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Klaasen, Marge Oral History Interview: Sesquicentennial of Holland, "150 Stories for 150 Years"

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Oral History Interview with
Marge Klaasen

Conducted February 14, 1997
by Barb Raabe

Sesquicentennial Oral History Project
"150 Stories for 150 Years"
BR: Can you give me your name, where you were born, and when you were born?

MK: I was born in Spring Lake, Michigan. My name is Marjorie Klaasen, and I was born in 1914, May the 2nd.

BR: And what was your maiden name?

MK: My maiden name was Scholten.

BR: Who was your husband?

MK: Harold Klaasen, better known as "Cobb."

BR: Where were you married and when?

MK: We were married in Spring Lake at my parents’ home in 1938, June 25th.

BR: How many children do you have?

MK: Two children.

BR: Can you give me their names?

MK: Mary VanderBeek and Bob Klaasen.

BR: How did you and Cobb meet?

MK: Well, that was pretty funny. It was a blind date. These friends of ours sort of arranged us. I was living in a girls dormitory at the time, and I came down the steps into the lobby where we met. Then we went down the front steps of the dormitory and I fell the whole distance down. I caught my heel. I was so embarrassed and I wanted to make such a good impression and my pride was so hurt. What happened
was the heel of my shoe, I just tore it right off the shoe. I picked up my shoe and the heel and trudged back up stairs and got another pair of shoes, but of course I’d had my best pair on. But, it worked out. We’ve laughed a lot about that. I wasn’t hurt, however.

BR: After you married him, did you live in Holland?

MK: Yes, we lived in Holland and lived there our whole married life.

BR: What years did you go to Hope College?

MK: I started in September of ‘31 and graduated in June of ‘35.

BR: And what was your major?

MK: History.

BR: Did you get your teaching certification in history?

MK: Yes. I did my practice teaching in history.

BR: Who did you do your practice teaching with?

MK: Bernice Bishop. She was the principal of the junior high here in Holland.

BR: Do you have any interesting memories of that?

MK: Yes. The first day that I went I was kind of shaky and a little nervous about it, and the students were studying and I was sitting up at the desk. This young little eighth grader came up, a little boy, and he said, "How do you pronounce that?" And I said the "Treaty of....." whatever it was. It just rolled right off my tongue, and he felt so badly because I think he thought he was going to catch me. It was a kind of hard word, but I got it.

BR: How many years did you teach?

2
MK: I taught three years, fourth grade in Spring Lake. I was able to live at home.

BR: That was before you were married?

MK: Yes.

BR: Any interesting stories about when you were teaching in Spring Lake?

MK: Well, it was a nice experience. I had forty children at one time. Usually an average of thirty-five, and they were nice children. Of course, having lived in Spring Lake I knew a lot of the families and their parents. I knew I wasn't going to be teaching forever because we were planning on getting married, but I wanted to at least use my education and earn a little money on my own.

BR: Do you remember how much you got paid when you were teaching?

MK: $900 a year!

BR: It's a good thing you were living at home.

MK: Well, of course it was all relevant at those days. I can remember now when I tell that to some of the younger people that are teaching, they just think it's the biggest joke ever. Actually, I was doing well because some of the kids I graduated with were getting $600 a year.

BR: And what year was that? 1935?

MK: 1935 when I started. Fall of '35.

BR: And you got $900. And when I started teaching in 1953, I had a wonderful salary of $3,300. So, for almost twenty years that's about the same. You have some interesting stories about your years at Hope College....

MK: They were fun years. I just loved it there. There was one dormitory on campus at
that time. All of the girls that came from out of city stayed in the dormitory, and the
town girls were not allowed to stay in because we filled it with the out of town girls.
So, you got to know everybody, they were freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and
seniors. I made a lot of lifetime acquaintances in those days. We had a lot of fun.

BR: About how many students were in your class?

MK: In my class I think there were ninety. And at that time I think the total number of
students was about five hundred. I think today it's about three thousand.

BR: Were there hours in the dorms?

MK: Oh, mercy yes! We had to be in at ten o'clock in the evenings and on Tuesdays we
were not allowed to go out because we were supposed to go to the YWCA on
campus. I did go out on a Tuesday night, so I got a demerit. If you did something
wrong you got a demerit, you get so many demerits and then you're campused and
you can't go off the campus for a whole week. That was fun!

BR: Why was it fun?

MK: Well, everybody knew everything about everybody in those days. First we had our
three meals a day, and we were supposed to be quite lady-like when we went down to
our meals. There was a dining room downstairs.

BR: How did you dress? Did you have to dress up for meals?

MK: Not really. We had to look nice and be clean. Neat and tidy. We wore skirts all the
time. We weren't into slacks those days. Mrs. Durfee was the Dean of Women and
she lived in the dormitory. She made it a point to have speeches quite often after
dinner, trying to make ladies out of us. She had a lot of little tidbits that she would
offer to us, and one of them was ‘Sit up straight and win admiring glances.’ We always remember Mrs. Durfee about that.

BR: That would be like a bumper sticker now!

MK: That would be a good bumper sticker! Another thing that she didn’t like was that we all had nicknames for each other. I had a friend Ruth Fisher, and she was "Fish," I was Scholt, and everybody had a funny little nickname. We would call each other by those nicknames and we would shout at each other in the hall and so on. Well, one time we had a little discussion from Mrs. Durfee about that. That wasn’t very ladylike. We were supposed to call them by their right names and not shout down the hall. She was a dear, sweet lady, but she had her hands full.

BR: Did you have any memorable meals? Was there anything that you liked or didn’t like?

MK: I can always remember we had petty johns for breakfast. It was a cooked cereal and it wasn’t very good. We didn’t have much of a selection. Now, they have a cafeteria so you can eat what you want and have some choices. We didn’t have it every day, but I remember it because it had such a funny name.

BR: You say that you didn’t have a cafeteria. Did somebody serve you at a table?

MK: Yes, it was students working for their room and board. Everybody had to be down there at a certain time, and you better be there. That was another thing we used to have discussions about.

BR: What happened if you were late? Did you get to eat?

MK: Yeah, you got to eat, but I don’t remember people being late. We were just so taught
that we had to be on time and we were. I think we were hungry. The meals, today I would probably think that they were not very good, but we ate them, and a few fellows came and ate there, but not many.

BR: Where did the fellows live? Did they have a dormitory?

MK: Van Vleck Hall, but that didn't hold very many of them. A lot of them rented rooms near the campus. Then, there were the fraternity houses and then they lived there. Those four years went by fast, too fast.

BR: Was chapel required when you were in school?

MK: Yes. Yes it was. We saw to it that everybody went to chapel just as regular as anything, and role was taken so they knew whether you were there or not. Of course today, it's not compulsory, but I think quite a few go to chapel. About eight hundred I heard.

BR: What time was chapel?

MK: I think it was eight in the morning, and it lasted about twenty minutes. I was in chapel choir when I was a junior or senior, and we were in chapel as a chapel choir.

BR: Did you do outside concerts like the choirs do now?

MK: No. I don’t remember anything like that. They had a boys glee club and a girls glee club, and they traveled spring vacation and gave concerts.

BR: How far did they go?

MK: One year they would go east another year they would go to Iowa or Illinois, that area. Mid-west. I tried out for glee club, but I didn’t make it.

BR: Was the glee club larger or smaller than the chapel choir?
MK: It was smaller. The chapel choir was pretty big. You had a better chance of getting into that.

BR: What kinds of services did you have at chapel? Do you remember anything special?

MK: Not anything special, but Reverend Hinkamp was the chapel preacher, but that didn’t mean that he had to do it all of the time. We had a little message, it wasn’t very long. I think everybody was kind of looking into the books of the subject that they had to go to next, which they should have done before. Dr. Nykerk lived in the dormitory with the girls and Mrs. Durfee. He taught English. He was born in Overisel, but he was very English. His classes were fun because he was so wrapped up in English Literature. He was a good teacher. He would go to the football games, and he had a Hope pennant and when they would do something spectacular he would wave that pennant, "Press on severely! Press on severely!" And he was so cute, he was kind of a little man. He was a very good teacher, wrapped up in English Literature. I took that class from him, and he would put his book on a music stand and he would start reading. He read beautifully, but he never seemed to get that nut screwed on for the top of the stand. As he would be reading, it would be slowly sinking down, and without missing a word he would pull it back up. We were of course in stitches! We were bursting almost from not being able to laugh out loud. But this happened so many times.

BR: Did he realize everybody was bursting?

MK: I don’t think so, but we just knew that sooner or later that stand would start going down, and he would pull it up and do the screw a little bit; never did it tight enough.
BR: What about some of the other teachers you had?

MK: I took French from Ella Meyer and she was a very good French teacher. We enjoyed her. She was a lot of fun. She would meet us at the door with a French phrase like "Ferme le bushe" meant keep still and close your mouth, and there was another one about the windows. She would have a lot of little phrases in French and we were supposed to know and do what they asked us to do. Sometimes we couldn’t translate them that fast.

BR: Could you usually?

MK: Not really!

BR: How many years did you take French?

MK: I think just one. I’d had two years at Grand Haven High School so I knew a little something before I went to Hope.

BR: So, there was a language requirement at Hope then?

MK: I shouldn’t say that it was required, but I wanted to take it. I think there was. I did not have to take any math or any science at Hope. None at all. Of course now they have to; it’s required. I didn’t take it which was a good thing.

BR: What kinds of history did you take and who were your some of your professors?

MK: Professor Bruce Raymond. He was fun. He had a good sense of humor and I enjoyed his courses so much. He pretty much took care of the history department with the college being so small. I took Bible from Professor Hinkamp who was an ordained minister. I enjoyed that not so much.

BR: Was your background before you came to Hope in the Reformed Church?
MK: Yes. I had been a member of the Reformed Church in Spring Lake. My mother
played the organ in the church; I can’t remember any time that she didn’t. I think I
was just a little bit of a kid when she started. That was kind of fun.

BR: Did you ever think of going anyplace other than Hope?

MK: No. Frankly, I never did. I had two cousins who both went to Hope, my brother
went to Hope, and I was looking forward to it. My cousin was a year older, so I
went to visit her several times when she was there as a freshman. I thought, "Oh,
boy. This looks good to me!" I did go home quite often on weekends. I was going
with a boy from high school and he was at Michigan, so he’d go home and I’d go
home, but that didn’t last long. He was too far away.

BR: When you were going back home to Grand Haven, how did you get there?

MK: My poor father many times had to come and get me, and take me back on Sunday. I
came home a lot when I first went to Hope, but after awhile I didn’t go home so
often.

BR: Why do you think that was?

MK: Because my boyfriend was in Holland at that time. My dad would come to some of
the football games and basketball games. If I didn’t go home they would usually
come Sunday afternoon, get my laundry and bring it back.

BR: That was one question I wondered about, how did you do your laundry? Send it
home?

MK: The girls from away, they had women in the town that did their washing. They
would pick up their laundry and return it. We didn’t have laundromats or anything
B: Did you belong to a sorority?

M: I remember going to the meetings, and the meetings consisted of a serious paper, a hilarious paper, and a musical selection of some sort vocal or piano or whatever. I had to write a humor paper when I was a freshman. Well, it would have been much easier to write a serious paper, just go to the library. So, Mrs. Durfee was Dean of Women, so my topic was "Where does Mrs. Durfee's Lap Go When She Stands Up?" It was quite funny.

B: Do you remember any of it?

M: I can remember trying to do it mathematically; it was stupid I thought. Anyway, it ended up that when she stands up it comes up under an assumed name, or some dumb thing like that, and they laughed and they laughed and they laughed and it got into the Archives. My problem was they were always asking me to write a humor paper. It was ridiculous, but that was what they wanted. We met every week.

B: What sorority was it?

M: Delphi. I think that there were five sororities, and each sorority had a room in the basement of the dorm, and we met every Friday night. That's a little bit hard to get a program for every week. That was a nice experience, too, being in a sorority.

B: Of your friends from College, are more of them from your sorority or roommates?

M: Actually, I roomed with my cousin. She was a year ahead of me and when I came to Hope we roomed together. Then she graduated when I was a junior, so then my last year I roomed with Betty Boven, Betty Gainer at that time, she was from the east.
We had a lot of fun. My freshman and sophomore years I was very, very close to three sororites and they were my best friends and we got along just fine with no problems. Just because we belonged to different sororities didn’t make any difference.

BR: Did you have rush like they do on campus now?

MK: Yes, but not nearly as involved and it was very well regulated and it was done nicely. I remember that every girl got into a sorority which was very, very nice. They were rushed a little bit, you knew that you were wanted I guess you might say it that way. Then, Mrs. Durfee got the list and had the final say of where each person was going. If there were some that didn’t get any bids at all, she put them. That was wonderful because those girls would have felt just terrible. Of course, it’s a lot crueler now I think.

BR: What about parties? What were parties like when you were in school?

MK: I think that as a freshman, when we were first there, we had some freshman get togethers, but I can’t really remember anything outstanding about them. The sororities had a party in the spring and we invited a boy. No dancing of course, those were the good old days and we had to have chaperones at our parties. I can remember going to the country club one time, big stuff for a party. We had them around town usually and they were kind of a highlight of being in a sorority.

BR: What did you do at a college party if you couldn’t dance?

MK: I can’t remember what we did. I guess we had a little program. But, I’ll tell you what happened. We would have chaperones and then they would go home and then
we would dance after, for all intents and purposes, the party was over.

BR: Did they know that you did that?

MK: I don’t know. I can’t say that they didn’t know because it was done so much. I suppose they thought kids are kids.

BR: Could you stay in the same place as where you had the party?

MK: Not always. We would go some other place.

BR: Where would you go?

MK: Well, the Literary Club was one of them. Now of course with their parties they go all over. Delphi had theirs in Chicago this past year at the Palmer House. I get a newsletter all of the time, and when I read that I almost dropped my teeth! That must have cost those kids a fortune. Of course, we didn’t spend hardly any money at all on our parties.

BR: Did you decorate?

MK: Oh, yeah. A few little pieces of crepe paper from the ceiling.

BR: When the party was over and the chaperones left and you danced, what was the music?

MK: A victrola in those days. We had radios, but nothing very fancy. We got together and stayed together.

BR: What kind of refreshments would you serve?

MK: I think a lot of times it was dinner.

BR: So, that took up some time so you didn’t have to have such a long program. More like a banquet.
MK: That's what we would probably call them. Banquets.

BR: Well, what are some of these funny stories that you've got to tell?

MK: We had a lot of fun and we were all compatible. Everybody in the dorm was compatible. We would lock each other out of the room and all of that crazy stuff. There was a bathroom on each floor; two bath tubs. So, if you had a date, it was a mad dash for those bath tubs.

BR: There weren't showers?

MK: Oh, heavens no! Another funny thing was we had a fellow that was going to college, and he was a janitor. The poor guy, we used to feel so sorry for him because he never knew quite when to go in. He would empty the wastebaskets from the bathrooms and we felt so sorry for him because he was so kind of sheepish about it and embarrassed, but he got used to it. I got myself campused a couple of times.

BR: What did you do to get yourself campused?

MK: I went out on a Tuesday night and I should have been at the "Y."

BR: How did they know you weren't there?

MK: They knew everything. I don't know.

BR: Was Mrs. Durfee at the meetings?

MK: I don't know. I'm sure she wasn't, but she knew when everybody came home from the "YW" meeting. If anybody came in later see....

BR: You couldn't go anywhere after the meeting?

MK: I don't know about that, but I think that you were supposed to come home and study, and I got caught. On weekends, I think you could stay out until eleven o'clock, but
what we could do was the dorm kids would go and stay over with a friend in town. That was permissible, but you had to get permission to stay.

BR: How did you get permission to stay with a friend?

MK: You had to go and talk to Mrs. Durfee and tell her.

BR: You didn’t need a note from your parents or anything like that like I did when I was in college?

MK: No. I stayed at Ann Notier’s, she was Ann Jackson then, quite often.

BR: What did you do when you got to stay out late?

MK: We would go to the movies or go to a dance and then go out and eat.

BR: Was she dating Bob then?

MK: No. We were dating a couple of characters and they were friends.

BR: Do you want to talk about them?

MK: When Ann died and I went to call on the family, I was telling the kids about how Ann and I used to double date with these two fellows. One of the kids said, "Did you marry them?" and I said, "Oh, heavens no!" They weren’t the marrying kind. Not for us anyway.

BR: What did you do when you went out on a date?

MK: Lots of times we would go to the movies. We had two theatres: The Holland and The Park. Then we would go out to eat and have a soda or a sundae or something like that.

BR: Where did you go for that?

MK: The Model Drug Store a lot. Then we had to ride around the oval sometimes and
take ride.

BR: Was that on a Saturday or a Sunday?

MK: Usually on a Saturday more likely.

BR: Why were these guys such characters that they weren't the marrying kind?

MK: Well, shall we say they were kind of wild? But, they were loads of fun. They were nice guys.

BR: Were they in your classes?

MK: I think they were both older. Ann was a year ahead of me. This was probably when I was a freshman and sophomore that this was happening. I think they were upper-classmen. Maybe that's another thing that we thought, they were older men.

BR: When did you meet your husband?

MK: I met him when I was a junior.

BR: And he was at Hope, too?

MK: No, he wasn't. He graduated in June and I came the following September. So we were not at Hope together. So that was kind of nice because he was established and working. His father had a printing company and he was working for his dad's company. He had a car. His car even had a radio in those days.

BR: Really? What kind of a car was it?

MK: Oh, golly! I don't remember. It was a car with four wheels and a steering wheel! And boy that was really something to go with a fellow that had his own car.

BR: Did anybody who was in college have a car in those days?

MK: The only kids that had cars were the kids that came from the east, and they would
drive to school. They packed the kids in the car and then they could go home for spring vacation and so on. But they were kind of junky cars, you know? It isn't like today where every kid on campus practically has to come with a car.

BR: What about some of these stories that you weren't sure you wanted to tell?

MK: This one is kind of silly. We were supposed to be in our rooms, I think probably at seven o'clock to study. Well, I went down to my friends room who answered the telephone, that was her job. There was one telephone for the whole dorm. Then if you got a call she would ring your buzzer and then you could come down and answer the phone. Well, I went down to her room when I should have been in my own room, and Mrs. Durfee lived just two doors down from this friends room, so we were having fun and we could here her door open and then a knock on the door. So, I quickly zoomed under the bed, and the mattresses were about an inch to an inch and a half thick, so I was under there and my friend was on the bed. Mrs. Durfee was looking around because she'd heard noise and she thought there was another person in there. I think she knew darn well I was in there. She probably heard me, but we got a good laugh out of that! Boy, I went under that bed in a hurry.

BR: You were supposed to stay in your own room to study? You couldn't go visit in somebody else's room?

MK: Not at that hour. From seven to eight or seven to nine; something like that. I remember when we would get done with dinner, there were four of us and we would get done with dinner and we would play bridge until seven o'clock.

BR: What were class schedules like? Did you start right after chapel in the morning?
MK: Yes, we started right after chapel. Most of the classes were in the morning. Now, I remember having a history of music class at one o’clock and Curtis Snow taught it. A lot of lab classes were in the afternoon.

BR: Science labs, chemistry, that kind of thing?

MK: Yeah. Of course I had nothing to do with that so I can’t remember any other class in the afternoon that I took. Oh, and another thing that we used to do, we would go to the library to study in the afternoon. Well, we would start to study and somebody would get the bright idea ‘Let’s go to the movies!’ So, we would go to the movies, we would usually go to the park as I remember. Then, after the movie would get out, there was a real good spot to get coffee and cake. It was on River Avenue. I can’t remember the name of the little place, but then we would go and have cake and coffee, and then go home for dinner! We did that so often, and then we would have to go to the library every afternoon to study. We didn’t do that every afternoon because they didn’t change the picture that often. We had a lot of fun. I think the kids have to study a lot harder now, too.

BR: Do you think so? Do you think that they actually have more work to do then you had at that time?

MK: I think so. Of course, it depends on your course, too.

BR: Right. But with your history you had a lot of reading to do, didn’t you?

MK: Yes, but it wasn’t like solving problems or anything like that.

BR: And you didn’t have the labs that were extra for the science classes. Did anybody work when you were at Hope? A lot of the kids now have extra jobs.
MK: A lot of the kids worked right on campus. I know that a friend of mine, she came from New York, she worked in the kitchen and did dishes, and some of the girls waited tables. I didn’t know that any of them worked outside of the campus.

BR: Like in businesses downtown and things like that?

MK: I don’t remember anybody like that. Maybe some of the boys were, but I don’t remember any of the girls.

BR: Do you remember what the tuition was?

MK: I sure do. When I started in ‘31, it was $50 a semester. $100 a year. Now, my grandson, he’s out of Hope now, but when he started four years ago, the tuition was $10,000, and I think that it is $13,000 now. When you compare that with $100 up against $10,000 at that time....

BR: Well, how about some more of your stories?

MK: Gee, they all went out of my head somehow. I can remember, you know it was prohibition days in those days, but on South Shore Drive they had a little someplace....

BR: The Parkway Tavern?

MK: Could be. No, not Parkway then. It was someplace on South Shore, and you could get 3% beer or 2% beer, and we used to go there.

BR: And they sold that during prohibition?

MK: Yes, but that wasn’t really the place to be when you’re at Hope College! But there were some of us that were there. We always thought that was pretty risky and daring, you know.
BR: Yes, but that probably was what is the Parkway now because that was originally a tavern when I grew up out there and it had been up for quite a while.

MK: What was the name of that man that had a place out there that was so famous, do you remember that?

BR: Which man?

MK: I don’t know, I can’t remember the name! He had a little eating place out there. This was when I was in college and it was kind of a fun place to go.

BR: It wasn’t Jenison Park was it? Was Jenison Park still there then?

MK: Not as a park, I don’t think so.

BR: There used to be some kind of a hamburger place right out at Jesiek’s somewhere around the boat dock. I can remember it being there.

MK: I can remember it was quite a famous spot for the kids to go, and I can’t remember the name of it either. It was quite a spot for the college kids.

BR: What kind of things did they serve?

MK: Oh, hamburgers and all that good stuff. Now that’s got my interest peaked! I’ll have to check that out.

BR: Did you go out on the lake at all or around Ottawa Beach much to swim?

MK: Oh, yes. Not to swim so much, but we would take rides out there. When I was in college I almost drowned on a date in Macatawa!

BR: You did? What did you do?

MK: Well, it was in March during spring vacation so it was probably the end of March, first of April and it was cold. This fellow called me and said, "We’re going sailing."
Somebody, this kid from Zeeland had built a sailboat, this is the maiden voyage! I said sure, that sounded like fun, and this kids name was "Droopy" DeRoob, Ralph was his name. Anyway, this fellow from Zeeland got a date with a town girl, so they picked us up, and we went down. I can't remember where we boarded the craft. We went before lunch it was spring vacation, a Saturday about that time. She brought a packed lunch and we were gonna have lunch on the boat. It was cold! I had a big jacket on, and Droopy had some gloves and my hands were cold so he gave them to me to wear. It was cold! This was in the '30's, and there weren't a lot of people living along the lake, just a lot of cottages and so on. So, we were going along, we had our lunch, and all of a sudden we tipped over. Right in the very, very, very widest part of the lake. There wasn't anybody on shore. We were in Pine Creek Bay, so there we go. So, this other girl could not swim! I could swim, and I said to Droopy, "Do you mind if I take your gloves off?" I was worried about his gloves! Anyway, we hung on to the boat and that started to sink, and one of the boys said there was a rowboat on shore and that he would swim and get that rowboat, I said, "You won't find any oars in it!" I wasn't a bit afraid, I was just cool and collected. Well, here we were. I think that I could have gotten to shore, but you remember the General Mead that used to come out to dredge the harbor in the spring? Well, that boat was kind of going down the other side of the lake, and we screamed and we hollered and finally we saw them lowering a little row boat and they came over, and we got into the row boat. Well, we had to go out into Lake Michigan because they had a load of sand and stuff to dump out there, and we were all wet. We went down
in the bottom of the boat and they had hot coffee for us and they brought out men's
clothes. They let us off where the car was and one of the men had to go back with us
to retrieve the clothes that we were wearing, and I don't know what would have
happened if that General Mead hadn't have come because it was cold. It was so cold!
Anyway, my brother heard about it because he was at the college too, and boy did I
get balled out. Dumb, dumb, dumb! That was quite an experience, but it could have
turned out a lot worse than it did.

BR: Did the boat leak or had he done a good job of building it?

MK: He hadn't done a good job of building it, I'm sure that was it. It was a sailboat, and
I don't think they knew how to sail properly either. I never went on a maiden voyage
again. That was one of the highlights, or lowlights should I say, of college.

BR: Well, I don't know. It was one of the more interesting things I think.

MK: But of course it's so different now on the lake then it was then. Everybody lives
there permanently. If that had happened in the summer then it wouldn't have been so
bad because there would have been other boats and people around. It was bad.

BR: We moved out there in 1940 and people thought my parents were crazy for wanting
to live on Lake Mac. "Way out in the country? Why would you want to live there?
Nobody lives that far out!"

MK: Well, I can understand that at that time.

BR: Yes, it was just not a popular place then, and of course now....wow! Now my
mother is happy to have the house she has.

MK: The lakefront property is really in demand, and people are building year-round
houses.

BR: And tearing down the old ones, or tearing down two or three and building one. Much, much bigger than they used to be. What are some of your other stories? What other trouble did you get into? You told me there were some things that you were afraid to tell, now I haven’t heard a thing yet that I would put in that category.

MK: Well, I went to a speak easy one time when I was in college. I remember Club Grayjack.

BR: Wasn’t that open during prohibition and they served meals there? Where was the "speak easy"?

MK: This was down in somebody’s basement on the northside in Holland. The next night it got raided.

BR: What did you have to do to get in? Did you knock on the door and say this is so-and-so?

MK: Yep. I can’t even remember who I was with that night….yes, I can. I think it was the same guy I double dated with Ann.

BR: Was there a drinking age at that time?

MK: No, there wasn’t a drinking age because there was nothing to drink supposedly. It didn’t matter how old you were.

BR: Was Mrs. Durfee waiting up for you when you got home?

MK: I think I got home before it was ten or eleven. We didn’t stay long; I think it was just kind of a dare, you know? Just one of those things to do.

BR: Were there a lot of people there?
MK: I don't think there were more than four or five other people there. It was probably some man that had a still in his basement you know....

BR: You said that you got "campused" again, once for not going to the YWCA, what else did you do?

MK: Well, one time Guy Lambardo was in Grand Rapids, and Mina Becker and I had got dates and it was during the middle of the week. Of course we got in late, and it was a weeknight. If it had been Saturday we would have at least had another hour. We didn't of course make it, we didn't really try either. We were just so excited to go see Guy Lambardo.

BR: Where was he playing in Grand Rapids?

MK: At the Civic Center.

BR: That was worth a week?

MK: Absolutely! It sure was. It wasn't so bad being campused. It really wasn't.

BR: Were there that many places to go anyway?

MK: No.

BR: Did you have to stay right in the dorm when you were campused?

MK: No, just on campus. And of course the campus was so small at that time....

BR: What was it like? Just one block?

MK: Yeah, just one block. I was in Voorhees, the Chapel was there, the President's home, Graves Library, Van Vleck Hall, and Van Raalte Hall, that was classrooms, Carnegie Gym.

BR: What were you're gym classes like? What did you wear?
MK: Bloomers. As I look back at that, it seems like all we did was march. Jack Scouten was the whole athletic department in one. I think we played basketball, not competitive, just in gym class.

BR: Do you remember, when you played basketball, did you have the whole basketball court, or did you have just half a court?

MK: I played in high school, it was not competitive with other schools, it was intermural, and we would pick teams after school. No, we played the whole court I think.

BR: When I was in high school, it was intermural, but we only played half of the court, and you had to stay on your own half of the court. There were three guards and three forwards and the forwards could shoot and the guards guarded them, the guards couldn’t shoot at all.

MK: I don’t remember it being like that. And look at them today!

BR: It’s not fair!

MK: That’s another thing when I was there at Hope, there were no girls teams in anything. There was football, baseball, basketball, tennis, golf, and that was about it. Now, they’ve got track and soccer, volleyball, swimming. The campus was pretty small, you didn’t have to walk very far to be at the very edge of the campus. I remember taking walks, a bunch of us before dinner. We would go south from the campus, and we didn’t go very many blocks before it was vacant fields. Now it’s all built up. After you got past 22nd and 23rd Street there wasn’t much.

BR: I lived on the corner of 26th and Central when I was little and the street wasn’t paved and there were very few houses beyond that, so you could go out just a little ways
and be out in the country.

MK: I had a friend who lived on 32nd Street, but there were very, very few houses on that street. Very few!

BR: Well, that was the edge of the earth! It was the county line! I don’t know if the city even went to 32nd Street then. It must have, but I don’t remember. Well, I know since you’ve been out of school, you’ve been going to basketball games. How long have you been going? Tell me about the gang that went to the basketball games together.

MK: Well, there were about eight of us, four couples, and we had so much fun going to the games because we were so interested in the team. Hope has pretty much had a good basketball team through the years and right after the Civic Center was finished and the basketball season started, we bought season tickets. We would go to the game and then we would go to somebody’s house afterwards. We would discuss the team and the game, hopefully we would have won. Then we had a lot of fun, and have a few drinks. It was really awfully late when we would get back….early Sunday morning. They were so much fun! We had so many laughs.

BR: Do you still go to the games now?

MK: Oh, yeah.

BR: Do you still buy a season ticket?

MK: Yes, all these years since the Civic Center opened.

BR: And how many are left in your gang?

MK: Two. That’s all.
BR: But they're still exciting games, aren't they?

MK: Oh, yeah. Really, they're more exciting now than ever. They're faster games; higher scoring and they move so fast, those fellows.

BR: Why do you suppose that is?

MK: Well, for a while there, I remember this, when one team scored a basket, they would have to come back to the center and tip off again. That slowed the game up so much. I think they're higher scoring now, and they're faster. They zoom, zoom, zoom!

BR: How about the Calvin games?

MK: Well, they were awful years ago. Awful! Just awful!

BR: Why awful? What happened?

MK: The noise was terrific, of course it was always the Calvin people's fault, they would come up with cow bells. Of course the Civic Center would be packed to the rafters practically, and the noise was deafening. During the game, especially if it was close, you could cut the air there was so much electricity. Now, they're not that way. They aren't as noisy and I have no idea why, except I know last year or two years ago, not at any of Hope's games, and Ray Smith was the Athletic Director, they had a little problem with two of the other MIAA teams, and the crowds got a little rambunctious and were not very sportsman-like. Ray, at the next game in Holland, the Athletic Directors got together and said something's got to be done about this. He got up and he said when a team from out of town comes, we are their hosts, they are our guests and I want them to be treated as our guests. And I think all of the Athletic Directors at the other MIAA schools decided that they had to stop all of this.
It was just getting out of hand. Now, it’s much more comfortable going to the Calvin games you would think we were mortal enemies just ready to slit they’re throats.

BR: Aren’t we?

MK: Yes. I guess we are (laughing). There’s another little story about that. When I came to Freedom Village and I was at gym class, there was another girl there that I didn’t know from a bail of hay. She and I had walked the track together, and I was asking where she came from. She said she was from the Chicago area and she had a grandmother in Holland. Then she said she had gone to Calvin and that her husband had played for Calvin, so I said good-bye (laughing). I really did. It was the very night that Hope and Calvin were going to play. I said, I am your enemy today, I’ll be your friend tomorrow. She never forgot that. On Calvin game days, we don’t speak (laughing). We really do, she is a real nice gal. I like her so much.

BR: On any day, but a Calvin game day, you are friends.

MK: That is right. That was the first time I had ever talked to her and then I walked away. It is kind of fun to have a rivalry like that.

BR: This one is even more so than any other rivalry, even in other colleges.

MK: Yes. It is true. I can remember even in high school, it was Holland....

BR: Holland and Grand Haven.

MK: Yes.

BR: It was still that way when I was in high school.

MK: Now I think it is more Holland and West Ottawa, more than Holland and Grand Haven.
BR: Holland and Holland Christian play each other too, which they didn’t used to do.

MK: Another thing, some of the good fellas on our team right now are Christian school.

BR: On the Hope College team.

MK: Yes. I attribute that to the coach, to Glen.

BR: Do you think he recruits them?

MK: Yes. The coach of Calvin retired just last year, and I think the kids seem to like Glen more than Douma. There is nothing against Douma, but I think Glen has such a nice personality and he doesn’t seem to get fussed too easily. I think that is another thing that caused the coach at Calvin to think about leaving because he was really losing out on the Christian high school. This Holstege, I’m sure, came from Grand Rapids Christian High. We have another fella on our team that came from Holland Christian. It is always fun to have the rivalry.

BR: Tell me what you do when you listen to the Hope-Calvin game on the radio or on television.

MK: If we aren’t ahead, I turn it off (laughing). Then, I will turn it back on hoping we are about ten points ahead. If we aren’t, then I turn it off again (laughing). Some of those Calvin games have been really tight right to the bitter end.

BR: I think this last game, of all the games they have played, there was only six points or twelve points difference. They are very close in points. So, it gets pretty nerve racking?

MK: Terrible! Just awful! Everybody’s hearts are just pounding. You would think it was the end of the world if we didn’t win. It is so silly, everybody is ready to go out and
get Harry Carey if they didn’t win. The players on the team get along just fine. They are all friends. Some of them have played high school basketball together, and they were on opposite teams. It is those darned spectators that cause the problems, big problems (laughing)! But, it is so much fun and I look forward to going to those games; all of Hope’s games!

BR: Here at Freedom Village the bus just takes you to the Civic Center?

MK: Yes, it is wonderful. It just lets us off by the front door and it is there when we are ready to go home.

BR: It makes it really convenient for you.

MK: It certainly does. Parking is such a problem at the Civic Center. Especially in the winter time when it is icy walking, that is not so good either. I wonder what is going to happen to our new Civic. That will be interesting because it is not cut and dried, is it?

BR: No, I don’t think so. I think it is going to come down to very close, whether it passes or not.

MK: I do too. I can see, it would be advantageous to the city to have it closer in to the downtown area.

BR: Yes. But I hate to see those people put out of their homes.

MK: I would too. I think that would be just awful, and expensive! Think of having to buy all of those houses.

BR: But, it sounds like it is going to be pretty expensive anyway.

MK: When they first started, I think they were talking about thirty million, now I think it
is about fifty million.

BR: Although I would just as soon spend the money on someplace like that where the kids can get some experience and skate, things like that as opposed to spending it on things like prisons.

MK: Oh, heavens, you bet. To me that is just money down the drain.

BR: Yes. I would like to give them the opportunity to do those type of things now.

MK: I think that Boys and Girls Clubs is a neat thing.

BR: It seems to be, but I don't know very much about it.

MK: There is always going to be some that you can never reach, unfortunately.

BR: Having taught, you know that too. They don't all take advantage of the opportunities they are given.

MK: That is so true. I thought it was so nice when a Christian Reformed Church opened up their parking lot and put some basketball hoops up.

BR: The one on Eighteenth Street. That is full of kids.

MK: That is wonderful. It is in an area where it is needed. It works, we know it works. As you said, you see so many there.

BR: They can't be getting into trouble when they are there.

MK: That is the problem, getting into trouble.

BR: Do you think that you would like to be teaching now?

MK: No! Absolutely not.

BR: Why not?

MK: Because you don't have the cooperation of the parents that you did back then. I'm
not saying that all the parents are not cooperative. There are too many one parent families, there is no cooperation at all. When I was teaching, the Parent Teachers Association was very important. They met in the afternoons, sometimes at night and the mothers came, and they came to school, and they talked with the teachers, but you don’t have that anymore.

BR: I remember it being a social function, where the whole neighborhood came.

MK: Yes, but in those days they didn’t have so many things like television and mothers were home watching their kids. No, I wouldn’t care to teach again. My daughter and my daughter-in-law both teach. Mary, at Hudsonville, she teaches second grade and Gail teaches out at West Ottawa. She teaches fifth grade. It isn’t as easy, but they do have fewer children. They have to, they couldn’t handle forty of the kind of kids they have today (laughing). It would be impossible. I hear them talking about their stories. How would you like to be teaching in an inner-city school system? It would be awful. Although I had kids who came from an inner-city setting, and they were the rural, inner-city kind of kids. You would think a town like Holland, with its reputation and the kind of people that are here, you wouldn’t think you would have trouble. We didn’t years and years ago, but then you had an infiltration of other people. I’m not saying that they are all bad because they aren’t, but they did make problems.

BR: Sometimes it is just the numbers of people too. For instance, we were talking about how the city ended about 24th, 25th, 26th practically, and now it just goes on past 32nd Street. When you have that many people together, I think that makes it a little
more stressful too.

MK: Because you have got so many different personalities. Whereas, you always thought of the Dutch as being very ambitious, kind, and honest people. And, I think they were. They had very good work ethics.

BR: Yes. Your background is Dutch.

MK: My mother was born in England.

BR: Was she really. How did she happen to come here?

MK: That is kind of interesting. She had one sister and my grandfather had two brothers that had come over before he did. They wanted their two daughters to have a good education. In England at that time if you weren't in with the royalty practically....

BR: Yes. They had those classes.

MK: They came over, my mother was eight and my aunt was eleven. They settled in New Era. Do you know where New Era is?

BR: North of Muskegon.

MK: Do you remember how gooseberries were very popular in England, gooseberry pie?

BR: Yes.

MK: My grandfather was a gooseberry farmer.

BR: In New Era?

MK: Yes. There was a canning factory and he sold his whole crop to the canning factory. Did you ever eat gooseberry pie?

BR: I don't think so.

MK: Well, you are lucky (laughing)! It is sour.
BR: Really.

MK: That is how they got to come over from England.

BR: Now, what about on your father's side?

MK: My father was born in Overisel. He had a sister, Betsy, who died when she was fourteen. He had a brother, Ben. When Ben was born, his mother died. So, Ben was just a baby and he went to live with relatives in Zeeland. So, there was just my father and his father. They went North and lived near Lucas. That was near Lake City, up north. If I had a family reunion with both sides of the family, we would have it in a broom closet because their is so few. On my father's side and my mother's side together, I had two aunts, two uncles, and two cousins. Those were the only relatives I ever had. My mother had twin brothers, but they died when they were born or soon after.

BR: Now, how are you related to George Claver?

MK: My father and his grandmother were first cousins.

BR: How are you related to Nell Wichers?

MK: I've got to think about that one.

BR: Shirtail?

MK: Yes. It is something like that. My father's, father.... I'll ask my brother, he'll know. It is a second or third cousins along the way, with Bill's family, the Wichers.

BR: Then, you were related to Dorothy Claver too?

MK: Through George. In-laws. Uncle Ben went to live with somebody in Zeeland, and he took the name of Vrieling. I think, Bill's mother was a Vrieling. I'll have to ask
Harvey, George, or Nell. I am probably the second or third cousin to Bill, through my father. It is fun to trace the family back. I guess when my grandparents, my mother and Aunt Harriet came over from England, they had a real stormy passage. I guess Grandpa almost got swept overboard. Both of his girls taught school. My mother taught school and Aunt Harriet taught school.

BR: Did they go to college, or did they go to the county normal?

MK: I think they went to Ypsilanti. The normal school there. In those days, you could become a teacher in one year. My mother taught north of Shelby, it was a country school. Aunt Harriet taught in New Era. I don’t think they taught very long before they got married.

BR: Did you after you were married?

MK: No.

BR: Was it allowed?

MK: That is right, good reason. But, I don’t think I would have anyway.

BR: At that point, teachers were not allowed to be married.

MK: I don’t think it was too long after that, that it was changed. That would have been the early '40's.

BR: When I taught in the fifties I could be married, but I couldn’t be pregnant. I had to quit when I was pregnant (laughing), which seems very strange now.

MK: (Laughing) Well, everything is strange now and it was strange then. No matter how you look at it things are strange.

BR: Things have changed haven’t they?
MK: Boy, have they ever changed! I think my generation has noticed it so much. We have seen so many things come into be.

BR: Yes. Name a few. What have you seen?

MK: I can remember when radio was first invented. I was probably in the seventh or eighth grade. We had a little crystal box, a little wooden box, with earphones, and that was radio.

BR: There was no speaker on the radio then.

MK: No. Just the earphones. I only two stations I remember were KDKA from Pittsburg and WLS from Chicago. World’s Largest Works; Sears Roebuck.

BR: You had got those stations in Spring Lake?

MK: Yes. I think those were about the only two. Then, I remember very well when television came because my kids were young. It was quite a novelty. There was a fellow that had a radio shop on Washington Avenue, it was Henry Tysse. When television came into being, he put a television in his window. We lived on 23rd Street, not too far from Washington Avenue and we would go over there in the evening with the kids. Everyone would go stand out there and watch television, this wonderful thing, black and white of course. We would go watch Kukla, Fran and Ollie.

BR: In the store window?

MK: Yes. The kids enjoyed it because they were little.

BR: I am sure you did too.

MK: Yes. I loved it! I just loved it! I remember when we got our first television set. It
was delivered late in the afternoon, we were so.... This was the end of the world.

BR: Do you remember what year this was?

MK: No, I really don't. If I could think how old those kids were. Bob was born in '39. It was the '40's or early '50's. We all hovered over it. We paid all this good money, we have got to get a good use out of it. I finally pulled them away so we could have some supper. I got right up from the table, dishes and everything were left there. I had to get in there to watch this marvelous machine thing. That had to come to an end because at ten o'clock at night I had to go out in the kitchen and put the kids to bed. I guess they got to bed earlier than that, but I never will forget that.

BR: How long did that continue?

MK: Not too long. I never did that again because I wasn't too happy about doing all of that at ten o'clock at night.

BR: You didn't have a dishwasher then?

MK: I never did have a dishwasher. I never wanted one. My mother thought I was kind of screwy, but ....

BR: Do you know why you didn’t want one?

MK: For one, Cobb would always help me with the dishes in the evening and that was kind of nice. I just never minded the dishes. I did miss it when you had a big crowd, then it would have been nice. But, then I had a lot of people to help. It was kind of stupid, but I'm not one for the new fangled things.

BR: Did you ever get a microwave?

MK: No. I never wanted one. My kids wanted to give me one for Christmas, but I never
really cared for one.

BR: You sound like my mother (laughing).

MK: (Laughing) Well good, I'm glad there is someone else in this world.... The kids got all of this stuff and they think I am a little cracked.

BR: Does it bother you?

MK: No. Not a bit, or I would have changed, maybe.

BR: You seem like somebody who has always had a mind of your own and enjoying a good time.

MK: That is right. I could have had those things, but they didn’t mean a thing to me. The kids couldn’t live without those things. They just couldn’t live without their microwaves and dishwashers. I was very glad to get a...(tape ends).
Marjorie Klaasen, 83


Born in Spring Lake, she graduated from Grand Haven High School and Hope College. She had taught fourth grade in Spring Lake prior to her marriage. She was a member of First Presbyterian Church, the Woman's Literary Club, and the Frances Browning Hospital Guild.

Her husband, Harold, preceded her in death in 1985.

Surviving are her children, Robert and Gail Klaasen of Holland, and Mary and Buel Vanderbeek of Hudsonville; five grandchildren; brother, Harvey and Gail Scholten of Holland; sisters-in-law, Celia and Ward Hamlin, and Ruth Wassenaar, all of Holland; nieces and nephews.

A memorial service is 1 p.m. Thursday in First Presbyterian Church, 659 State St., with the Rev. Richard Campbell officiating.

Burial will be in Pilgrim Home Cemetery.

Visiting is 2-4 and 7-9 p.m. today at the Notier-Ver Lee-Langeland Funeral Chapel, 315 E. 16th St.

Memorials may be made to Hope College or First Presbyterian Church.

Mrs. Klaasen passed away before having the chance to edit the enclosed transcript.