DeLong, Bill Oral History Interview: Sesquicentennial of Holland, "150 Stories for 150 Years"

Ann Paeth
Oral History Interview with
Bill De Long

Conducted August 6, 1997
by Ann Paeth

Sesquicentennial Oral History Project
"150 Stories for 150 Years"
AP: Why don’t you state your name and where and when you were born?

BDL: My name is William De Long, I was born in North Muskegon, Michigan on May 12, 1913.

AP: Tell me how long you lived there, how you came to here...?

BDL: I lived in North Muskegon until early in September of 1948, which is when we moved to Holland, Michigan. I moved here because we had an accounting office here, and the manager of the accounting office was killed by a car. He walked out of the 14th Street Christian Reformed Church, walked in between two cars and into the path of a south bound car on Central Avenue on a Sunday morning. He died the following Saturday. I was appointed by my employers in Muskegon to come down and manage the accounting office in Holland, which at that time was known as Maihofer, Moorer, De Long, and Kragt. I took over the management of the office on December 1, 1947, but I delayed moving down here until after my kids got out of school in North Muskegon in June of 1948. We moved down here just before school opened in September of 1948.

AP: They probably appreciated that. It’s kind of hard to switch in the middle of the year. So had you had much contact with this area before that?

BDL: I had very little contact with the Holland area before that.

AP: So what was it like when you came, what did you think of it?
BDL: Well, if I tell you a little bit about my wife... She was a dancing teacher in North Muskegon. When we moved down here, she decided she was going to terminate her dance teaching. Our house was not ready for us to move into until early in September of 1948, so we lived in an apartment for about a week or ten days. The woman who owned the apartment was a very Dutch, religious character, and she asked my wife what she did. She said, "I teach dancing." The woman said, "Don't tell anybody else." That was one of her first experiences in being down here. I'm quite liberal myself, and I have nothing to quarrel with dancing or anything like this. In fact, before we were married, I went up to her house to take ballroom lessons. Now, this makes a good story, and you can believe it, or you don't have to believe it, depending on what you want to do. After taking several lessons, and paying for my lessons and everything, she was the girl I thought that I would like to marry, so I married her, and I didn't have to pay for my lessons anymore. You can believe it if you want to. Because of some dance recitals that were programmed in Holland here, she started teaching dancing again, because all of the dance recitals that we attended at that time, a student gets behind the curtain, they open the curtain, the student does a dance, they close the curtain again. That was not my wife's idea of dancing. Her's was a young Broadway production. I guess I'm talking about her more than I am myself, but her dancing has never bothered any of my activities down here or anything at all. In fact, we've got hundreds of people in the Holland area who have taken dancing lessons of one sort from her over about a twenty year period of time. Both ballroom, acrobatic, ballet, toe, tap, and everything else.
AP: So Holland was okay with that?

BDL: Yes. Well, because I'm talking more about her than I am myself, I'll tell you about her anyway. She was the first one to teach dancing in Holland High School. She was the first one to teach dancing in Hope College. She received a distinguished service award at Hope College for the dancing she promoted here in Holland. She wanted to get dancing installed as a course in Hope College. She worked on that until there was a dance minor installed at Hope College. She wasn't satisfied with that, and with the help of Dr. Gordon Van Wylen, there was finally a dance major installed at Hope College. The title to the program at Hope College is the Dorothy Wiley De Long Chair of the Dance. So the dance course at Hope College is named after her.

AP: This is great. I've been involved in the dance department at Hope College. I had a very large minor.

BDL: Maxine DeBruyn and I are pretty good friends. However, she and I disagree about her dance recitals. I don't think she puts on a dance recital. The numbers that she has in her dance recital are way too long. They are extremely long. They get boring after a while. Dance 21 was bad. I was going to write her a letter and tell her how bad I thought Dance 21 was. I talked myself out of it. Dance 22 came along, and Dance 22 was worse. I've been involved with dancing ever since I married my wife which was in 1936. So I've been involved in the dance for a long, long period of time. I can't do it. I can't do some of the things that I criticize. But I know what I like to see. Dance 22 came along and that was worse, and I couldn't stop myself
from writing a letter. I wrote a letter to both Maxine and also to John Jacobson, President of Hope College, at the time. I was told that I would never hear anything from it at all. But finally I got a telephone call from Jacobson’s secretary, and told me he would like to have lunch with me and Maxine DeBruyn some noon. We set a date and I was there. Maxine and I still differ. I told her that Dance 21 was bad, and Dance 22 was worse. She said, "Bill, I differ with you." I said, "You can have your opinion of your dance, and I can have my opinion of your dance." So she and I parted good friends and everything. I said, "Maxine, I’m coming to your Dance 23 next March also," which was this past March. I said, "I’m going to write you a letter. It may be a good letter, and it may be a bad letter, but I’m going to write you a letter." But Dance 23 was a much better dance than the other programs. It is still not a dance recital. Now if she does not intend it to be a dance recital, then she can do anything that she wants. I told her in my last letter to her, that I wrote probably in April, I sent a letter to Jacobson and also to Maxine. I told her that her dance recital was much better. She could have left one number out entirely, and that was I think the second number, where there were a bunch of girl on stage in street dresses, and I thought that was a terrible number. I told her so. I told her the costumes were much better this year. I think it was principally because of Anne DeVelder.

AP: She’s really good at what she does.

BDL: I’ve known Anne ever since she was a young kid. I don’t know her that well. I know her dad and mother very well. In my letter I said, "There is one dance, I think, which is the most beautiful dance that there is of any. That is the waltz. I
would like to see you put a program on with maybe a half a dozen girls dressed in flowery, fluffy pink or peach dresses, along with their male escorts in either a dark blue or a light blue full dress suit." I said, "Put on a good waltz program sometime." I haven’t heard from her. I don’t know whether I’ll ever see it. But that’s my experience as far as my wife’s side of the family is concerned. I am not outspoken or anything like this. I sort of hold a temper form time to time, unless it gets too bad. Then I feel as though I have the right to speak out, which is what I have done.

AP: Going back, could you describe what your first impressions were of Holland when you moved down here, what your kids thought of it, how they made the transition...?

BDL: They were very careful about what they did. My two sons, I have two sons only, they integrated into society very well with the rest of the kids. All of the children in the neighborhood were friends of their’s. I had no problem integrating into Holland. The only reason that my wife had a problem was because of her dancing. But other than that, we had no problem at all.

AP: Were there things that were different about Holland?

BDL: Yes, because in North Muskegon you cut your grass on Sunday, and here you didn’t cut your grass on Sunday. Things of that particular kind. You were a little careful of what you did. I’m not opposed to people wanting to cut their grass, if they want to cut their grass on Sunday. It’s up to them. It’s not a problem with me. I don’t cut my own grass anyway. If I wanted to, I’d cut my grass on Sunday. I try not to raise an objection with any of my neighbors or anything like this, but some of my neighbors cut their grass on Sunday. That doesn’t bother me at all.
AP: What was the city like at that time?

BDL: South of 26th Street was principally orchard. There were a few houses in there. That was when we moved in here in 1948. All of that has been built up since then. That goes way beyond south of 32nd Street now, way out to the highway. As far as going east of here, US 31 was not in at that time. The eastern boundary was about where Russ’ is on East 8th Street. Sure they had a road going out there that went to Grand Rapids and so forth. West, you couldn’t go any farther because you’ve got Lake Michigan out there. North, there wasn’t much of anything north of the river.

My first house was at 35 E. 26th Street, which was midway between Central Avenue and College Avenue. We lived in that house for six or eight years. There’s a house on the corner of 26th and State Street that Jim Klomparens owned at that time. I told Jim, "If you ever sell that house, let me know." He put it in the hands of a realtor, and the realtor called me up one day and said, "The house is for sale." I said, "How much?" and he told me and I said, "It’s mine." So I moved from the middle of a block down to the end of the next block. It was on the northwest corner of 26th and State Street. Then there was a lot on Lake Macatawa, Allen Drive. I bought a lot and we constructed a house out there. My wife was taken sick in 1979. We moved out to the house in ’72. People were curious about it because we built a hexagonal house. It had six sides to it, the middle of the house was the living room. I told the architect what I wanted, and he designed it for us. We had an indoor swimming pool at the time. We could swim in the pool in the winter time and look at the snow outside. She was taken sickly, and one of our doctors said we had to
move away from the lake because of the high humidity out there. Little did I know, at the time, anyway, most of your humidity does not come from around here, most of your humidity comes from the Gulf of Mexico. It swirls around and comes up from the Gulf of Mexico. Sure there’s humidity here, but the high humidity came from the Gulf of Mexico. I didn’t want to sell the house, but because of my wife’s condition, I decided that we had to move. We moved from the house up to a duplex on Hope Avenue. We bought a lot, which is where I’m living at the present time. We bought a lot on that corner; it was not a part of that subdivision; it was subdivided later on. We moved into a duplex at that time. I think it was September of 1978. We moved into this house in August of ’79. She died in January of ’82, so she lived in the house for two and a half years. Anyway, I have a great big back yard which is full of flowers. That takes up most of my time. That’s why I’m down in the office here only two days a week during the summer months. It takes me about thirty-five hours a week to work on my garden.

AP: I’m interested to hear about some of the things you’ve been involved in.

BDL: Okay. Well, Jim Klomparens, who I bought the house from on 26th Street, moved outside of the city limits, so he could no longer be a member of the Board of Public Works. Bob Visscher was mayor at the time. Bob Visscher appointed me as member of the Board of Public Works.

AP: So when he moved and you moved into the house, you got that position?

BDL: Within about a few months of each other. I was a member of the Board of Public Works for fourteen years. I was the first one to lose my job on the Board of Public Works.
Works, because the city passed an ordinance that no member could be appointed to
any board for longer than two full five year terms. So I finished out Jim’s four
years, and than I was appointed two more terms, five years a piece, so I was on the
Board of Public Works for fourteen years. I couldn’t be reappointed again. I was the
first one to lose a job on any board because of the new ordinance. I was the
chairman of the Ottawa County Red Cross. That was at the time when we had the
tornado over at Hudsonville and Standale. That took quite a bit of time, early in
April of whatever year it was. I was one of the founders of the Holland Public
Schools Educational Foundation. They collect money, receive money, and grant that
money to teachers in the school system who want to conduct a particular program.
Don Ihnnan, who was superintendent of the schools at that time, called me up, and
said, "Bill, we’d like to have you get together with us some time and talk about
something." So I said all right. The outcome of it was the founding of the Holland
Public Schools Educational Foundation. I’ve forgotten the city’s school this was
patterned after, but it was patterned after another school. We handed out gifts to
teachers to conduct a program that would be beneficial to the students. I was the
treasurer of the Macatawa Bay Yacht Club for a period of twenty-four years. I went
through a whole lot of commodores out there. The reason I took that position was
that Bernie Donnelly was appointed the treasurer of the Macatawa Bay Yacht Club.
He was going to be away for six months and so they asked me if I would take over
Bernie’s place while he was gone. I did such a good job there that they kept me on
there for twenty-four years. (laughs) I have been treasurer of the Rotary Club for
probably twenty-five years or something similar to that.

AP: Tell me about the Rotary Club, its purpose, the kinds of things you do...

BDL: It's a group of generally business people who are doing good within the community. They have their four reasons for being a club. At the present time, we conduct a program which is called the International Youth Exchange, whereby we take in students from other countries. They are assigned to us, and they come in from all over the world. We've had them from Australia, we've had them from Brazil, from several different countries in Europe, Japan. We keep those students here for a period of a year, and then they return. They go to our local schools here. They live with a family for generally three months, and then we transfer them to another family. So they live, probably with about four families during the course of the year that they are living in Holland. Then they go back home again at the end of the year.

One other thing, Hope College has their fund raising early in December of each year. I have been on every one of the fund raising drives, with the exception of one, and I happened to be in Chicago that year. I think it's been more than twenty, but I've been on every one of them since then. I've been on fund drives for Hospice, for the Community Foundation. We're assigned certain individuals to call on and raise funds for each of these organizations. I've been on all of these fund drives. In fact, we generally call on manufacturers and such things as this, industry, commercial division. When people see me walk up the sidewalk and into the door, they say, "Oh, not you again." (laughs) They know what I'm there for. I have a lot of fun with them, though. Not only, but when they are thinking about what kind of a
contribution they're going to make, I say, "I don't want one of these small checks, I want one of these big checks." (laughs)

AP: Could you tell me a bit about your sons?

BDL: My oldest son, Jack De Long, he's a doctor in Holland here, specializing in ear, nose and throat. He was in business since 1971, when he graduated and finished his work in a hospital in Burlington, Vermont. He took over the practice of Dr. Harold DeVries. He had offices in the second floor of the People's State Bank at that time, which is now the Old Kent Bank building. He has been in practice since then. My youngest son, Ted De Long, owns part of this organization right here, De Long & Brower, CPA. When I came down here in 1947, I worked as an employee. I was made a partner in 1951. I was supposed to get a lot of help from our main office which was in Muskegon. I got no help at all, and I sort of got disgusted. It hurt me to send their share of the profits up to them each year. I finally told them that I wanted to buy them out. That didn't go over so well. It took me a few years to convince them that I was serious about it. I told them I was either going to buy them out, or else I was going to close up the office and open up my own office. Three of the fellows I had working for me at the time, they were the main cogs in the organization, as well, I asked them if they wanted to become a partner with me. I said, "You don't have to put up any money, but you can leave your share of the profits in here, which will accumulate to be your working capital in the business."

Ted was one of them that came along, we hired Ted. He went through Hope College and Western Michigan University for some advanced work in accounting. I wanted
him to work for somebody else for a while before he came to work for me, but he decided against it. I said, "All right, we've got an opening in the organization," so we hired Ted. Ted liked the accounting business, but he got enamored with the real estate business. So he terminated his employment at my accounting firm, and he went to work for Woodland Realty, and he was their top salesman for a year or two, but he never lost his love for accounting. He finally made up his mind that he wanted to get back into accounting. The upshot was that we did have an opening that was available, because we had a satellite office down in Douglas, Michigan. We didn't have anybody to put in that office, so we hired Ted to take over the management of that office. He was only down there a couple days a week, but then he was back in our own office the rest of the time. After working for a couple of years, when he came back to the office again, he wanted to know when he was going to be made a partner, because he was a partner before. They said, "It might be year, it might be two years, it might be three years." He and Chuck Brower got their heads together and they said, "We aren't going to wait that long, we're going to open up our own firm." That was in 1988. They rented an office, took on additional space, and still ran out of space. So they, along with a fellow who rents part of the building here, decided they were going to build a building. This is the building that they built. We were on 16th Street at the time, right across the street from the cemetery, and we moved out here on December 30 of 1990 or 1991. We've been down here since then, but we're running out of space down here, too. I am not a part owner in this business here. I just work like all the other employees do. When
they found out I was going to retire from my old office, Chuck and Ted came up to my house one day, and they said they understood that I was going to retire, so they twisted my arm and said, "Why don't you come to work with us?" So that's why I'm working here.

AP: Why don't we talk about how the city has changed since you've come here to today.

BDL: I want to start with a little personal light. When I was in Muskegon, there was something up in Muskegon called the Greater Muskegon Industrial Foundation. The principal purpose of that foundation was to finance people who wanted to start into business. When I came to Holland in 1947, there was nothing like that at all. I had lunch one day with Marv Lindeman and Clarence Jalving, and I mentioned it to them. It took a few years for it to take hold, but the outcome of that luncheon meeting became HEDCOR, which is what we have in Holland here at the present time. I am probably the one to put the seed into HEDCOR, but I had nothing to do with the founding of it. The second thing is, in Muskegon, we had a Community Foundation, and when I came down here, there was no such thing at all. I think I sat down with Pete Boter one day, who was an attorney, and we were just talking, and I said, "How come we don't have a Community Foundation?" The outcome of it was the Holland Community Foundation, which is now the Community Foundation of the Holland-Zeeland Area. When I retired the second time, I was going to get out of all of my committees and such things. The one thing I was never on, though, was the Community Foundation. Vern Boersma came to me one day, and he said, "Bill, we'd like you to give some thought to being appointed to the Holland Community
Foundation." So I did accept that one, so I’m on that Board of Trustees at the present time. The HEDCOR has made property available to industry, and they’ve put industry, generally, all in one section of town. That has just grown to beat the dickens, and I don’t think there’s any land available on the south side of Holland in the HEDCOR area, they had to go to the north side. One of the things that has happened to Holland is people have been moved into Holland to manage an industry for an out of town owner, such as Life Savers, that’s one of them. There are a number of other companies around town very similar to that. The managers are eventually moved to another city, but when they decide to retire, they move to Holland to live. That says something about Holland. I guess if you take a look at the unemployment rate in Holland here, it’s one of the lowest in the state, I think. But along with all these other people moving into Holland, it’s much more liberal than it was before.

AP: Have you seen good effects of that or bad effects of that?

BDL: It’s just a turnover of people is really what it is. I haven’t seen any bad effects of it. Whether it’s a good effect or not depends on whether or not you were a Dutchman and told you couldn’t do anything on Sunday and all these other things.

AP: What do you think of the size of the city now?

BDL: Well, it’s going to grow anyway, no matter what you want to do. I don’t remember what the population was of Holland when I moved here, and I don’t know what it is today. It must be up in the mid 20s. But I don’t see any ill effects of it. People are going to have to expand their vision and such things as this, because Holland is going
to enlarge regardless of whether you want it to or not. One of the things that I commonly comment on is this: you see so many apartment buildings being built in town, it seems to me as though they’d reach a saturation point in time, but they keep on building them. Which means, at least, that if people are moving into apartment buildings, they’ve moved out of something else and that has been reoccupied. So I don’t think the saturation point has been reached.

AP: Do you think we’re close?

BDL: Well, this is just a little humor, but one of the things that has been talked about from time to time is the merging of Holland and Zeeland. They thought they would take the first three letters of Zeeland and the last four of Holland. That would be Zeeland.

I tell you, I don’t show my age. I’m 84, but I don’t show it. Most of my life is built upon three principles. Being an accountant, I should know better, but I don’t. Ninety-five percent of my living is optimism, 95% of my living is humor, and 95% of my living is attitude. I know that they add up to more than a hundred percent, but I can’t help it. I just have a lot of fun living is all.

AP: We haven’t talked about the role of the church. Have you been involved in the church?

BDL: Well, I belong to Christ Memorial Church, but I’m not involved heavily. I’ve been going there since 1972.

AP: Has the growth and size happened recently?

BDL: I’ve forgotten now when Christ Memorial church was organized, I think back in the 50s. We used to belong to Hope Church, but when we moved from 26th Street out to
Allen Drive, Christ Memorial was much closer, so we decided to transfer our membership from Hope over to Christ Memorial. Now, Christ Memorial was a fairly small church at the time, but they were holding three services on Sunday. Because the enrollment kept increasing in Christ Memorial, and really I can't tell you what the membership is today, it has to be close to 3,000. But anyway, they built the new addition onto the church. I'm not involved that much in the church.

AP: Do you have any idea of how that growth has happened?

BDL: I think it was because of the ministers that they've had at the church, who were much more likeable than some of the other ministers in Holland. There was a very good minister, very likable, and then we got Ed Mulder here for a while, and then we got Tim Brown, and Tim Brown was a very likable individual. The church really grew under him. Tim Brown left to become one of the ministers at the Western Theological Seminary. We have a minister at the present time, Kirt Anderson. I like Kirt just as much, if not better than I like Tim Brown. I've got so many things to do, that I just can't take the time off to do some of the things that people would like to have me do as far as the church is concerned. I just can't see myself spending time at the church when I don't feel so inclined, anyway.

AP: You've certainly been involved in so many other things, as well.

BDL: I think I spent my time well.

AP: I wanted to ask you, because your wife was involved in Hope College, and you've been in the community, what kind of role do you see Hope having in Holland?

BDL: I did not go to Hope myself, so I have no idea as to what their teaching is like, but
from all the reports I hear, Hope has to have a big effect upon the city itself. It employs a lot of people, it brings a lot of cash into the city, because of the students that come to live here for that time. But Hope has to have a big effect upon Holland itself. It also has an effect upon the growth of the community as well.

AP: Have you seen any controversies or issues within the city? As far as city government or...

BDL: You will always have somebody who disagrees. I don't care what it is. But the disagreeable things are usually in the minority and therefore you overcome that. The same thing with this Park Township vote yesterday, on this property over on the north side where this fellow wants to put up a number of houses, a development out there. It was turned down. I don't know whether it's good or bad. But it was voted down yesterday in the election.

AP: But there haven't been any heated disputes?

BDL: Scandals? No, I don't know of any.

AP: Maybe as a final thing to think about, are there things left for Holland that you don't see them doing that they should? You mentioned when you first came here you saw things the city needed, and they've happened. What's next?

BDL: This new Holland Civic Center, I guess, is the most controversial thing on the boards at this time. I am not in agreement that the foundry down here is the right place to put it. It's a beautiful place to have when you drive in from Zeeland. If you drive in from Zeeland, you could look right at the Holland Civic Center there, but you have to move all of those people out of there, there's about fifty houses. I'm not sure if the
foundry property is the right place to put it. I’d vote against that. I have no opposition to it being out at GE. Whether GE is the place to put it or not, I don’t know. I had a place that I thought would be good, but there are some office buildings going up at the present time, so there’s no sense in putting it there. But this would be at the corner of Hope Avenue and 16th Street just beyond Meijer. There was plenty of space in there in order to do it. I realize that the people that want to put up the community center want it closer to downtown, and that’s farther out. I don’t have any objection to it being there. In fact, where they want to put it, down at the river’s edge down there, it might be a good place. People who argue there’s going to be too much of a traffic jam, the traffic only lasts for fifteen minutes. You’ve got three ways for the people to go. You have a road for the people going north, and east, and south. I don’t see any big reason for it not being put there. I don’t know if it’s my favorite place or not, but I wouldn’t object to it. I think the city itself spoiled their chances of it being put on the north side of Holland there when they delayed so long on making up their minds as to what they were going to do. That’s the city’s fault. In fact, I think if I had been in one of the townships voting for or against it, I think I would have voted against it just because of the city mingling around with the things.

AP: Are there other things that you see the city needing to address?

BDL: There probably are. I can’t recite any off the present hand. The people who sell groceries today must have some assurance that the city is going to continue to grow.

With Meijer expanding their store and D&W putting up their big store on the north
side, they must see something in the future that somebody else hasn’t seen. I think one of the big problems, and I haven’t the faintest idea of how to solve this at all, and that’s the traffic going over to the north side late in the afternoon. But you know, that traffic jam only lasts fifteen to twenty minutes, so I can’t see what’s wrong with that. Sure, it would be nice if the traffic had a better flow, but I get involved in that traffic every once in a while, and it doesn’t take me long. Calm your nerves.

AP: Are there any other things we should talk about?

BDL: You might want to talk about my final retirement. I don’t know when that’s going to be, so I can’t talk about it.

AP: How is that? You said the second time you retired, they came over to ask you to work here.

BDL: Well, when I got to be 65 years of age, I was the principal owner of the accounting firm of William P. De Long and Company. When I got to be 65, I told my other partners, I’m going to around for five years yet, and if you don’t want me around, you better tell me. Nobody told me anything, so I was around for another five years. I stayed on, then, as a partner, for another five years. When I got to be 70 years of age, my partners bought me out. So I continued to work as an employee. I spent my time as I do today: from January 1 to April 15, which is the tax season, I’m here every day and all day. As soon as April 15 goes by, I come in on Mondays and Thursdays, and when I get my work done, I go home. I did the same thing at my other office. Then I got to thinking, when am I going to retire now? Am I going to retire when I am 75 years of age, or am I going to retire when I’ve had 50
years of tax accounting in? Since I started in 1939 in tax work in Muskegon, I'd have to go to 1988.

AP: Well, now it's 1997.

BDL: So I told my partners there that I was going to retire at the end of 1988, and my son and his partner twisted my arm and I went back to work. I left my old office on December 31, 1988, and I started in this office on January 1, 1989. I retired and I retired. The only thing is, when my work gets to be a bore to me, then I'm going to quit. But I have a lot of fun doing it. That's where my humor comes in, I guess. I don't know when I'm going to retire. I just may up and say to the fellows here some day, "You better find a replacement for me, because I'm going to quit." The only thing is, I don't have any winter avocations. I have all kinds of summer avocations, which are all my flowers out there. My principal flower is the dahlia, and I grow them in all sizes. They're behind schedule this year, because of the cold weather in May and June, but sometime after the end of August, come out and take a look at them. I grow the flowers for my own purpose, because I like them. If other people like them, why, so much the better. I never cut one of my flowers to take into the house. I'm never in the house. I'm always out in the garden, which is where the flowers are. But I do cut a lot of flowers and I take them over to the Holland Christian Schools, I take them over to the Western Theological Seminary, I take them over the Holland Country Club, I take them down to Russ' Sandwich Shop Office. I take flowers to a lot of these people, just because they're going to die on the stalk anyway. Somebody else might just as well enjoy them.
AP: My mother loves to garden, and what she loves about flowers is that God has never made an ugly flower, they’re all beautiful.

BDL: Another thing, too, is you can look over a field and see a lot of weeds flowering out there, and those are weeds while they’re out there. But if you take those same weeds and put them in your garden, they’re not a wild flower and more, they’re a cultivated flower then.

AP: Like black-eyed Susans.

BDL: I’ve got a bunch of black-eyed Susans in my yard at the present time. I’ve got a number of lilies that are blossoming at the present time.
Rotary honors De Long

William P. De Long has been awarded the Distinguished Service Award for the Rotary Club of Holland.

The award is given yearly to the Rotarian that best demonstrates the Rotary motto. The recipients have distinguished themselves through service to others.

De Long has served as chair of the Ottawa County Red Cross during the Standale/Hudsonville tornado; is a 14-year member of the board of the Board of Public Works; served 24 years as treasurer of the Macatawa Bay Yacht Club; served 25 years as treasurer of the Holland Rotary Club; and has been a member of the Cheff Center for the Handicapped for 39 years, having served as secretary and treasurer. He has served on the board of the People State Bank, Holland Public Schools Education Foundation; Holland Community Foundation; and the Michigan State Board of Accountancy.

His club memberships include Hope College Second Century Club, and Holland Professional Men's Club.
I was born in North Muskegon, Michigan on May 12, 1913. I am one of 9 children. I had 2 brothers and 2 sisters older than me, and 2 brothers and 2 sisters younger than me. I was planted in between, being the fifth member of the group.

I went through the elementary school years in North Muskegon, being through the seventh grade. Since North Muskegon had no eighth through higher grades, we were sent to the Muskegon Public Schools for those grades. I graduated from the Muskegon School System in June 1931, in a June graduating class of 196 students. If you include the February 1931 graduating class, just add 46 more students.

I attended the Muskegon Junior College for the next 2 years, graduating in 1933. No, my education didn't stop there. While working in a grocery store, I took correspondence courses. Since my first 20 lessons came back with high grades, I discontinued writing the answers to the lesson questions, and studied the remainder of the lessons by myself. I gave myself some excellent marks on those lessons.

I have worked in a grocery store, on celery farms, a bookkeeper in an office supply firm and an ice cream company.

Coming from a good Dutch Reformed Family, I was not exposed to ballroom dancing. But that didn't stop me from wanting to ballroom dance.

There was a dance teacher in North Muskegon, who taught ballroom lessons. I went to her house for those ballroom lessons and paid for those lessons. Since she was my kind of girl, I began to wonder why I should pay for those lessons. Why not marry her and I wouldn't have to pay for them? I did on November 5, 1936. This, you see, I was constantly doing things that went against the ethics of my parents. I wasn't the black sheep of the family, only dark gray. It took a while for my parents to warm up to my wife, but she eventually became the favorite daughter-in-law of my parents. Oh yes, I even had my family minister talk to me about the evil things I was doing - Marrying a dance teacher.
I started in the accounting field in February 1939. At that time, income tax returns were due on March 15 of each year. Our hours then were 8-12, 1-5, 6:30 to 12:00 midnight, or later.

The accounting office I worked for, Maihofer, Moore & De Long had an office in Holland, also. In Mid-November 1947, the manager walked out of the 14th Street Christian Reformed Church, walked between two cars on his way to his car across Central Avenue, and into the path of a south-bound car. He died the following Saturday.

I was appointed by my employers to take over the management of the Holland Office effective on December 1, 1947. Not wanting to remove my children from the North Muskegon Public School until the close of the school year, we delayed moving to Holland until September 1948. The original intention was that I would be here for only a year. A very good acquaintance of my employers was scheduled to take over the management at that time. But, I did such an admirable job of managing, that they continued my employment as manager.

Eventually, after a couple of years, I was made a partner in this office. I was supposed to have received some accounting help from the Muskegon office, but got very little. I got tired of sending them their share of the profits each year, without receiving any assistance, that I thought I should buy out my partners interest in the Holland Accounting office. This didn't set very well with my partners, and it took about two years to convince then I was serious. They consented and I purchased their interests on October 31 of same particular year.

I operated as the sole owner for only two months until the end of the calendar year.

Because I had some valuable CPA's working for me at that time, I offered to make them partners with me. It was not necessary for them to buy into the partnership, but, was only necessary to leave as much of their earnings in the company, that they could, in order to build up their capital. This they did. In fact, outside of Grand Rapids, our accounting partnership was the largest on this side of the State, having about 38 people in the organization.
Oh yes, I had my share of charitable jobs in my life: on the Board of Public Works for 14 years, Chairman of the Ottawa County Chapter of the Red Cross at the time of the Hudsonville Tornado; had some high office in the Longfellow school and Jefferson school PTA organization. I was the Secretary-Treasurer of the Cheff Foundation (now the Cheff Center for the Handicapped) in Augusta, Michigan for 45 years; I was a trustee of the Community Foundation of the Holland/Zeeland area; I have been the Treasurer of the Rotary Club for about 25 years (I should own it by now); and some others too numerous to mention.

My Hobbies

I was never very good at golf so I gave it up to devote more of my time to flower growing. I have grown dahlias since I was 16 years of age, except for a few years when we lived in apartments. I know of some dahlia growers who like to grow a few varieties, but a large quantity of each. That's not for me. I grow not more than two bushes of any variety, but of a great number of varieties. The summer of 1995, I had 378 dahlia bushes. In 1996, I had 318 dahlia bushes because I started a 16' x 40' perennial garden. I spend about 35 hours a week in my garden. And seldom, if ever, allow anyone to work in my garden.

I grow flowers because I like them. If other people enjoy them, also, so much for the better.

Do I cut the flowers to take into my house—the answer is no. I am seldom in my house. I am in the garden where the flowers are.

My wife—she was a doll. Sure we had our problems, but who doesn't. She was sickly for a period of 12 years. At one time she was given two months to 2 years to live. I swear that she wanted to live to celebrate our 45th Wedding Anniversary in November 1981. She died of COPD in January 1982. Don't ask me what that is but it has something to do with the respiratory system.
Yes, I miss her and who wouldn't. She was the first to teach dancing in the Holland Public Schools; the first to teach dancing in Hope College; she received a distinguished service award from Hope College for her efforts to promote dancing in Holland; she worked with Hope College to establish a dance minor at Hope, but wasn't satisfied and worked to establish a dance major at Hope. The dance program at Hope bears her name: The Dorothy Wiley De Long Chair of the Dance.

My romantic life isn't dead: I know I should look at girls, but have forgotten why. I have a cute chick for a constant companion. No, no intention of marriage. She is independent, and so am I, that we couldn't live together amicably.

Do I feel my age - no. My living is 95% attitude, 95% humor, and 95% optimism. I know those add up to more than 100%, but that's me.

I have clients that can't wait until they get to be 65, and then retire. Upon retirement, they sit in a rocking chair and die.

What do I do for meals at home, I buy very few packaged meals that only require heating before eating. I prefer to start from scratch and do my own cooking. Nothing fancy.

Yes, I retired twice, and was talked into coming to work for De Long & Brower CPA. So I still do a little CPAing, but have turned over most of my work to other employees in the office. Old age should have some benefits.