Haverdink, Carol Oral History Interview: Sesquicentennial of Holland, "150 Stories for 150 Years"

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AP: For starters, if you could just state your name, birth date, if you will, and where you were born?

CH: My name is Carol Jean Beekman Haverdink. I was born here in Holland, [date removed], 1947. I was married to David Haverdink on August 30, 1968 and he passed away of cancer in January of 1987. I’ve been a widow ten years now. What else? I have two children. I have a son, Kurt, he was born in 1973. Right now he’s 23 years old. I have a daughter, Kristel, who was born in 1977, so she’s 19 years old.

AP: So you’ve lived in the Holland area all your life?

CH: Yes. Well, I have lived here most of my life. I lived out of town briefly when my husband was in the army in Fort Lee, Virginia for three months. Then, later, I lived in Germany with him for a year in the Service. Then one year, we decided since he had a job on the other side of Grand Rapids, we moved to Jenison for a year, but moved right back. We didn’t like that. I was born in Holland Hospital, but we lived on 16th Street right near the old high school which is now the community ed building. We lived in an older home there and what I remember about that home other than that it was old and had these old stairs that you climbed upstairs, is it was a lot alike all the other houses on the street. The houses were really close together. It was a big family type atmosphere in the neighborhood. I started out in kindergarten going to Washington School. That’s on 10th or 11th Street. At that time, I walked by myself
Those blocks to school, which now a days, you wouldn’t send a kindergartner to walk five or six blocks alone to school. I was thinking about that, the times have really changed, Holland has really changed as far as what you feel is safety’s sake, and so on. I went to Washington School for kindergarten and first grade. Then in second grade, I went to Van Raalte School. I'm not sure why the change. Perhaps Van Raalte had the higher grades or they did some redistricting. I really don’t recall. So I switched to Van Raalte school in second grade, and also walked to that school. That’s on 19th Street, a couple of blocks over, so it was about the same, five or six blocks to school. Then at that time, my parents decided we needed a newer home. Our home was quite old. I would say it was probably close to 80, 90 years old at that time. People didn’t do a whole lot of remodeling in those days. You just kind of moved on. You either stayed or you moved on, and they decided to buy a brand new house, so we moved north of town. I think that was real typical of the mid 50s. Holland was growing and expanding and the north side was the place to move to. We moved to a three bedroom ranch on 5th Avenue, which is near the old Chris Craft building. We just thought we were in heaven. Now we look back at that house and it’s kind of a dingy little home. It didn’t have an attached garage again. We did build a car port on it. It didn’t have any landscaping or anything. But I do remember we paid $13,500 for it, which, we thought, was an enormous amount of money. Of course, now a days you buy a car for that much. So we moved to the north side of town, and that meant I had to transfer to West Ottawa Schools. West Ottawa Schools were in the process of building a high school. So they did not have a
high school, yet, and my older sister was still living at home them.

AP: I'm sorry, do you know when they annexed? People talk about the annexation of the school and West Ottawa making it's own school district. But I don't have a good hold on the dates and when that happened.

CH: I'm not sure what you mean by the term annexed.

AP: When they were all under the Holland Public Schools, and Holland said you either become part of Holland City, or you'll be your own school district.

CH: OK. That was in the mid 50s. Because we moved there in 1956, and my sister had gone to Holland High School, and she had either one or two years left, I think she had just one year left. The high school was not built yet, they were in the process of building it. So she drove in to Holland High school from the north side of town to finish off her high school and graduated from Holland High School. I was in elementary, so I'm not sure how that exactly went. But I think the elementary schools started, year by year, adding another year to the high school. What happened with me is that just about every year I went to a different school as they were trying to figure this out, how to make this work, and where to put us. In third grade, I went to Glerum on Lakewood Boulevard, which at that time was called Beechwood Number 2. In fourth grade, I went to Beechwood Number 1, which is no longer there. It's the parking lot on Ottawa Beach between Ottawa Beach Road and Howard Avenue, but that was called Beechwood Number 1. In fifth grade, I went to school in the basement of Beechwood Reformed Church, we rented classrooms from the church, a couple down there. In sixth grade, I went the first half of the year in the
gym of Waukazoo School, and the second half of the year I went in what they call the Annex Building, which is now the administration building for West Ottawa on Lakewood Boulevard. That was made into, I think, three classrooms. So I finished off sixth grade in there. In seventh grade, we had a mini junior high in the gym of Glerum. We had three teachers, we had one seventh grade and two eight grades. I'm not sure about that, but I know we had three teachers, and three teachers would move between the classes to give us an idea of junior high. Finally in eighth grade, the high school was built, and of course the high school was a junior senior high school. So finally the high school was built and off I went to West Ottawa High School and graduated from there in 1966. So that gives you an idea of how Holland was really growing and blossoming and how difficult it was for them to make this change from being part of the Holland district and then setting up their own new high school.

I kind of forgot all about my family. I kind of skipped right over that. I probably should tell you about my family. I have an older sister, Arlene, who was married when I was four years old. So I really never got to know her very well, because she was at Hope College for those four years before that. I was a flower girl in her wedding, and that's probably my first memory of her. Then she got married and left. She married Roger Northuis. They both went to Hope College. She went on to be a middle school social studies teacher. He was not only a teacher, I believe it was English, he was principal of Byron Center and then Godwin Heights. Then he became the director of the Kent Skill Center, and they are both retired now. My
brother, Don, he's 15 years older than me. He went into the army during the early 50s. I remember a trip down to visit him in Georgia. It was not during any wartime that I recall. He wasn't in anything military overseas. He was in the states the whole time. He married Myrna Monetza. He went on to work at Holland Motor Express which became TNT, and he just retired a year or so ago. My closest sister is Shirley, and she married Wayne Larson when I was about eleven years old.

Basically, I was an only child from when I was eleven years old. But then there were basically just two of us while I was growing up, my sister and I. One thing I was thinking about was when we moved from the old house on 16th Street to the new house on 5th Avenue, you'd think that we'd each have our own bedroom, but we didn't. There was a little den, and my folks said, nope, that's the sewing room and the den, and we had to room together in our twin beds in that room. I can remember the typical teenage squabbles. But I don't remember complaining about we had to sleep together. That was just what we had to do. So, anyway, that's my family. I forgot about finishing about Shirley. Shirley graduated from Holland High School and I can't remember, she worked as a secretary first at Prudential Insurance Company, and then had three children, and went on to work in banks. Now she is the head business teller for Hope College. My oldest sister moved to Grand Rapids with her teaching, and my brother and sister both stayed here in Holland. I myself graduated from West Ottawa. I met my husband the summer between graduating and going off to college. I met him on a blind date and we met at the entrance to Ottawa Beach, which I thought was interesting, because that's still the gathering place for
teenagers in Holland. I went off to Western, only stayed one semester, moved back home, got a job, and eventually got married. This was all during the Vietnam War era. That was really a turbulent time in the United States in the late 60s. There was the race riots and the assassinations and the whole Vietnam War unrest thing going on.

AP: How did it affect Holland?

CH: Well, Holland has always been a protected community, especially years back when it was mostly Dutch, and everybody usually had most of their family right here, and so, in a lot of ways, we were protected from all that violence. We didn’t have any of the riots and anything like that in Holland because it was so homogeneous, so Dutch, and so family and church oriented, that that was kind of like, you’d read about it and you’d see it in the newspapers and on the TV, but it was almost like not very close. Except when the draft began for the Vietnam War. That really affected us because we were drafted just like anyone else. That’s kind of an interesting story, what happened with my husband. He graduated from high school and immediately got a job, as did most of his friends. They were all called up for pre draft physicals. He happened to be called up with his two best friends and they went for that physical across the state. His friends, immediately, got a notice and got drafted within three months. But my husband didn’t hear anything. We found out later that he had scoliosis, but we didn’t know that at that time. We just knew that his rib cage, if you looked real closely, you could see that it didn’t match up quite right, so they must have been investigating that. This was in 1968, and like I said, his friends had been
drafted immediately, and we were just waiting, figuring it was going to happen. They got a notification first that they passed the physical, what classification they were, then the next month they got drafted. About six months after his friends had got their notification, he got his notification that he was draftable, whatever that classification was, I forgot. We were just all up in arms. We had been going together for a year and a half. We were engaged, but hadn’t set a date, and decided, let’s just get married. We were married a month later. We just threw together a quick wedding. We got married in the minister’s home in front of his fire place. We didn’t even bother with invitations. We just phoned all our family and friends and said, we’re going to have a reception, at the time it was Jack’s Restaurant, now it’s Beechwood Inn on Ottawa Beach Road. We just threw together quickly this wedding and got married. He did get drafted, but not for five months. We lived in Windmill Trailer Park on Lakewood Boulevard for five months. We bought a furnished trailer, brand new, for $5,500. Our lot rent, I believe, was $80 a month. We both worked and didn’t know what would happen, and he did get drafted at the beginning of 1969. He was sent to Fort Knox, Kentucky. I stayed home, working, and I found someone else through a sister-in-law, that also had a husband that was in basic training there, so weekends, she worked the night shift, so when she got done at two in the morning, we would meet on Friday night, Saturday morning, the two of us, who were nineteen, twenty, we’d get in a car and drive the eight hours down to Fort Knox, and be there in the morning. Whenever they could get off, we would be there, we’d rent two rooms for the weekend, and whenever they could get off, we’d be there for the
weekend, and we'd drive back on Sunday, and Monday go back to work again. We did that for the basic training. When he got done with that, he had advanced training, and it was in Fort Lee, Virginia. He said, "I don't care, you're quitting your job, you're coming with me." So just like that, in a weekend time, I quit my job, we actually sold our older car, and got a little bit better car, packed the car full of stuff, and drove down to Fort Lee, not having any place to stay or anything. But we found an apartment. It had roaches. It was terrible. (laughs) But for two months, we figured we could deal with it. He was pretty sure that he was going to get sent to Vietnam, and he did get the orders. So we had to stay two weeks longer, and he went through jungle training and went through all the training, got all his orders, had a specific list of what you may take: one duffle bag, you don't take your dress clothes, you only take your good travelling clothes, and you could take X number of socks, X number of underwear, and you had a few personal effects in your one duffel bag, and that's all you could take. He was given a month's leave of absence. So we came home, and for that month, we just kind of hung around and made preparations. He figured he was going to Vietnam, and I did too. Kind of a popular thing at that time was to go to Grand Rapids and say good bye to the family, and then I flew with him to Chicago so we could have our private good bye. So I flew with him to Chicago, said our private good bye, flew back, and went back to work. Three days later I came home and my dad said, "Dave's not going to Vietnam." I said, "What?" He said, "He's not going to Vietnam, they changed his orders." When he was there, he was there for three days in California, and they called out the first group of 60
guys, and he thought, "Well, here I go." And they said, we have too many men for
this shipment, so you guys are going to go to Europe instead. That's the only person
I ever heard of that happen to. Of course, there were 60 men in that group that had
that happen to them. That was kind of like a prayer I didn't even pray that I got
answered. That was really so unusual and such good news, I can't even... Just to
think of it again kind of sends chills up my spine, because it was such an amazing
thing to have happen. So he came back. He had a week. They gave him about a
week in between to repack, because he could take everything along there. Then they
sent him over to Germany. When he got there, they really hadn't planned on him
being there, they didn't have a place for him. So he was kind of shuffled around for
six weeks, trying to decide where they were going to locate him. Finally, they got a
location for him, which was about thirty miles from any base on a little mountain top
radio relay station. I forgot to mention that he had put in for MP training or cook,
because he was a big guy and thought that he would be a good MP, or someone said
to put in for cook, because then if you went to Vietnam, they usually kept you behind
the battle lines. So that was his reasoning for that.

AP: Right, he'd be on a base. That's one thing that interests me is that, when my father
was in the Air Force, as somebody already in it, he had specific training, so you
weren't put in combat. Everybody with specific training was put at a base to use that
skill.

CH: So he went to cook school, and he got there and he was the cook for this base that
had anywhere from six to twenty-five men. The only thing is that he wasn't really
interested in cooking at all. So, right away, he put in for radio training. Meanwhile, he wanted me to come over there, but since it wasn’t on a base, there was no housing for me. But at the bottom of the mountain, there was a little German village, that had one apartment that people would rent out to American servicemen. There was one serviceman who was going home, and so we waited for his wife to leave, and then I came over there. So I spent from the end of July to November waiting for her to leave, and for him to get situated, first of all. So I flew over there, and we lived as the only Americans in that little German village for a year. One thing I should tell you, right at that same time were the first steps on the moon. While he was home, that was when the first steps were taken by Neil Armstrong on the moon, and I took a picture with a camera of the TV, so it was kind of a fun thing to watch. Also that we celebrated our first anniversary on our 11th month, because we thought he was going to be in Vietnam. We took that cake out of the freezer. It was just the most awful tasting stuff. We couldn’t even swallow that bit that we took. Then it turned out he was in Germany, instead. That all happened in 1969. So we lived there for a year, and that was very interesting. I didn’t take German before. I had my little Berlitz translator, and I learned what I called "chop German." The people that were in the apartment below us had been used to Americans there, and they could understand us quite well, and they could understand English fairly well, but they didn’t like to speak English, so they only spoke in German. They kind of took us under their wing and they did some sight seeing with us. Took us to Rothenburg, which is the oldest walled city in Germany. They took us to a parade and Octoberfest, that was kind of
nice, that was interesting. A couple of interesting things we did there, for our delayed anniversary present, we went on a three day weekend pass to Paris. We rode a bus to Paris and then spent about two days in Paris on a tour, just a regular tour, and road that bus back. That was an awful bus ride. But it was fun. We had the ten minute tour of everything: rush, rush, rush. But it was fun. I remember seeing the Mona Lisa, that was one thing that strikes me. The Eiffel Tower, I really wanted to go up in there, but it was raining, and Dave said, "There is no way I’m going in the rain up in that thing." The Notre Dame Cathedral was just so lovely, and the Church of the Sacred Heart, that was way up on a hill, I remember that, it was just a beautiful, beautiful sight. That was one trip that we made. Another excursion we made was on a one day pass. We rode the trains all the way across Germany to Amsterdam. We spent one day in Amsterdam. We rode the train through the night, spent the day in Amsterdam, and then rode the train through the night back, because he had to be back, he had that one day pass. That was fun. Now I look back and say, I was over there, why didn’t I go back and look up my ancestry, but when I was twenty, I didn’t have any interest in that. Now I would approach it much more differently. I would like to go through the countryside and look up some of these towns, but it’s a missed opportunity.

AP: What was the general feeling of men serving in Vietnam at that time. For here, was that their duty to go, was anybody thinking of how to get out of it, or were people supportive of soldiers over there, what did you experience here?

CH: It was a little bit of everything. There were guys who fenagled their way out of it by
college or by Canada, so on. But my husband said, if I get called, I'm going to go with our country, I'm going to do my duty. So it's kind of like a Dutch, Stoic view of it, and I think a lot of people just had that, they just did it. Two of his best friends went and served over there and did their duty. The one, I think, turned out fine, and the other one, I think, had a drinking problem. Never really settled down real well. I think that the people were very supportive of it. Being a small town, I think, makes a difference than living in a big city. I think Holland, now, is a big city. Back then it was really a small town, yet. There was a lot of patriotism and a lot of support for the guys. You hear about that now, about how they weren't welcomed back. I think in Holland they were, that was not something that happened here that you were looked down on because you went in that war. Everyone just figured, you're an American, you do your duty, and they were respected for that.

AP: Something my mom remembered was, just when we went through Dessert Storm and comparing that... everybody was praying. She said that during Vietnam, where she was, even in the Prayers of the Parish, nobody would offer up prayers for the soldiers in Vietnam. So she, generally, said there wasn't a lot of support in a lot of cities, and I was wondering how Holland compared, because it is a very close-knit community.

CH: I'll give you an example of the support from our church. They were just extremely supportive. Whenever they had mail call, everyone would moan, because Dave would get letter after letter after letter after letter. Of course, he had a big family, he had seven brothers and sisters. But, also, we just got mail from the church all the
time. Christmas time, we got 52 Christmas cards. I can remember on the door, putting the Christmas cards in the shape of a tree, and it about covered the entire door. Of course, that made the other men very jealous. They weren't supported like we were. We had tremendous support from the church and family. This wasn't Vietnam, but it was Germany, and it was during the war. I'm sure that they supported the servicemen who were in Vietnam with the same type of support that they did for us in Germany.

I was looking over those questions, and it said, what one thing from the past really sticks out in your mind, and I would have to say it was the assassination of John Kennedy. You do, you really remember exactly where you were. I was in high school. I even remember where I was, I was in the little auditorium. We were in there for some type of a little presentation, and it broke through over the PA system. I remember the girl behind me just broke down in tears. Her parents were quite wealthy and I think they were quite into politics. She just broke down to tears. We were all stunned. It was like time stopped. Then all the news coverage and so on. You were used to it with politics or with war, but this, the news coverage, just continual, continual. I remember sitting there and watching the caisson being pulled by the horses down in Washington for the burial, and watching that over and over again, and the shooting. Then the killing of Oswald right then and there. It was just very unsettling. That's a historical thing that sticks out in my mind. As far as Holland itself, I remember the windmill, De Zwaan, being purchased and brought over here. I remember that, as teenagers, we were so upset. We though they
spending so much money on that, and there was nothing for teens to do in Holland.

(laughs) I have a teenage daughter and you hear the exact same things from her right now, there’s nothing to do in Holland. All we have to do is go to the beach, and that’s the same sentiments that I had. I can remember I had an assignment to write a letter to the editor, and that’s what I wrote the letter to the editor about, all that money they were using to bring that old windmill over here. Of course, now I love the old windmill. But at that time I saw that as a controversial issue. At least in my teenage mind it was controversial.

Changes in Holland over the years... It’s changed completely from the small town, homogeneous Dutch background to just so many cultures. All the Hispanic people that have come in, largely through the migrant workers, through the blueberry fields and so on. That has changed. The industry, that really made the area bloom was that industry that came in. We were thankful for it for jobs. When my husband and I both came back from Germany, he was offered his old job back. But I had talked him into going back to business college. So he elected to take a part time job at a gas station, and he went to college full time for two years on the GI Bill. So I needed to get a fairly good paying job, basically, to run the family. I remember going and applying at twenty places. I mean, I applied at everything, and jobs were just very, very scarce. I remember that was a real concern. That was 1971. All the servicemen coming back, they would have their jobs, if it was still there. But, when the wives came back, you just couldn’t find a job. I finally did get a job at Luth Electric. I think I was making minimum wage, very low. I can’t recall what it was
right now, but I was just really thankful to have a job. Through a sister-in-law, I heard of an opening at Excello Aerospace on 8th Street. That was a fairly new factory that came into town that made airplane parts. My sister-in-law's sister worked there, and I heard there was an opening, and I went down there and applied. I got a job there and I made $2.00 more an hour. So I worked in a factory, and I ended up working there for about seven years. I started out as just a basic inspector, and worked my way up through all the little steps that you had to go, through the inspector rank to first piece inspector. Even, for a while, I transferred into quality control, which was office work. By that time, that was about four or five years that I had been there, they had opened a second plant in Zeeland, so we had two plants. I transferred over to the Zeeland plant and I worked in quality control in the office. I was thinking about women's lib in conjunction with that. What a tough time I had as a woman in the office in the quality control of that company. Of course, most of the men had worked in Aerospace for twenty years. Here I was, in my early twenties, and we just had a lot of battles. It was a real struggle. Back in the 70s in the Holland area, the women were still not realized for their potential or mental ability or whatever, and I had a real struggle with that, and I finally asked to go back to the factory. It was just too frustrating, too upsetting. I would end up in tears, the battles I would have to do, because they just wouldn't believe me. Now I think that's changed. I think women, throughout the entire country, have come a long way. But in the 70s, I still really felt like I wasn't respected. During that time, my husband graduated from Davenport and got a job with Holland Motor Express. He was not
real happy there, moved on to a company called Indian Head Truck Lines, where they made him terminal manager. It was kind of a small office. He was salesman, terminal manager. They really believed in him. His wages rose terrifically. His two year business college degree really did well for him. It took me nine years after he died for me to make the same wages as he was making when he died, so I thought he did really well. Of course, he could see that they were going to go bankrupt, so he got another job with Ryder Truck Lines and worked in Grand Haven for a while, and then they opened up an office in Holland. He did the Herman Miller overflow trucking. They had some routes that they never had enough drivers for, then they would turn it over to the rental truck line, which was Dave, so he did the semi. He did the dispatching. This was a one man office. He did the dispatching, he did the coordinating, he did everything. Back to the 70s. During that time, our son was born, and I took a three month leave of absence and then went back to work, which was pretty normal for that time. You either didn’t work at all, or you worked full time. Then, after a couple of years, we wanted a second child, but I wasn’t getting pregnant, so I decided to quit my job. The next month I got pregnant, and then my daughter was born. At about that same time, we decided to send out children to Christian school, and I got a part time job, and always worked part time to help pay for that Christian School tuition. I worked part time until my husband got ill with cancer. It was quite a fast growing lymphoma, and they said, we have this really intense chemotherapy that we’ll try with him, and if it doesn’t work within three months, than there’s probably nothing we can do. We had good reports that it was
almost gone. He had monthly bone marrow tests. Every time it was almost gone, but not quite. The next month, it was almost gone, but not quite. The third month, it was almost gone, but not quite. They said that anymore chemotherapy would probably damage his internal organs. Then they decided to try a different therapy, but we kind of had a feeling that they told us that, and he died within six months. We did some other radiation, we had just started a new kind of chemotherapy. He lived until right after Christmas, I think he was just holding on until right after Christmas. What happened then was, I was just kind of thrown into turmoil. I had quit college for him. I decided, well, I always thought about going back to college, let's investigate that again. That was my therapy at first to keep me busy: going around and I looked at JC and Grand Valley and Hope, and decided on Hope on the advice of my old high school counselor. At Grand Valley they said, why don't you go back to your old high school counselor. He said, why don't you just go to Hope. I know it costs more, but it's right here. So I went back, taking two classes, just to see if I could handle it, and found that I loved it. I took some aptitude and interest inventories, because when I went to college originally, I wanted to be a social worker, but I wasn't so sure about that anymore. I had done a lot of church work in between there, and I loved to work with kids. Lo and behold, one of the tests, the top thing came out, teaching special education, so I decided to major in special ed. That first year I went half time and completed that second semester I never completed in 1966, so I had 21 years between my first semester as a freshman and my second semester. Then I went back full time. So I worked part time at Family Fare grocery
store, and went back to college full time, and completed it within the three years, and graduated in 1991. I applied to 47 schools. In this area, it's really difficult to get a teaching job. There's a lot of teacher colleges in this area, where people come from all over because they're good teacher colleges, and they do their student teaching here, and they love it here, and they want to stay here, and they get their jobs here, so it's just extremely difficult to get teaching positions in west Michigan area. They say, in the nation, there's a shortage of teachers. But around here, it's really difficult. I did apply at 47 schools, 21 of those were Christian schools. I had a couple interviews, but Allendale hired me, so I had a teaching job in the first year, unlike my son, who's been out of college two years and still doesn't have a teaching position, he's been subbing for two years. So I taught special education for the first four years, then I transferred into regular ed, and I've been a fourth grade teacher for two years. At almost 50, I've just been teaching for six years. Then now you're going to ask me about my book. (laughs)

During that time that I took the college classes, I took a class called religion in America with Rev. Dennis Voskuil. We had to write a minimum ten page term paper on something that really interested us, something that really caught our attention. The split of the Christian Reformed Church from the Reformed church was an interest of mine, so I decided to research that. I researched it at Van Wylen Library, at the Joint Archives, at the Herrick Library, at the Western Seminary, and at the Graafschap Church Historical Library. I read several books, and my ten page paper turned into a 37 page paper. But in that, I read all about the beginnings of Holland
and why Van Raalte came over here, and developed a real interest in Holland history. Right after that I took a May term class, which means that they condense a whole semester's work of classes into three weeks, and you go everyday for half a day for three weeks. I took language arts for elementary teachers. Throughout that I had to write a children's story and illustrate it and do two other projects for that class, also, within those three weeks. I had just learned all this Holland history, so I decided to write a children's book using the historical facts, but then make it historical fiction by putting in a little girl and how she would feel about coming, and all the changes and all that type of thing. I knew that I wanted to write something... (tape ends) ...I could use in my student teaching, and I hoped to do the regular ed student teaching in christian schools, and I knew that they taught a Holland unit, so it was kind of an ulterior motive to use it in my own teaching experiences. So I wrote the story. I didn't feel like I was much of an artist, so I used clip-art, sort of, where I clipped Dutch costume fabrics, just to make outline pictures, and put together this book very quickly. I have used it in teaching over the years to teach about the early settlers of Michigan, but also to teach the facts about why they did come over here. I also used it in process writing, talking about writing a book and revising it, and I've used it for Young Authors in school. This past year, with the 150th Anniversary, I decided to give the book to the Sesquicentennial committee, and they chose to use it, to give to all of the second graders in the Holland area as a gift. It was underwritten by the American Association of University Woman, the Joint Archives, Holland Area Historical Society, and Hope College. They funded it so that it could freely be given
to all of the students. One thing is that the Dutch costume fabric wouldn't copy well, so they asked Carolyn Stitch, a local artist who has also done the Sesquicentennial poster, if she'd donate her time to also do the illustrations for it. She kind of took my illustrations and made comparable illustrations in pen and ink so it could be copied quite easily. It's a little black and white book, 27 pages long. I have just recently written a proposal to Baker Book House, and so we'll see if I can get it published more widely. It's been a lot of fun. I went to one school and did some presentations on it, and it's been a lot of fun. I've enjoyed that very much. I belong to Holland Historical Society, although I've only belonged to that for one year, but I decided it was time for me to make time for myself. During this whole time since my husband died, I felt like I haven't done much for myself. I've tried to give my time to my children, and then to my job. Of course, teaching takes an inordinate amount of time. If you're an elementary teacher, you spend hours at night, preparing for the next day, or correcting papers. In the summer time, I've always taken classes, or during the school year, I've always taken classes. Either Saturdays or a night a week, so this year I decided that I wanted to do something for myself. I enjoyed being a member of the Holland Historical Society and going to their presentations.

I kind of forgot to mention one thing. Back in the 70s when I was working part time and my children were growing up, I really got involved in a lot of church work at Graafschap Church. We had a coffee break/story hour program, which was a real popular program at that time period. Some churches still have that going on.
But I worked with the story hour part of it as well. Some ladies led Bible studies, and the moms would go to the Bible studies, and they’d have stories and crafts for the children. I was really involved with that for about eleven years. That really gave me a good foundation in teaching children, but also, as the story hour leaders, we were invited to the other leader’s—the day before the Bible study, they would all get together and they would do the lesson themselves, so we were invited to that pre-lesson and learning, and that really strengthened my faith. That really helped me through the death of my husband. That was really God’s hand preparing me and my children, too, for that stressful time in our life. Although I have to say that when you have a death in the family, so many people think that because on the outside it looks like you’re handling things well and successfully, that that’s not really truly the case. We just had the 10th anniversary of my husband’s death, and it was really stressful. This Father’s Day, just this past weekend, was really stressful for my children. It’s something that people on the outside really don’t realize, how you can look like you’re successful, you can look like you’re handling things well, but things aren’t really going well. I guess the lesson I’ve learned is that you have to be willing to open up and tell people that, because people just don’t see that, and they don’t understand.

AP: I’m curious to know what it was like for you going back to Hope.

CH: OK. Well, I was a non-traditional student. I was like the mother. Although there were many students that were much older than I was. I was 39. There were other non-traditional students that were older, and there were other non-traditional students
that were younger. It was really funny. All of the professors, with the exception of one or two, really liked having an older student in there. They could always get more of an adult perspective on things. They'd quite often call on us in psychology classes: what happened with you and your children? Or in religion classes, especially on the 60s. This was in the 80s. When we had religion classes, in religion of America, we talked a lot about religion in the 60s. They would really use us as a resource. The other students would usually think of you as a mother figure. Generally I was old enough to be their mother. There were a few students who kind of resented you. My experience with the non-traditional students was, we were all there with a purpose, much more so than the younger students, and so we were gung ho. We all got good grades. Sometimes they would be jealous of that. But I spent hours, I really hit the books like I never did before, because I really had a purpose. I wanted to have a better job that I could support my family with when I was done, and I wanted to get done as soon as possible, because I basically financed the whole thing. I did get some scholarships and grants and so on, but I just went in and said, I cannot make any payments, so I have to finance the entire amount. Which I didn’t do the first year when I just went half time, I tried to pay a thousand dollars a semester. I said, I just can’t do this, I’m going to go full time, I can only work part time, and I can’t do any of it. So they worked with me, and they found me a way to finance the whole thing. But I did get quite a bit of Hope College grants and a Pell grant, and Stafford loans, reduced loans, and so on. I was really there with a purpose. It was interesting. When you first start out, you really feel out of place, but it didn’t take
too long and I was quite comfortable. But quite often, you’d have an hour and a half
between classes—not enough to go home or do anything. So I just walked into the
Kletz one day and saw an older lady sitting there alone, and just walked over and
said, "May I sit with you?" That’s how I met Betty Cook, who is about twenty years
my senior. She was just finishing up. I said, "What are you going to do when
you’re done?" She said, "I’m going to be a well-educated grandma, but it’s
something I’ve always wanted to do." That was my first introduction, so I got brave
and met several people just by doing that, seeing them in the Kletz sitting alone, and
walking up and saying, "May I join you?" We kind of made a little group of friends.
That changed as people graduated over the years. You did find that we did kind of
gravitate together, too. One thing I will say, though, is it was really difficult doing
group projects, because scheduling with college kids...

AP: They all want to meet at 11:30 at night?

CH: Yes. I know. I just couldn’t do it, and some got kind of angry with me. I said,
well, I have two children home alone. It’s bad enough that I leave them after school,
sometimes, if I have a class that’s later. I said, I don’t want to do it after ten at
night. That was, I would say, difficult.

AP: I think it sometimes goes unappreciated that no matter where you’re at, you think
you’re do busy, and as you go on... Even comparing senior year to freshman year,
freshman will say, "I’m so busy!" And you just say, "Just wait." Every year you’re
going to find more and more things to do, heavier loads, more demanding classes.
Then people graduate and they say, you’re only going to get busier as you go on.
You’re only going to get busier, and we never appreciate that.

CH: Right. That even is true with life. As your children grow up, you think, how can you be any busier? It just seems like you’re just busier as you go on.

AP: Then you think back to some years: what did I do with all that time? My first semester, I only took fourteen credits. What did I do? I want to know. What did I do? A lot of us certainly can’t understand… I’ve always really appreciated the different perspective the non-traditional students have brought into classes and discussions.

CH: With the exception of one or two professors, they all really loved having us there. I had a couple of professors that were kind of almost threatened. Kind of like, don’t try to contribute too much in class, don’t try to take over. That type of thing. But that was probably just a personality thing.

AP: And you took all the core classes?

CH: Yes, the college really was helpful in getting me through in the four years. The registrar, John Huisken, he did some adjusting. Dr. Dirkse was the head of the department at that time. He said, you go to John and ask him if you can take this instead and substitute this. He willingly did just about everything so that I could get through in the four years. I have a special ed major with learning disabilities concentration. Then I have a language arts minor. To do that language arts minor, they let me take introduction to the theater and introduction to cinema, which you’re not supposed to take two out of the same discipline, so I got to skip out on either art or music. They let me take my year in Germany, speaking a German language, as
one of my semesters of language, so I got to wave a semester of language, so I only had to take one semester of Spanish instead of two. That type of thing helped me get through, otherwise I would have had to take more classes. Hope was really helpful. They had a non-traditional student director that would have meetings. I attended some of those and made a few contacts that way, too. They were really helpful, and the education professors were fantastic. They would bend over backwards to help me in any way they could.

I was thinking about downtown Holland, how that has changed. From when I was a little girl it was the hub, it was the center of the community, because that’s all there was. Thinking back how times change, my mother was a stay at home mom because that’s exactly what you did in the forties and fifties. Once I got into high school, she got a part time job. She worked for a while downtown in the Windmill Restaurant, which is still there. I can remember going there and sitting there at the little counter, waiting for her to be done with work, and then going home. Don’t ask me how I got there, I really don’t know. But downtown was Sears and Penny’s and the Woolworth Dime Store. That was where you went to shop, and the only place there was. Then, of course, we got the malls. When they came, all the stores started leaving and the Sears and Penny’s went out to the mall and the Dime Store went out of business, and the downtown was really going down until Ed Prince decided to invest a lot of money into the refurbishing. Downtown Holland is quite charming now. Has a lot of exclusive shops, though, a lot of people feel like that’s for the tourists now. They don’t even go downtown. I do occasionally. Mostly because I
go to Pooh’s Corner Book Store as a teacher, for books and for teaching supplies. But I do love the little gift shops, Tin Ceiling and The Bridge and The Mole Hole, and now the new Ottawa Trading Company. I like those kinds of shops. I do go to Teerman’s. If we didn’t have the snow melt and the refurbishing of the buildings, because the buildings were really getting drab and old looking—if we didn’t have all that restoration, I think Holland’s downtown would be dead, so we owe a lot to Ed Prince and to the others who had the foresight to do that and make that a reality.

AP: Are there any problems or negatives in Holland right now that you see?

CH: Holland has lost its small town flavor. I don’t know how many are living in Holland or the Holland area right now, but it really has a big town feel to it now. Partly because all that industry pulled in so many people. We have a lot of different nationalities here now that clash. That’s kind of sad, for me. Like I say, when I was little and five years old, I walked five, six blocks to school alone and no one thought of it. Now-a-days you just don’t send your children out to walk around like that anymore. You’re more protective. We’ve had a few gang incidents and a few drive by shootings, which just were unheard of in past years. How to really solve this, I don’t know. I think they’re really trying with some of the neighborhood programs that are going on. The policemen that are doing the walk now. Instead of driving through they’re walking through and getting to know the people one on one, I think that’s a real help. I think that some of the school programs that Holland is instituting, they just had it in the news recently, with the one on one, teaming people from businesses with students who are having difficulties. That can all only help.
But some of the old timers aren’t appreciative of it, so I think that’s a controversy. They aren’t appreciative of the some of the people that have moved in and changed the character of Holland. They wish it were back to the old way, and, of course, there’s no going back, you can only move forward. The world is getting closer and closer together through media and transportation. We just have to really all learn to live together. But for some people it’s not easy to do.

AP: How would you compare the quality of kids’ lives today compared to your childhood?

CH: Well, for quality of life, I think I had a very peaceful, safe, and calm growing up. I think, now a day, children kind of grow up in a lot of turmoil. A lot more stress. The kids now a days have just much more pressure to succeed, to excel. A lot more competition, I think. A lot of children either thrive under that, or they break under it. I think that television has really changed a big part in that. When I was growing up, we didn’t get a television until the mid 50s, so I didn’t even have that when I was little. Now a days, from the time they’re born, they’re bombarded with a lot of violence on TV. It’s almost pushed into their beings from real tiny children on.

Holland is just like the rest of the world. It’s completely different from when I grew up.

AP: I was talking to someone the other day, and they were talking about when they were growing up, they didn’t even remember the temptation or the prevalence of alcohol and drugs being around. Kids today, it just seems that if a kid wanted to experiment with that or was just innocently being a kid, that would be something that would come up in their daily life. How does that compare today? Do you remember how that
transition happened?

CH: In the 60s and 70s, we went through that whole generation of the "Age of Aquarius."

AP: Did that affect Holland much?

CH: Only just slightly. We were on the fringes of it. We always used to say that everything in Holland was five years later than everywhere else in the United States. The fashions were five years later, the trends and so on. I do recall that’s when a lot of people talked about marijuana and LSD. That was the big talk at that time, the LSD. I never knew anyone here in Holland who took LSD, but I did hear people who got marijuana. I have no idea how they got it. Our big temptation was to smoke or to drink, which as a teenager in Holland, that was readily available. But as a teen, not in the younger years, like now a days they say that it’s getting younger and younger. I really don’t know, except that the whole world and that "me" generation of satisfying your own pleasures and wants and whatever and doing everything for yourself, that came into Holland slowly.

AP: Could you characterize a difference between the 80s and the 90s that you’ve seen? Because, everybody tags the decades. Do you think you have enough perspective to tag those decades, yet? How would you describe them?

CH: I think that in the 90s a lot of us are going back to serving others and helping others. For instance, the Habitat for Humanity type projects where you build houses for people. I think there’s a lot more people getting involved in those types of things: disaster relief going across the country, or donating to help people that have had hurricanes or floods or whatever. I see that as something that I’m seeing more of,
but other than that, I really can’t think of a way to tag the 80s.

AP: It does seem that was a very money driven time, people were very into possessions and material wealth and massing material goods. Looking even from the popular films at that time, just the moral standard was very low. Just in the common romantic comedy or slap stick comedy that you’d see, there’s be a lot more nudity and drinking and swearing. Just today, the common movies, there are a lot more action adventures, but there’s not so much unnecessary nudity or swearing. There’s a lot more violence, maybe. But some of those other things, they don’t seem to be as prevalent.

Now, your son went to Hope?

CH: Yes, my son went to Hope. He majored in history, minored in physics. He’s been a substitute teacher for two years, just not able to get a job in this area. He does not want to move away. He’s very reserved, very much a home body, and does not want to move away. So he’s made that choice just to stay. Right now he’s working a summer job in a factory. Now he’s saying if he can’t get a job in teaching, maybe he wasn’t meant to be a teacher. Maybe he’ll have to change career paths. Although, it’s pretty early yet. My daughter just went from high school into factory work. She’s working at Thermatron, and has a boyfriend, and is a typical 19 year old.

AP: What is 19 compared to when you were 19? I know my mom was married when she was 19, and I have friends getting marred at 22, and she’s sitting there going, "Oh, that is so young, I can’t believe it." Do you have a similar outlook?

CH: Right. I was married at 20. My husband was a year younger, he was 19 and I was
20, and that was pretty common back then. Now a days it seems like people are waiting a little bit longer, trying to get a little more established, save up. Of course, we didn't think of that back then at all. It was like, during the war, let's do this. I had a friend that said, "He may go off to Vietnam and you'll never be together. Grab your chance while you can." So it was a whole different mentality. Now a days, people plan more.

AP: I think people want to start out with a stronger base. Almost, a lot of kids my age, want the quality of life they had with their parents as they grew up. Right now I know my parents' quality of living has changed a lot. When you said you lived bought a trailer and you were in that apartment... My parents lived in a trailer that had all these mice in it. Today, I know a lot of kids just wouldn't tolerate a lot of that. Whether that's good or bad... I think it's good to plan, sometimes I think they're standards are kind of unrealistic.

CH: Right. I have a nephew who wanted to have a new house right away. They had already bought their lot and had the plans for their house, and they lived in an apartment six months while their brand new house was being built, and moved right into a brand new three bedroom home, newly married. You're right, kids have a high standard, they want everything right away. They're not willing to... Some are. I think a lot of them aren't... I think we were closer to the Depression back in those days where people really went through a lot. My parents talked about that. They had crates for tables and chairs. They rented an upstairs apartment and my sister had bed bug bites all over her, so they moved to a different apartment. My dad would work
at a gas station Saturday mornings so he could earn enough for the kids to have an ice
cream cone. (laughs) It’s just a whole different world. So when your parents are
from that world and I came from that old house with the rickety steps and the bees
always got in through the windows and the cracks and everything, I didn’t think
anything of moving into a trailer. That was just part of life.

AP: I talked, last week, with someone that was an immigrant, came from India, and to
study and stay here. She said that at this one point of time, they were pretty
unhappy, and they thought about leaving. She said, "My perspective is, we’re
immigrants. We came here with nothing." She said they moved there during the ’92
Olympics and they had one chair and this old TV and they were watching the
Olympics and switching to see who gets to sit on the chair. Then they got to watch
the ’96 Olympics last year and it was so different. Her whole feeling is, they started
with nothing, why not risk it all? Look at how much they amassed. It’s OK.

People, too, coming out of the Depression, they had nothing, they know what that’s
like, they’ve been through it, it’s not scary anymore. Kids now, we’re used to
growing up with so much material wealth. Kids have so many toys. We don’t know
what it’s like to live without those things. To us it is really scary, we don’t know
that you can do that.

CH: When we lived in Germany in that apartment, in that area yet, they didn’t have
running hot water. We only had cold water, so when you wanted to take a bath,
there were no showers, you had to light the kerosene three hours ahead of time to
heat the water in that water tank, and keep a real watch on it, because it would want
to go out all the time, and then we'd have one bath. So my husband would shower at
the base, and then I'd have a weekly bath. In the morning, we would heat water on
the stove so that we could wash up in warm water. Their kitchens there had a sink.
Nothing else. We had a bought little cupboard with a little tiny refrigerator in it, and
a hot plate. That was our stove. Everything had to be cooked in one pan. You
could fry one thing at a time, you could take it off, and you eat one thing at a time.

AP: Well, you didn't need a lot of pots and pans and dishes.

CH: Right. (laughs) You think back, how in the world did we ever survive? We had a
kerosine heater that was in the living room and it was kind of smoky and fumy. In
fact, I was kind of sick when I first got there. Then we found that by cracking the
living room window, I felt a whole lot better. We could have died of carbon
monoxide poisoning, but you just live through those things. For a while there, we
slept on straw mattresses. That's just what they had. OK. That's the kind of
mattresses they have there. But you do, you live through those things. They had
nice feather blankets, though, so that we kept warm in the other room, because the
one little heater was in the living room, so you had these nice feather blankets, but it
was chilly when you got out of bed. It was a whole different world. I did grow up
in a whole different time than my children who had waterbeds and video games and
computers.

AP: Was Europe really Americanized when you were over there?

CH: Not really, but part of that was because we were way off in this little village. Every
other week, we'd drive into a base where we could shop in a PX and get American
food. Otherwise we had to shop in the German grocery stores. So we'd drive the twenty-five miles to the nearest base. We were right in between two, Aschafenburg and Wurzburg. So we'd drive to either one or the other and go to the PX there. Those towns were Americanized. They could understand the Americans, they could understand the English. But in my village, the little store that was down the street...

Because, our refrigerator was like this big, I would go just about everyday and buy whatever we were going to have for supper. They could sort of understand me. But if I would get in the car and drive two miles down to the nearest, closest little village, they could not understand a word of my English, or my chop German. They couldn't understand my accent. Actually, the feeling in those little towns was not real good toward those American soldiers. The American soldiers would come in, they'd do a lot of drinking and partying, they'd get their girls pregnant, leave them, or they'd marry them and take them away, back to the States. A few, but not many, would stay there. So the feelings towards the Americans were not very good. They didn't really care for us being there. You can see that, you can understand that, as kind of a left over thing from World War II. How many years ago was that? I question the reasoning for keeping the American troops in Germany. They're still there. Even back in that time, there was a lot of animosity.

AP: It seems a lot of people I know, still, in the Service, get stationed in Germany.

CH: On the flip side, that couple that was in the apartment below us, they just welcomed us in. In fact, they made real good friends with the couple that was there two couples before us, and they have visited with them several time, back and forth. They’ve
really kept up together. Once in a while I get a phone call from Elizabeth, "Ja, we’re in America again." And then she sits there and doesn’t say anything because she really doesn’t like to talk the English.

AP: I noticed in your book about the dedication: To all the second graders in Holland, if your family came here with the first settlers 150 years ago, or you moved to this community in the past year or two, we all share a common bond.

CH: That was kind of the Sesquicentennial committee’s dedication. I kind of added the part about whether you came with the first settlers, or if you just came right now. First of all, they said, maybe you can dedicate it to the Sesquicentennial committee. I said, I’d rather dedicate it to the second graders. Then we kind of came up with this idea here. They added this, we all share a common bond. That’s Holland Museum’s theme. They’ve had that display about common bonds, about all the different nationalities that have come into Holland. I thought that would kind of be a nice way to tie it in. I wanted to dedicate it to the second grade students. The original book I dedicated to my children. I wasn’t giving it to my own children anymore, so we changed it. It was a nice project, though. It was quite a bit of work. A lot of work by a lot of different people. Peg VanGrouw from the American Association of University Women was kind of like the chairperson. She worked with all of us on the revision and brought it around to the museum and to the Joint Archives and had people look it over and make some suggestions on how to make it a little more historically accurate. They made a few changes. It turned out very nice.

AP: Do you have quite a bit of research into your family’s genealogy?
CH: Well, my sister, really, has done the research. She’s traced it back many, many
generations. I have a cousin who even found a connection, so we have it all the way
back to the 1600s. Just the father and each family’s name back to the 1600s. The
VanIwaardens from the Netherlands, turns out they actually were French in the
beginning. The first two generations are French. Jan VanIwaarden, the old man, and
Jan, the young man. There’s Jan’s all the way down till today. I have a cousin John
right now, too. That’s kind of interesting, but it would be fun to go back further. I
need to do some more research on my father’s side. I really didn’t mention too much
about my father. My father was Arthur Russell Beekman. His father was Gerrit
Beekman. Gerrit’s father was Henry, I believe. There’s an interesting story with
Henry. This would be my great grandfather. He came from Germany. I’m one
eighth German. He came from Germany when he was about 14 years old, and he
was a stowaway on a boat. I don’t know the reasoning, I assume it was economic
conditions, or maybe just kids wanting to run away, go to this new place, America,
or he decided on a career, he wanted to be a merchant marine, or whatever, but he
was a stowaway, and then became a sailor, and came through the Great Lakes.
That’s how he ended up in Holland. My dad said he had a girlfriend in every city,
but decided to marry in Holland, and then stayed here. That was an interesting story.
That family, I don’t know much about at all, the Beekman’s. Except I do know that
they had two N’s on their name in Germany, but the one N was dropped in America.
My grandmother has ancestors that were Dalmann’s. I would like to go sometime
and investigate that to see if those were some of the original immigrants that came
over. I have a feeling that they were ones that went originally to Grand Rapids. She was born in the 1850s in Grand Rapids. So she’s from some of those earliest settlers here in this area. But how she got from Grand Rapids to Holland, I haven’t discovered the history behind that, either. My mother was Catherine VanIwaarden. She came from a large family that came over in the early 1900s. Some of the children were born in the Netherlands, but my mother was born in America. I know her brother was born in 1902 in the Netherlands. My mother was born in 1912 here in Holland. So somewhere in that time period they came over, I’m assuming just for economic reasons.