmorter who held the state rep seat), that was an open seat. So then I decided to run for that seat. I'm hoping everybody understands that the primary is what counts around here because we're about 75% Republican. So the general election is sort of an also ran kind of thing. It's just not significant. So in that primary, I decided that was my chance. I was getting kind of tired of the county board actually. I felt I had done all I could do. By the way, I should mention too that it is really Jeannie Lowe and I who got that park system going and we wrestled it away from the road commission and that cost us a few nicks. But it still was worth doing because then we got John Schulz who today the park system in Ottawa County is just fabulous. And that would not have happened if we left it with the road
commission. So she and I just worked on that together and we were really committed. One of the negative votes against doing that though came from Bill Van Regenmorter, and we had to wait until he left and somebody else filled his shoes on the county board. We picked that vote up after he left and we were able to do that. So this is the truth. Kind of old history, but Jeannie and I have never forgotten it. But anyhow, I got to the point that I thought I really...most of the laws that we worked under in the county were decided on the state level, and I thought if I was going to make any further changes, particularly in some areas like Friend of the Court, I'd have to go to the State. So with my husband's blessing, and he's always been a big booster of mine and that's critical particularly if you're female, you have to have your husband go along with these things or else there's not going to be a lot of happiness in the home. And there are a number of divorced women in the legislature. So I ran for that against Don Disselkoen, the former mayor of Zeeland, and Carl Noe from Jenison, which at that time my district included Georgetown. Georgetown is a very big voting block so that was a real worry for me in that primary. And I beat out...it was myself number one and Carl Noe number two and Don Disselkoen in there. There were three in that race and I went on to be state rep. And I've been state rep for seven years. I have one more year and then I'm term limited in '98.

LW: I want to ask you about that in a minute, but what do you think were the factors in your win in that primary?

JD: I had two things going for me. Actually my record, which was a plus and a minus. More than really Disselkoen or Carl Noe who had no elected...he might have been a
township trustee, I don't remember. But he wasn't a sitting elected person at the time of the election. I had a good record, I think, and reputation as far as getting the job done in the county and I was very forthright in most everything I said publicly which a lot of people felt was refreshing. On the other hand, I was so forthright in where the jail should be, that some of the Zeeland people really resented me. And to this day some of them have never forgotten. We had purchased at a very good price the piece of property where the high school now sits. We were going to put the jail and the sheriff's department there and one of the district courts there. We were going to make a regular justice system there. The fair people in Zeeland felt it was going to ruin their city to have this sitting outside them and they were able to whip up a vast amount of negative votes against that. So we lost on that issue. And they never really forgave me for that, but I still think to this day that would've been a great spot because it wasn't just the jail. It was going to be the sheriff's department, which would have given them more police protection as the Zeeland area grows, as well as it would have had a district court and people would have had to come in town to get something to eat. And you know, they just don't have the traffic in Zeeland today. Now maybe Zeeland in the future can pick that up somehow, but it would have been a natural. But anyhow, that's you know water over the dam, but these people didn't forget me or forget that issue. So I didn't do real well in Zeeland. And, of course, Don Disselkoen being the former mayor, he did very well in Zeeland. But Holland really stuck with me and Park Township, and I think I picked up Holland Township. Those were the big voting blocks anyhow except for Georgetown and Carl Noe was
number one in Georgetown but I was number two. So I came out of Georgetown with
a number of good votes and he was number two in Holland. But in the end I had the
majority.

LW: Did you do much campaigning in Georgetown?

JD: Oh yeah. My husband and I went door to door. We went door-to-door for about two
and a half months. We would do it, not Sunday, thank God, and I appreciated the
(laughs) the Sunday off because really we were just tired. And you can only go door­
to-door, at least now you can only go door to door, between like four in the afternoon
to eight or nine o’clock - to dusk, essentially, because that’s when people are home.
They’re not home any other time. Otherwise it’s just a leaf drop or a lift drop is what
they call it. So we went door-to-door. And we picked up some people up in
Georgetown who would go door-to-door with us, people who lived in certain
neighborhoods, and they came forward and said they’d help me. So that was very
nice. I had a gentleman from Saugatuck who was bound and determined I was going
to win. He went door-to-door with me in Zeeland. I don’t think he helped me at all
(laughs) but I think I was a lost cause to begin with. But anyhow, we covered every
single door in Zeeland. Isn’t that amazing? But it’s an easy city to do because the
lots aren’t all that big and there’s a lot of houses on every street. So it’s not hard to
do. It’s not like some of these big subdivisions where you have to walk up long
driveways and stuff. It takes a long time but we did that. It’s fun. I don’t mind
going door-to-door, it’s just physically tough to do everyday. It just sort of wears you
out. But we eventually pulled it off.
LW: What are some of the things that you were able to do in the state legislature that directly affect Holland area?

JD: Well, I should tell you first though what it's like to go there and the day that you're sworn in. You sit in this magnificent room that's been restored, the capitol that's been restored. It's just a beautiful thing and you look up and all the glass, the ceiling squares representing every state in the union and some of them are original and some of them are reproductions. But it's just something else. Besides being sworn in the first day and you have all your family, and I had a lot of family and friends there, and I had Bill's small office which was still in the capitol before they had changed the offices and they were like the size of a closet. Of course, they ripped a lot of those partitions down. They've enlarged the place so those things are no longer there, but it's very impressive. You just sort of sit there and think, "Wow!" My sister was in the balcony, who lives in Birmingham. She and her husband came up. After you're sworn in you pick your seat and you do that by class. In other words, when you came in. And then within your class, because there were a lot of us in our class, they do that by lottery. So they pick up your number and they call your number out and then you get to pick your seat. So you stand up and shout out what seat number you want in the back. My sister said that really gave her a big thrill. She thought of our mother, who was a pretty forceful woman, and what a shame she had gone by then and it was a shame she wasn't there to hear that because she would have loved it. She really would. But it's a wonderful thing to represent the Holland area, not just the city but the townships as well, because we're generally on the same value wave. You
know it's homogeneous still in Holland. It's families. It's church. It's all those things about honesty and forthrightness and commitment. And those things are still here. That's a wonderful thing to represent. I don't have to go thinking I've got all these diverse cultures that I've got to represent and how do I do this on some of these close votes. It's not a problem for me. So it's a wonderful thing. Some of the things I've done for Holland were to get some smoke stack exemptions for the Board of Public Works that they would have had to abide by that I thought were pretty unfair considering Lansing Public Works had those exemptions. And I was able to change the status of the swimming pool thing so that it became an authority. And you know how hard to fight that was because nobody in the legislature could understand that there was only one indoor swimming pool in the City of Holland outside of Hope College. How they started that whole thing was, that in order to get a swimming pool for Holland High, they had to pick up the Holland Christian vote. And the Holland Christian vote was not going to vote for a swimming pool since they didn't have one either. It was going to be at Holland High. So they decided to have a community pool in order to bring along those Holland Christian votes. But it was run by Holland Public Schools. Well, when we changed the financing of schools under Proposal A, that definitely put that pool issue at risk because those mills were not instructional mills and there was a lot of question as to exactly where that millage would come from. Even though it was voted separately, it was kind of kind of lopped off the Proposal A deal and it was sort of in limbo. So the Holland Public Schools decided that they would like to have it made an authority by itself. And there's no
other authority like it in the State of Michigan and it was very hard to sell to people because they thought this was some loophole I was going to try to push through the house. There's something fishy about this. It's just not a straight issue like Representative Dalman is talking about. And it really was a straight issue! And to this day I get ribbed about you know that little sort of special interest thing I did for Holland on the swimming pool. It didn't cost the state a dime. It does cost the local folks who are going to use it because they voted to increase the millage, which is fine, I mean, that was their choice, their decision. And it is an independent, stand alone authority which I think in the long run is going to be better for the residents of the city because they're going to get a magnificent facility out of it - better than really any one high school could possibly have. So in the end I think it's a real plus. But to tell people that sitting in Lansing that there's no pool in either the Holland Public or Holland Christian Schools and this was a joint venture, that just blew their minds. They just couldn't understand that. And so it was really a hard push and it seemed so easy and logical for me (laughs).

LW: You got it through!

JD: I got it through! (Laughs) But it's those things that...and I've done a number of things for the schools since I'm on the education committee and that's in higher ed. I expanded the post secondary options to include private colleges, and I did that as soon as I got there. I saw that they were excluded from that and I thought that was totally unfair, particularly when I think of kids in Holland here. Their only choice at that time was to go to Hope College. And why should just the kids whose parents can
 afford to send them to Hope when they're in high school, why should those be the only kids who go there? It should be anybody who's worked hard and has done a good job as far as academics is concerned should be able to go to Hope, and the State ought to pay for it because it's part of their high school education per se. So I was able to kind of get that in as an amendment to the higher ed bill, and I'm really quite proud of that because it sort of slipped through. I had help from the chairman. That was critical. He's Jim O'Neil from the other side of the state and he left the legislature, but he agreed with me that that money would not be affected by the constitutional prohibition against using public money at private facilities for K through 12. He said that he agreed with me. So he slipped that through and that was wonderful! (Laughs) I didn't even have to fight for that! Those are kind of nice things you relish because I think you hope you do make a difference.

LW: How do you feel about term limits? You are going to be termed out.

JD: I am going to be termed out. I voted for it so I can't really cry too much. But I think six years is too short and I'm hoping that the people and the state in their wisdom will change it...I won't see it. Well, there is a court challenge right now and I don't know how that's going to turn out. But I think it ought to be ten or twelve years. It's interesting that a lot of my colleagues leave after ten or twelve years. It's a stressful job. I know people think it's just fun and games but it really isn't. It's very stressful. It's very hard to convince people of your issues sometimes. Logic doesn't always work. I always thought if you went and laid this thing out and people would see the merit of the case because you got all the facts laid out. Wrong!
Sometimes that works but it doesn't work all the time. Then you have to think of other ways to convince people that your issue is good and lot's of times you never get them on a committee and that's true of my divorce reform stuff. So I think that six years is too short, and I don't see the legislature tackling really big issues because they haven't got enough time. Let's take divorce reform, which I probably won't get through by the end of next year. I started in that four years ago but I really introduced the package a year ago February on Valentine's Day. And I did that for national attention and I got it - more than I expected actually. And that issue has just taken off nationwide. But you have to really talk to people about the effects of divorce. And you have to lay out the studies. You have to get them to start thinking about this issue. And when you have six years you just don't have time to do that. There's no way that they're going to feel comfortable and not nervous about voting for something like that. And also some of them are divorced and they don't want to talk about it. After you've been talking about it for a while, they start talking about it themselves. But at first, they don't want any part of it. And I understand that. But we've got to get to some of these major social issues, and I don't think we will. I don't see it. I think it strengthens the hand of the governor, the executive, and also the senate because they have longer terms. The senate is four years and the governor is four years. And we have two. So it's just a kind of revolving door. We'll be always running and then we'll quit and run out and another group will come in and run and the fact that sixty-six of us or sixty-eight, I don't know what the final count is, will be leaving next year...and it isn't staggered! So every six years you're going
to have this big blimp of people leaving. I just can't imagine. It will be interesting to see how that plays out. It would be worthy of somebody's Ph.D, I think, to study that issue.

LW: I would imagine it would be hard to convince people to run if they know it's only going to be six years. To leave some other job or business to do this.

JD: Well, you know, that's exactly what's happened. When it was first proposed, first of all, I don't think any of us knew it was a lifetime ban. And I went back to look at the original wording. You can only have a hundred words on the ballot for any initiative. And in those hundred words, I went back to look at them, it didn't say anything about life time ban. So I think the public was misled on that. And that's what the court challenge is about and I think they're going to have a good case to overturn. At least that piece. The idea at the time was that companies would let their employees go for six years and kind of as a goodwill gesture, I guess, let them run. You know what? That hasn't worked. And I've asked executives of some of our local companies if they would do that to encourage some people to run and they say, "We can't afford to hold a spot for somebody for six years in the company." So that might have sounded nice, but in fact it is not practical, particularly in a booming economy. Now maybe when things are flat, and we do go through business cycles, that's a possibility. But right now, it's not a possibility. So there aren't that many people that are out looking to run for my seat. I'm really kind of surprised. And the two that I know of are young guys. I mean there's nobody in their forties for fifties that are willing. They can't afford to step out of their businesses. I thought maybe some lawyers might
because it's a natural for them. They work with the laws and they understand them and it's easy for them to get into this. The learning curve would not be as great. But they just can't afford to leave a practice. And who's going to be there in six years when they're done?

LW: Sounds like a big concern.

JD: It is a big concern.

LW: Let's go back to Holland. What controversies have you witnessed in Holland in the course of your close to forty years?

JD: Well, there have been controversies. No question about it. I just can't think of any. Do you have any you can kind of...?

LW: Some of these questions we ask everyone. We want to be able to compare and see what pops up.

JD: Well, of course, going way back. Sunday closing. The blue laws. And the bowling alley episode. And I came after a lot of the Holland Furnace stuff.

LW: That was just really folding up at the time.

JD: It was, and I wasn't here when a lot of that controversy about their bad practices - that was before my time. Annexation was a controversy and whether or not the piece that was west of Holland out there towards Macatawa. Because when I came, there was really one school system. It was Holland and it served Hamilton and West Ottawa and all those kids were bused into Holland. I was a permanent substitute when I first came as a teacher. They hired me because somebody immediately left in August so I was thrown in the breech in September teaching American history. And all those kids
came to Holland, the old Holland High School down there on Sixteenth. And that was kind of a neat experience for me. But when West Ottawa was created it, was whether of not the south side of Holland west of Old Orchard would be part of Holland or West Ottawa, and of course they wanted to be part of... There were two or three people leading that thing, and I, to this day, think it should be part of Holland City. It just makes sense. It doesn't make sense to see the sheriff run through the City of Holland to police them out there or the fire department as well. I mean, it's just dumb! But, hey, politics isn't always logical, and some people can lead the issue and a few people did that out there. And so it never did become a part of Holland City ever or Holland Public. Annexation was kind of big in the sixties around here, but they never became part of Holland City. And I always thought that was kind of dumb. But then, I wasn't elected and I wasn't as close to the issues as I could have. I'm trying to think of some other controversies. I can't think of any other controversies. The growth of the City itself brought it's own problems. Well, there's Hope College and the closing of Twelfth Street. That was very controversial! I remember that one. And I think it's been a plus!

LW: It definitely has been a plus. I think everyone would say that now. But at the time it was a very...

JD: It was a hot issue! Yeah. (Laughs)

LW: And of course when they tried to close Tenth a few years ago, the memories of that was still on people's minds. Is there a perceivable generation gap in Holland?

JD: I don't know. I think not. I don't see it. Again, I have to refer to the census and it's
surprising that I don't have a larger senior citizen population in my district which includes Holland than other people have. Other representatives have much larger senior citizen population. Now if you were to look at Holland and think about Holland and what goes on in Holland, you'd say there was an enormous senior citizen population, wouldn't you?

LW: Freedom Village, Evergreen Commons...

JD: Right! But in fact, that's not the case. Because I think they forget all those homes that are being built south of Thirty-second and not so many in the city itself. Not so many condominiums as out in Park Township or Holland Township. But still, I'm always taken back when I see that statistic because I just thought at least 40% of the population here is senior citizens. But it's not the case at all. And so, I don't think so. We have enormous facilities and programs for families we didn't even have years ago. Soccer programs and types of things outside the school system that we just didn't have years ago. So I don't see the gap. To me it was an older place when I first came here, but then I was quite a bit younger so...

LW: Tell me about the Holland Historical Trust. We haven't touched on that.

JD: No, we haven't. That's kind of an interesting thing because you know I'm not a native Hollander, but living here I could see things were changing. Actually, Bill Wichers had asked Ron to be on the Netherlands Museum Board which is the forerunner of the Holland Historic Trust. Ron said he was just too busy. He just couldn't do it. He had his practice which was quite big, but he had other things that he was on at that time as well and it was just one more thing. But he said, "I'll give
you Jessie." There were no other women on that board. It was just Bill Wichers and his friends, which were John Donnelly, Henry Steffens and Vernon Ten Cate, and I think that was it. I'm not sure who else. But then he added three younger people who were Lou Hallacy, myself and Steve Bassett. And we added Steve because...actually that was my suggestion because he was an architect and I felt, particularly with the old Holland Museum, we needed some of that help. Well, that definitely was a little club in itself. And we'd go and it was kind of a mess organizationally. Bill Wichers was a great collector and had great vision. But he was not an organization man at all. Zero! (Laughs) So the longer we sat there the more we could see this was disaster looming. For one thing, what brought it to a point, was that he had lost some photographs of somebody that had dropped something off at the museum. He couldn't find them, and they sued us. And we ended up having to pay for that. He just had no clue where it was. What it was, people would bring things up there to his office in City Hall and plunk it down and there was no recording of anything! (Laughs) Or he'd have things move around different warehouses. There was no list of anything. So after we were sued, we started thinking about it. Elton Bruins was on this Netherlands Museum Board so really I started talking to Elton and Lou Hallacy particularly about some sort of organizational structure. And I said, "I'll call the Chicago Historic Society and see how they organize." And they sent me all their stuff. And so it was how to frankly get the courage to (Tape one ends)

LW: You were saying?
JD: Well, they didn't want to hurt Bill in any way and I didn't want to hurt him either. He's a fine gentlemen, and he was very kind of all of us. We liked him a lot. But this wasn't going to have a future. If he died, it was going to be a shambles. There would be all this stuff all over. And we didn't have a director of the museum. He had some women working there and they were part-time and they were wonderful ladies and carried the Dutch flavor beautifully, but there wasn't anybody who was really a force over there. And they all worked for him, essentially. So finally I brought it up. I went to talk to him and he sort of wasn't interested. Then I brought it to a board meeting, and I don't think I made him very happy but I didn't know what else to do. I said I'd be glad to work on it. I got this model from the Chicago Historic Society and I'll just, you know...He didn't want to spend any money on legal fees and have it done legally, and I said, fine. I would take this model and try to fashion it into what he had drawn up years before which was sort of a convoluted organizational papers in order to become a non-profit. So I spent a lot of time on that myself, personally, just trying to make some sense out of what he had constructed and what Chicago had. And I saw that Chicago by having a broader board really could bring in a lot more money and a lot more help and appeal to a broader base. Because this is just an inside ballgame kind of thing at this time, and we needed to broaden it. So eventually, through a lot of redos and whatever, and I did have Ron look it over, but he didn't write it in any way. I understand they've changed it somewhat since then, but we did adopt it. We had to send the papers in, and Ron made the application for the name change because we want to move away from "Netherlands."
We felt it was important to become a broader based community. So he sent in the name change. And it came back saying, "Uh, uh. No trust. Can't use it. Just for financial institutions." So then he got an argument together to say (I think the Chicago one is a trust as well) and showed them how Chicago's Historical Trust as well or Historic Trust, or something like that.

LW: There's a National Historic Trust.

JD: Yeah! And made the argument that this can't just be reserved for financial institutions. Eventually they bought it. But the State stonewalled that for about eight to ten months and we thought we're never going to get this name change through.

But we couldn't think of a better name, so that's really how it came about. I think for the future of the Netherlands Museum it made a big difference frankly. I don't want to brag too much about it because a lot of people were involved besides myself, but I really pushed the edge of the envelope. Even Elton Bruins would tell you I did. He was very nervous about this because he was a good friend of Bill's and he didn't want to hurt him. Some of the men on the board were angry at me for pushing it, some of his friends, and kept asking why it was necessary to do this. It was working perfectly fine the way it was. It was okay but it wasn't going to have a future. I kept looking at Bill and seeing him get older and older and saying, "Gee! He's not going to be here! And we're going to left with this mess." Then we got on to hiring a director and Reed Van Sluis was the first one and was able to convince the city. I think it helped because we had a more professional organization to convince the city to fund us even more than they were at that time. Because we lost some funding when the
Netherlands Information Service pulled their funding out. So we lost that funding and we were really struggling for funding. We needed to make pitches to the city that they could buy, and Bill and Steve Bassett and I we did that for three or four budget cycles. We would go regularly to the City and they were very generous. And they still are very generous which surprises me in some ways, but I think that's wonderful they're doing it. And I think it's a real asset to the City. But I think it was the Peck's Drug Store sign was taken down and somebody was walking away with it, I think Dale Van Lente said to me, "I saw the Peck's sign come down today and I went and got somebody (I don't remember who it was) and they went asked if they could have the sign." And they gave it to him. But when you see things like that change in the city that had been there for decades, it was really important we got going. And I think it is something the City can be proud of. But fund raising, we hired a professional fundraiser for the first big drive we had to...The city purchased the post office but then all the money for restoration came from that fund drive. That was hard work. I did mostly as a door opener. I would go with some of the better people who know how to ring money out of people. I would go because I knew a lot of people through politics and I would go with the guy the person sat down with Bob Sligh because I knew him real well, or I went out and talked to people at Baker because I knew them. At that one time, Baker was considering giving part of their collection to the Netherlands Museum. But we had no place to put it and so they ended up giving it all to the Grand Rapids Museum, whereas we could have had some of that chair collection that was here in Holland. We could have kept it, but we had
no facility for it and that was really too bad. But I went up there too and asked them if they'd help us and they did. They gave us all the fixtures because they were part of Kohler at the time. They gave us all the bathroom fixtures and the big huge boardroom table, the Baker piece that's upstairs. It is lovely. Mainly that's what I did. I was the door opener because I knew a lot of those people, and whoever came with me was usually the guy that put the squeeze on for the money, which in the end I think was very successful. We paid a lot for that fundraiser, I have to say that. But he showed us how. We had no skills. I don't know how else we could have done it. And since then, I think they've just kept that momentum going so that helps too. It's a wonderful thing. It was a great experience. Actually the most fun was getting in at the ground floor and seeing the thing actually happen. And all those people working together to make it happen. It was wonderful. I was very proud of it. I still am proud of it. I'm not active at the present time and of course the have a fine director in Ann Kiewel, Reid left. And with that, of course, we started the Joint Archives. That was an offshoot of the Holland Historic Trust. And of course that arrangement has changed somewhat from the original intent. But I still think the original intent was the best idea. That it showed that these entities could work together in a town like Holland. It's very impressive when you go to state government to show how various elements in a town can work together, because so often in other towns they don't work together. So nothing happens because they haven't got enough resources to do it independently. And really the Archives started with Elton Bruins as its leader and he did a fine job, but with Hope College and Western Theological and then the
Holland Historic being equal partners, that to me made a lot of sense. And I'm kind of sorry to see the way it has changed. But it still is an important, dynamic piece. It definitely is to the ...

LW: Still a lot of cooperation there.

JD: There's still a lot of cooperation. And fortunately it's still here. I'm always telling people to send their documents over to you. Did you get that piece on Seymour Padnos that Grand Valley College gave?

LW: Yes, I did. I'm always appreciative of that help whenever I can get it. I think we have a lot more name recognition than we did, we're really only ten years old. But there's still a lot of work to do. "Archives" is hard to get your hands around and our physical location is a bit of a detriment.

JD: It is. You mean because it's downstairs and it takes a long time...

LW: It's in the College library and we still don't have a good sign out front...

JD: That's never going to happen you know (laughs).

LW: Is there anything else you'd like to add? We've been chatting for about a couple of hours.

JD: No, I don't know if I have anything else to add. In don't know, at this point because of term limits, my future in politics is concerned. During that time, I started in an elective position when my daughter was in the sixth grade. She's my youngest. I have three children - two sons and a daughter. None of them at the present time live in Holland. Ron and I pretty much told them to go where their future is and they took jobs. Both my sons are doctors, they're married to doctors and my daughter's a
lawyer and she just got married and lives in Seattle, Washington. Practices law there
and her husband is a business consultant. But it's interesting that when she got
married this summer she wanted to get married in Holland, not in Seattle. And I
thought that was a real tribute to the community because sometimes when people leave
they leave in heart and soul and mind, and she didn't and I thought that was
wonderful. I think my sons feel the same way except there us no place for them here
in their medical specialties in Holland so they have to go somewhere else. But it's
been a wonderful life. Where we're recording today, this is the third place we've
lived in Holland. We've always lived within the city limits. We've never lived
outside of the city limits, so we've seen Holland change a lot. And it's not the place
it used to be in any way. There are some elements that are still here today that were
there then, but the Dutch tradition...and I hope to see that maintained always. I really
think the strength of the community...When Princess Margriet unveiled the sculpture
this summer, I thought that was a real tribute to the immigrants who came, and Ron,
my husband - I hope you're going to get him...

LW: He's on the list also...

JD: Good. Because it is his ancestors who cleared the forest by hand. That's something
you have to really honor and respect because it's quite a thing. It's been a wonderful
life! I've enjoyed Holland, and I've enjoyed representing Holland, so I feel very
honored.

LW: Well, thank you for your time today. (tape recorder turned off)

JD: (continuing) You know, when he was considering running against Guy Vander Jagt,
he came by here in June or May, no, it must have been earlier than that because he
had to file in May or June. He said, "Somebody's got to run against Guy Vander
Jagt. He really doesn't care about Holland anymore." I'm not sure that's totally true,
but he neglected us, that's for sure. And I think everybody understood that. He said,
"Why don't you run?" I said, "Oh, Pete, I don't want to go to Washington." First of
all, at that time, all the domestic issues because of President Reagan were being dealt
in the state legislature. I said, "I don't really want to go to Washington and do
foreign affairs. It just doesn't interest me." Education interests me, family issues
interest me. Those are state issues and I'd just as soon stay here. And although I
hate the drive two hours over there, two hours back, I said I don't want to be a plane
hopper either. Then Ron practices here, so how would we work that out? I wouldn't
want to be away that much. So he said, "Okay, but I think you're the natural." I
said, "Well, I don't think I'm going to do it. In fact, I know I'm not going to do it."
So he said, "I think I am." I said, "Great, good luck." We kept tabs during the
election cycle that summer. Very clever, he's a good person and knows how to
market himself. I was just really pleased how he used very little money to really
promote himself as well his ideas, which is what you have to do in politics. And he
was successful. I think that Guy, who had done a lot for the district over the many,
many years, was just caught off guard. He had forgotten what it was really to have to
run a campaign. And Pete beat him. When he had frustrations on the campaign trail,
he always knew I'd be here at night, so he'd drop in on his way home because he
lived just west of us here, and we'd chew out some issues - who to trust and who not
to trust. Those are the kind of things you do over the kitchen table (laughs).

LW: Do you keep in close contact with him still?

JD: Yes, I do. He's a real good guy. He keeps in close contact with Holland, that's the thing that's really important. Diane is still here with the kids - she doesn't live in Washington. I really think it's wonderful he makes the effort to travel back and forth and leave the kids in their own environment. I think it's healthier for the kids. They do miss out on some historical things, but I'm sure he takes them out there when it's important. But it's more important that he keeps his base here active, so that when he goes to Washington he doesn't have to run too many polls because he already knows what people...he sees them regularly here. People are always telling him...that's true of me, too. I don't run any polls either. I already know what people feel around here. I'm either on the radio program, or I go to just about everything. I go to every Chamber dinner and Chamber meeting that involves representatives or elected officials. I go to the Homebuilders Association breakfasts, 7:30 once a month. I'm just doing that all the time so I have a very good idea of what the pulse of the community is feeling. He does the same thing, but it's a little harder for him because he has to get to Washington and back. And he has to leave either Monday nights or early Tuesday mornings on the plane to make those sessions. So it's a lot tougher. I saw that up close because for awhile I represented Congressman Upton here, and I ran his district office here for three years. So I saw the sacrifices that Fred had to make. He moved his family to Washington, they all lived there. He has a house there and he has a house at St. Joan. Pete doesn't come from that kind of background, so he
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couldn't do that. So he chose to leave Diane and the kids here and make the trips. It is very stressful. I don't think people have any idea how stressful that is. It's really tough. It's been a wonderful relationship though. I've enjoyed Pete Hoekstra.

LW: We've had the privilege of having both of your papers. We have your county commissioner record papers, and we're hoping that the state representative material will come in when you do finally leave in '98, and we've built a relationship with him. We have his predecessor's too. We have Guy Vander Jagt's, which is a large volume of material.

JD: So you have all of Guy's stuff? It didn't go to Michigan?

LW: No, it came here.

JD: That's wonderful.

LW: There was some struggle with Grand Valley, actually, over where the papers would be placed. What ended up happening was is that his work on the National Republican Committee went to Grand Valley and all his congressional papers came to Hope. I think we have a better end of that...

JD: I think you do, too! (laughs)