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Bannink, Jacob Oral History Interview: Class Projects

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CL: OK, here we go. This is Chris Lowe interviewing Jack, Jacob Bannink and today's date is the 16th of April, the year 2000. OK, we kind of started talking about a few things before we started rolling tape here, but to kind of start things off, you're from the Netherlands, can you describe the area, the region as to where you came from?

JB: Yes, I was born in the Netherlands as you mentioned, in the area called South Holland-and specifically Westland. Westland is a smaller area right between The Hague, Rotterdam, and Hoek of Holland. It's an area that is highly dominated, especially today, with flower growing, bulb growing, fruits, vegetables. Especially when I was growing up as a kid, we had a tremendous amount of fruit growing in that area, and then later on this also became more and more into plants, specifically plants grown under glass. So there was a lot of agricultural business going on, especially agriculture to be exported to other countries; to England, of course Germany, Belgium.

CL: You were young when you moved, so what were some of the things that you did and you can remember from your early years in the Netherlands.

JB: Well...

CL: I know that's a really big question, but I mean as far as what stands out to you as so different, basically from the life when you came here... so, what was life like there for you personally?

JB: OK, life for me there was, in a way hard, in the sense that we were just- you could almost say peasant people. My dad worked as a foreman for a boss working on the farm on this
"Tuin" and Tuin meant you worked with plants, predominately with flowers and bulbs. I lived right in a rented house with mom, dad, brother and sister on this Tuin. So the Tuin was almost kind of like my playground, so to speak, because I could see my dad virtually any part of the day as a real young kid. We also could travel with bikes. Nobody in our area had a car until a number of years after the war. So as a kid growing up, I was surrounded by plants, surrounded by neighbors who basically were in the same social condition and situation. I was brought up, I think, in a loving home, but a home where mom and dad did lots of work and the situation was such that we had very little in terms of material things. We did have enough food because we could grow our own. My dad even had his own little garden. We could of course also get things from the neighbors. So we didn’t lack food as such, but certainly we were very poor in terms of material things and even clothing. A lot of times clothes were even recycled and remade and a lot of times we were on a pretty tight budget. I can still remember as a young kid, I only had really two sets of clothing, two sets of shoes and that was it. I kept on changing between the two for Sunday and regular days. Some of the things that stand out to me is my education. I did attend the School met de Bible, which was simply a school, a Christian school. In our particular town there were actually three different kinds of schools; there was the public school, the Catholic school, and then our particular school. I did attend through the grade school there for a full six years. And the only way we could get to school was really to walk or to take our bike. When I was very small, I always used to go with my brother on the back of the bike, and once I was given my own bike, which was in the fourth grade, then I took my own bike back and forth to school. School usually
started at nine o'clock, went to twelve, then we would go home for the big dinner. That was our main meal, and then we would go back to school 'til about four o'clock.

Wednesday afternoons, though, I remember was our afternoon off. But we did also have to go to school on Saturday morning. So it kind of evened out with the present day situation where you have normally five days, we went to school six days, but we did have two afternoons off.

CL: This isn't necessarily something that we're supposed to be asking, but I'm kind of interested to know about how the war, despite the fact that you were young, kind of influenced life for you, you can tell me a couple specifics from your survival... How the war directly affected. Well my next question is what caused you to leave, and whether that was one of those things that caused you to leave, but just how the war generally affected your life and reason you left there.

JB: OK, why did we immigrate to America? Actually there were two basic reasons. One simple reason was my mom and dad wanted to give us three kids a better chance at life. And, after the war, things were not good at all. And because of our background and my mom and dad's background, we would have had a very little chance at really making it in the world, although today certainly things are much, much different. But at that time, certainly we didn't have any money. We would never have been able to be our own boss. We would never have been able... we certainly weren't in a position to be property owners, run our own business, anything like that. So that was one of the reasons my mom and dad simply believed that if we went to America, "the land of the dreams", we would probably be given a better chance at life. The second reason though was my mom...
had a serious disease—well, it wasn't really a disease, it was a liver condition which, they
call it cirrhosis. It had nothing to do with alcoholism or alcohol, it was a type of disease,
they had told me, really affected her blood flow especially to extremities; fingers, feet.
And the doctor simply recommended she go to a warmer climate. The Netherlands, of
course, does have not necessarily extreme winters, but it does get cold. A lot of times it’s
wet, its chilly, its windy, and so my mom, a lot of times, would be in pain simply because
she had cold hands and feet. Her blood circulation was very poor. So two main reasons.
And then also, because I had an uncle in Southern California. He already had immigrated
there about five years before and had established himself as a dairymen. And he invited
us to come over and join him. My dad was going to be working for him, and they warmly
welcomed the company and the family back over there. So he was more than willing to
be our sponsor. So everything was kind of coming to place. However, we did have to
wait for about five years before we were allowed to immigrate. At that time there was a
quota. And it still might exist even today, but especially at that time, so many people
wanted to immigrate. There was quite a long waiting list so I think my parents applied to
immigrate already back in 1950, but we were not allowed to get out of the country or get
into America until 1955. But then we did go in January of 1955 to Southern California.

CL: A couple questions kind of bunched together. Did you have any concerns; you, yourself
obviously had some concerns when you were a young kid, but also with your family, or
was it all excitement? I mean, what kind of concerns did you have about leaving. I'm
assuming you just said that kind of everybody in your family went... But can you kind of
elaborate on the actual process of getting over here and what some of your concerns and
excitements were about that process.

JB: Yeah. Personally because I was a twelve year old kid, this was just nothing but a big adventure. There wasn't really any fear on my part. It was just going to the lands of the (laughter) the cowboys and Indians and going to orange groves. This was totally, totally foreign, I mean really foreign. I really had no conception of what America was like other than what I had read in some of the books that I had gotten out of the library and read as a little kid. And most of those were cowboy and Indian stories. I had not seen anything on TV or film. I didn't know anything other than a few of the pictures that our relatives had brought back and just some of the stories that my uncle had told us about. So, my idea of America was (laughter) totally off the wall, so to speak. And so it was nothing but a big adventure for me. Now for my parents, I'm sure, it was a very, very major change because that meant they would have to leave all of the familiar things, and I mean especially their social situation, especially their family and their friends. And they were quite close to their brothers and sisters and obviously their neighbors, their church. And a big fear, of course too, was the whole language problem. None of us really knew any. I didn't know one word of English. My mom and dad had taken a little bit. They tried to learn a few words before they ever went. But really, they didn't know English really. So that was another big thing to overcome. But they knew at least they were going to be received by their relatives back there and already in Southern California, there were a number of Dutch people there who had gone before. In fact, we knew that in Bellflower, there was going to be a Dutch church. So, the whole process once we got there did somewhat become a little bit easier, because there were other people who had gone
through the same experiences, who had to learn the same type of things, and simply went through the same kind of process that we had to go through.

CL: When you came across, did you fly, or...

JB: Oh no, flying was way too expensive. We did have to pay, as far as I know, we did have to pay our own way. I remember my piggy bank, and I might have had like fifty sixty guilders, which for me was a lot of money. But they even took all of my money to pay for their trip abroad. We sold most of our furniture, although that was very, very little. But basically, they spent all their money in paying for the trip across. The trip across was on "Grote Beer" it was called. It used to be a troop ship, a troop carrying ship, which I guess later on was converted into a tourist or immigrant carrying ship. But accommodations certainly weren't luxurious, certainly not by today's standards and today's cruise lines are certainly a lot better than what we experienced. Once we got here, and by the way, that trip took us, I believe it was a full ten days. It took us an awful long time. But we did have to go to Canada first and drop a number of immigrants there, and then we came to New York and landed in New York harbor. And then we took a train from New York to Chicago, then we transferred to the "El Capitan", I still remember that part. And then from Chicago all the way to Los Angeles on a train. And that whole trip took us at least two days, before they headed home.

CL: Were the people that were with you generally in your same boat? Pardon the pun, but I mean were they mostly immigrants?

JB: Yes, most of the ship was immigrants, although I remember there were some people on there who were either on there for business or who were just taking the trip because they
already been in Canada or the States for a number of years and then went back to visit the relatives again. But it was predominately immigrants. So, yes, most were immigrants.

CL: Your whole family was with you correct?

JB: Right, right. Mom and dad and the three kids.

CL: Did you leave many extended family behind?

JB: Everybody, with the exception of the people, the VanBerks, my aunt and uncle in Southern California.

CL: Obviously you touched on why the United States was kind of your choice as to where to go because of your uncle and your mom's condition and the warm climate. Did you make the decision to come to the United States, or did you make the decision to go and the choice was the United States? You know what I'm saying? Had you made the decision that you wanted to get out of the Netherlands and go somewhere and then you looked at your choices and chose the United States, or did you just say we're going to go to the United States? What was it about the United States apart from those other things which you already said?

JB: It was simply the land of opportunity, sure. There were, of course, quite a few people who after the war went to Canada because many of the people could get into Canada easier, quicker. They didn't have the same number of quotas as what the United States had. In fact, that's one of the reasons why so many Dutch people wound up in, for example, Toronto area in Canada. There were also a number of people who went to Australia. There were some Dutchmen who went to New Zealand. Some, I guess, went to Brazil, Argentina. So after the war, anybody who really wanted to make something out of
themselves, especially the poor people, the people who didn't see their way clear, who
didn't really seem to have a good future. At least at that time, a lot of those people had
the energy and the vision, the where with all to get out, and a lot of them simply did.
And, for some of them it didn't make any difference where they went, but in our particular
case, I suppose we could have gone somewhere else, but because of the ties already to my
uncle in the United States. That's why we came over there, not somewhere else. Now I
did have a couple aunts and uncles with their kids, rather large families, go to Canada,
because they wanted to get away, they wanted to give their kids a chance. They decided,
if we don't have a chance in the United States, they couldn't get in for a number of years
anyway, so they decided to roll on to Canada and try and make a career. By and large,
that was probably a very good choice for them, from all indications later. A lot of them
have done very, very well for themselves, economically. I think this was a good move on
their part. Now this gets into the whole question of why we would want to move. Why?
Basically in Netherlands at the time, conditions simply were very, very bad. Good
opportunities economically, opportunities in living condition, health conditions,
education situation. Everything was at a low, low level for most people, especially
people like us.

CL: You had all these impressions; cowboy and Indians, stereotypes when you came here.
When you got here, what was it like? Was it complete shell shock?

JB: In a way it was, in a way it was. Because I still remember we came off the boat, and we
had one little afternoon, a few hours in the afternoon in New York before we had to get
on the train. And we, my brother and I, took a little walk and toured. There, we saw all
the dirt and the grime, and we saw all these black people, and we saw all of these cars. Everything was just totally, totally different from what we were used to. Everything was just totally, totally different. I can still remember once we got on that train and then we went through some bad neighborhood, and we saw the grime and the dirt and all of these different people of all these different colors. Oh, my mom—well every town, just the first impression was really, really bad. And then we were put on a train that was absolutely, in a way, crime. We were put basically almost in a cattle car. They must have tacked it on to the train and decided that these dirty immigrants, we'll just shove 'em in the last car. Anyway, this car must have been many, many years old, and I still remember that we were sitting there, and of course people had to use the toilet, and that toilet started overflowing, and we even had the water and stuff running through the isle. There we were with our feet up in the seats, not to get 'em wet. It was nasty. It was bad traveling that first night. But then, the next day, we landed up in Chicago, and there we were transported to another train. And then all of a sudden this "El Capitan" was really nice. I mean, it had carpet on the floor, it had nice seats. It was all of a sudden a whirlwind difference. Anyway, things were a little different. And then simply traveling from Chicago to Los Angeles, and then seeing some of the desert areas and some of the mountains. I, as a kid, this was something I had never, never seen before. When we were in the Netherlands, we were simply too poor to go on vacation. We hadn't traveled much further than what you could do on the bike in a day. So, what we had seen and then now saw in this new situation was just totally, totally different. So we were really surprised in way. We really had our eyes open. It was a totally different picture of what our wildest
imagination might have been at the time.

CL: What were your impressions of the "folk", as you first of all started on the east coast and in two days you saw so many different subcultures. But when you actually settled down and you kind of adjusted to your setting, what were your impressions of the people around you?

JB: OK, we were very well received, of course, by my aunt and uncle. They tried to prepare to take care of everything for us at the time. They got us into a rental house, although that rental house was very small, and it was so different from what we were used to. But anyway, our accommodations were bare, but it was good enough for us to get started. Unfortunately, my uncle, where my dad was going to work, had sold the dairy, so when my dad got there, there was no job for him. So then he did start scrounging around for work. He picked up anything and everything that he could just to keep things going. After a couple of months, he did wind up with a job at the packinghouse. Now, keep in mind, my dad had been doing stuff with plants for the most part - bulbs and some of the tomatoes. So my dad was given this job at the packinghouse, and that packinghouse was strictly into killing calves. So, the job he got was dirty and filthy, and totally, totally different from what he was used to, but he was willing to anything and everything at that stage. He was a good hard worker. My dad could do a lot of different things. He was simply willing to make it work. He realized that he had to go out and work and make a living, and things work out. Plus, the job was very close then to our home. All he had to do was walk across the street, and there was work. And because we didn't have a car, he couldn't do the English, of course, he didn't have a driver's license. So from that
perspective, at least things worked out for us. As time went by, he certainly did learn English, and so did my mom. My mom got her driver's license within a short time. We did get a car eventually, my dad certainly also got his driver's license— even though both of my parents only had a sixth grade education. Then I have to believe that both of my parents were fairly smart. They had done a fair amount of reading on their own, but no high formal education of any kind. But certainly, they picked up English well and did quite well, and simply wanted to make it a go. So they were willing to work hard. My mom took on some house cleaning jobs, and sent us to school.

CL: Cool. You've kind of outlined some of the problems you faced. What were some of the things that maybe were the most different between when you grew up in the Netherlands and your quick switch here? What were some of the most noticeable things? Obviously you recognized it to be the land of opportunity— was it, were your expectations met? Also, not what surprised you as far as your expectations, but as far as your life in the Netherlands goes compared to your life right off the bat in Southern California. What were the things that were the most different— you know what I'm saying?

JB: Well, the most obvious difference for me was, of course, the language barrier because I was totally, totally uneducated. I didn't know one word of English, as I said before. So simply what happened, they sent me to school, and fortunately I could go with my cousin to school. He knew a little bit of Dutch, so he could help me a little bit. So, it took a little while to get up to speed so to speak. But, approximately within a year's time, I think I was totally up to speed so that I could keep up and do anything that the other kids were doing. So even though they put me initially in the fourth grade, because that's where my
cousin was, then they jumped me from the fourth, which was only for a few months, and then they jumped me to the sixth, then from the sixth to the seventh, and then I skipped the eighth grade. Then I went from the seventh grade to the ninth grade directly, all because I simply showed them that I could cut the mustard so to speak.

CL: Sure. As far as the move affecting your family and everything, you said that a lot of Dutch people had moved to Southern California already. What were some of the family traditions and stuff like that you kept and some that you rid yourself of, and how did it effect your life as a family.

JB: One of the hardest things for my family was the fact that they had no family other than my aunt and uncle there. They didn't have that whole supportive structure, that whole family structure with them. Back in the Netherlands, whenever somebody had a birthday, everyone would come over. When Grandma had a birthday, everyone would come over. It was a pretty tight knit family in that sense. They would see each other quite frequently, whereas once that whole business is taken away from you, what is there then? Well, you hopefully take up some friends and neighbors, and obviously we did do that, with people who were basically in the same boat; through our church, this Dutch church. So we did pick up a number of very good friends and start visiting with them and socializing and going to the Dutch church. See for me, it wasn't all that hard in a sense, because I went to school- I picked up friends, got involved into sports. I quickly, I think, assimilated myself into the whole situation, Whereas that whole process probably took quite a bit more time and was quite a bit harder on my parents. My parents, in a sense, paid I think a lot bigger price than what I as a kid ever did in that sense. I can still remember coming home one
afternoon and there was my mom just crying away because she missed her neighbors, she
missed her friends so much. Whereas me, sure I missed some of the things, but it wasn't,
I don't think, that hard on me as it was on my mom and dad.

CL: I don't know what else you did apart from school and stuff like that, but before you started
teaching in Holland, did you have any other kinds of jobs or anything like that? What
other avenues of employment, whether its part time or whatever, did you have before you
started teaching?

JB: Oh, I had all kinds of opportunities. In fact, right away when I got there, of course I was
only twelve years old, I started working for a couple of dairy men- mowing their yards.
And then as I got a little bit older, I started working on the dairy, even feeding some of
the cows, helping out. Then as I became old enough, I even helped to do what they call
relief work, even taking over somebody's job, let's say, for Saturdays or even Sundays so
that some of these people could have some time off. So through my high school years,
quite a few Saturdays and Sunday mornings, I helped out on the dairy- initially getting
started with yardwork, but then later on getting involved with the "dairying"- help bring
the cows in, washing them and feeding them, and grain and hay and doing basically good
enough work. That's how I made my extra money. In fact, that's how I made enough
money to go to college and pay for that myself.

CL: It probably wasn't as difficult for you to find that job, because of how easy it was to
assimilate into the new culture, but what about your mom? Was that a little more
difficult for her just because of the language barriers?

JB: It was a little more difficult for her but fortunately a number of people, some fairly
wealthy people in the area, loved to have her as a house cleaner because she was very
tidy. That was just her nature, she was very clean. And some of the kind of work she
could do, they loved to have her as a domestic, so to speak. With that kind of work, of
course, language isn't all that important. And some of those people knew some Dutch
anyway. In fact, one particular family was Dutch themselves, so she kind of integrated in
kind of a nice way with her work. Now my dad, on the other hand, it was a little different
because he worked for this packinghouse. That was owned by some Russians-white
Russians. Most of the time, the work didn't require a lot of knowledge of English. And
certainly he picked up enough English within a year's time to be able to work and work
very effectively. And as the years went by, with radio, and then, of course, we got a TV
after a few years, they assimilated English quite quickly and got to the point where they
were basically fluent- even though they had still a very good brogue, but they fitted in.
They could go to anywhere and get anything they wanted. But initially it was hard. For
example, I still remember my mom going to the store- and the stores, the supermarkets in
a way were a little bit easier because all you had to do was grab it. Or if you were at the
meat counter, for example, all you did was point and then you'd hold up a finger or two
indicating how many pounds of this or that you wanted. So in some ways it wasn't that
hard to get what you wanted or to do what you wanted.

CL: When was it that you moved to the Holland area, West Michigan? I know you went to
Calvin. When was that you made this move and what was it about Western Michigan?
Southern California is a very different world.

JB: Yes, Southern California, initially when we got there, there were still quite a few dairies,
and life wasn't quite as hectic. But of course as time went on, dairies disappeared. That was just starting to happen when we got there. But for a number of years, I worked at a dairy just a couple miles down the road. But all of those dairies disappeared, sold, were sold for basically their land value, and basically became housing, freeways, and what not. So it became very, very densely populated, became very crowded. Anyway, back in the early sixties, I started going to Calvin, graduated from Calvin, went on for one more year to Western Michigan University to do some more work there. And then both my wife and I were offered a teaching position at Holland Christian. And that's basically how I wound up in Holland, Michigan. It wasn't because I had been specifically looking here, it was just that the job opportunity came up. Because Merrie's father and mother lived in Grand Rapids, we didn't necessarily care to live in Grand Rapids, but we were willing to look for work fairly close by. And it just so happened that Holland Christian was looking for two people with our particular skills, so that's how we wound up here. And I really didn't want to go back to Southern California to all the busyness. I really didn't want to raise a family under those particular conditions.

CL: One other thing that just because for a lot of people this interview touches on some of their struggles in coming to Holland. Going back for just a sec, when you were in Southern California- did you feel, despite the fact that there were other Dutch around, did you feel discriminated against or anything because of your new immigrant status?

JB: Personally no, not really. Although, initially, when I didn't know the language at all, then you're always a little bit leery. You just don't know what's going on. What are people saying about you, or what are they trying to do to you? Are they trying to perhaps tease
you? You're always a little bit leery initially. But once, I think, you can converse fluently, you know what people want and expect and you can converse freely- then I think some of those disappear naturally. I still remember when I was very initially, well, one of the kids was kind of mean to me, "Another one of those dumb Dutchmen". That kind of hurt. But no, not in the sense of feeling discriminated. Southern California, of course, has a great variety of people. You have your Asians, you have your black. You have people basically from all over the world. It's probably one of the most concentrated melting pots of the world in general. So no, we didn't really feel- or I personally certainly didn't feel- discriminated against one way or the other. You had the opportunities if you were willing to work hard. If you were willing to get an education, you could go and do anything you wanted to do. It's just that unfortunately for my dad especially, because of his educational background, which was six grades, that was it, and the same thing with my mom, initially they were very, very limited. And once they were in sense up to speed, then they were getting closer and closer to where it didn't make any difference anymore anyway.

CL: When you first came to Holland being Dutch and this being a quote on quote Dutch town, what were your impressions of Holland as a reputed Dutch town. What were your first impressions of Holland when you came?

JB: Very favorable, very favorable. Nice, clean, Dutch town. Although I soon realized, of course, that a lot of the heritage had faded away to a degree. Sure, we have our Tulip Time, and in some ways some of the things were more Dutch here than what I originally had experienced back in the Netherlands. Things like Dutch dancing; I had never even
seen Dutch dancing. However, I had worn as a kid Klompen, the Dutch shoes, the Dutch wooden shoes. Sure there were some things that were kind of neat, some things that were very favorable, some things that were very attractive, and the whole general area, I liked what I saw and wanted to pursue my career and start a family in this particular area. But it was kind of in a way a joke to me because when people asked me, "Well, where are you from?" If you say, "Well, I'm from Holland". The Holland, the Netherlands instead of Holland, Michigan. So it was kind of funny to do.

CL: Just while you're on the subject of Tulip Time, when you see Tulip Time, what are your reflections upon this festival.

JB: Well, I think it's very neat. I think it's very, very neat for any specific town to be able to hold on to some of those things that are in their past and are part of their heritage. And I certainly encourage any culture to be able to take some of the good things from those cultures and perpetuate those and teach your children and to show them even off to other people. By all means, hang on to some of those things that you have grown up with. Simply make the best out of whatever things that you have in your background. Perpetuate some of those things. So I think, personally it's very neat that we are living in Holland, Michigan and can continue some of those things. And even myself, although at times it's difficult, I like to sometimes continue- like for example this little magazine here (a Dutch magazine). The reason I started getting that about ten years ago was I simply wanted to keep up with my roots or my background, being able to keep up a little bit with my Dutch. Because, of course, as you stay away from it for many, many years, you do tend to forget some things. You do tend to not stay in touch, because honestly you can't
travel over there all the time, although I would certainly like to go back, and I have a few times already. But I certainly like to keep in touch- be in the know as to what's happening, what some of the changes are, what some of the differences are.

CL: You've kind of touched on the nice things of Holland, the nice aspects of it. Are there any other main reasons why you stayed here and didn't move somewhere else around here?

JB: You mean why I didn't move to for example Colorado or go to Mexico or Canada.

CL: Sure, you've lived in Holland, what has been the things that have kept you here all this time?

JB: Well, initially, of course, as I mentioned before, we came here because of the job opportunity. And as I continued to live here, I feel that I put down my roots here. This is where I raised my family. This is where, in a sense, I belong. This is where my friends, my church- this is where I even have my own property. I really feel totally at home. Although, I think I could feel probably at home in many other areas, yet I simply feel that I've been able to make a contribution in this area. This is where I've been able to do some of the things that I wanted to do- been able to live the dream, so to speak. And so, I decided to stay here. That's not to say I don't know other places, but I feel that this is where I want to come back to visit and this is where I want to retire. This is where I feel very, very comfortable- where I feel like I made a difference, whether it's a church, whether it's in some concern of socializing, where I can work, where I can make a living. I just feel very much a part of this particular area.

CL: Since you've been here, obviously you've taught here, what other ways have you been
involved or active in the community?

So back on the whole community involvement and church affiliation and how you've kind of played a role in the community.

JB: OK, especially the involvement in church has been very important to me. Originally, we started at the Pillar Church, which of course is the old church in Holland. From there, simply because of location and moving to another house, we wound up at Park Christian Reformed Church. We've been there, it must be about 25 years now. Anyway, feeling very much a part of that church and to make, I think, some contributions there, not only attendance, but also hopefully bringing some other people to come there, serving as an elder and deacon and Sunday school teacher. That's been a very important part of my life and simply also being able to live that out in the community and what I call the extended community- being able to work on various service projects. In fact, in a couple weeks, both my wife and I are even going to go as far as Nicaragua to work there for several weeks to hopefully make somewhat of a difference there.

CL: Even in the four years that I've been a student at Hope, I've seen the diversity in the Holland area just dramatically increasing and increasing. You've obviously seen that on a much larger scale than I have. What are your feelings about the diversity? As the makeup of different cultures changes, as the Dutch percentage goes down and the Hispanic percentage goes up. What are your feelings toward those new immigrants that come in? What are your feelings on the Hispanic community, the Asian community, the diversity in Holland as a whole?
You're hitting on something. When I was growing up, I still remember— I must have been about ten years old, the only people that I had ever seen were white. One day, we were at the beach, there was this black person. I had never seen a black person in my whole life. I remember just kind of walking closer to that person and just staring at them. I had never seen anything like that in my life. It was something that was totally, totally different to me, and in a way it was kind of scary. This guy, he looked so big and so different.

Anyway, having gone from that stage to the "Salad Bowl", so to speak, in Southern California, and then living to a degree in the situations where I've worked with Blacks, I worked with Hispanics over the years, I've worked with some Asian people. Coming to realize that in some ways we all have our faults, coming to realize that we all have our prejudices, but I think I've come now to the point to where slowly I have come to realize that all of us have our own diversity to bring to society. Our good points and our strengths. We all have our weaknesses, we all have our strengths, and we can I think work together, I think. Personally, I have a lot of tolerance for other people's opinions, for other people's ways of living. Not necessarily would I certainly agree with all their differences, but come to the point, especially through my religious viewpoints and upbringings that yes, everybody can be accepting of the good parts of other people, that even as people coming from different cultures can offer and bring to society, to bring to a city like Holland, Michigan. We can bring our strengths, and I think we can all be better for it, when we can look at other people in that way and appreciate their different cultures.

So, personally, I think it's good to be part of a society where there are differences in the way people celebrate and worship and dance to music and perform and come up with
parts and whatnot. I think it only helps to see the diversity of people, and in Holland you can see and realize that.

CL: In looking at the current Asian and Hispanic cultures, their subcultures in Holland, especially as a former teacher, did you see or do you see them facing a lot of the same things that you faced when you came over?

JB: Yeah, some people of course because of their background, some will put more emphasis on education. Some will not- some will put more emphasis on certain areas than others. Some will have different standards of how they treat property correct, what is important to them. And obviously, there is going to be a lot of differences. Some will integrate into society rather quicker than others. Some will be able to hang on their language culture longer than others. I think by and large, the Dutch have been able to integrate into the American way of life. In fact, not only the American way of life, but in Australia and New Zealand, you name it, you will find Dutch people virtually all over the world who have integrated themselves very quickly with the scene, and sometimes even to the point where they no longer pride themselves or where they no longer keep some of the good parts of where they came from and what they brought along. Some cultures have been able to stay with their language, and they've been able to stay with some of their traditions much longer. I would say, and I would tell my kids, "Hang on to some of the good parts. Don't be ashamed of where you're from. Hang on to some of the good parts that you've been brought up with, but be tolerant, be appreciative of some of the good things that things from other cultures can bring.

CL: On the issue of your kids, as a second generation, do they speak Dutch, or anything like
that? Or as far as your heritage, how did that play in raising your kids and were they interested in the heritage that you were brought up with? What was their take on the whole thing?

JB: I think my kids are interested to a certain degree. However, because my wife never knew any Dutch. Her parents were both Dutch, but yet her parents really didn't really know any Dutch either so unfortunately my wife never was brought up with that language, she never learned the language as such. And so, when we had our children, I never really made a big attempt on teaching any Dutch. Maybe I should have. I certainly tried to instill in them some of the values that I was brought up with. I tried to make them interested in some Dutch things. Especially a couple of my kids, I think have seen for themselves because of their travels. One of my sons specifically was in the Netherlands for a whole year. It looks like he will want to go back there to represent a company from the United States. He loves the culture, he loves some of things that he has seen and heard there—although not totally fluent, certainly he has come to know the language probably too. So there's quite a bit of interest with my four kids. All of them to a degree realize that it's not something to be ashamed of, it's not something to totally do away with. It's something that they probably want to learn a little more of. Meanwhile, they in many respects have totally integrated themselves in American society. I think that's only natural, that's only the way to go here.

CL: I'm not originally from Holland, what are your thoughts on Cinco de Mayo? Do you know much the Cinco de Mayo festival?

JB: No, I really don't. Other than that it's a Spanish festival.
CL: It's just another one of those- we talked briefly about Tulip Time a little while ago, and,

JB: If other people want to put on something, then fine, great. And I might even want to
attend some of their events, especially if it's open to the public, if they show certain things
from their culture. I love to learn more about other means and ways of things, like I said
before; appreciating what good some of these other cultures can bring to the table; some
of their background, some of their contributions that they can make to society. Let's
celebrate. Let's all in a way have fun with that. Let's all appreciate one another for what
we can bring.

CL: Just kind of one or two more things. In your person, in your culture, in your background
and heritage and everything like that, how do you think that you as a person, you as an
immigrant, you as a Dutch person, are represented in the Holland area- whether it's by
numbers or also just by how the community represents you? If you are represented well
in the city of Holland or in the area of Holland- it's a hard question. But two questions
kind of go: Do you feel the community celebrates your background, which obviously to
some extent they do, but do feel like they correctly represent your background, and also
do you feel your Dutch community is well represented now, is that still declining?

JB: I think by and large, of course, because of the background of Holland, yes. You have
your churches, the Reformed, the Christian Reformed, you have Hope College, you have
a number of organizations and then of course the big event, the Tulip Time festival.
There are a number of things which have continued on. There have been a number of
things happening in Holland to continue some of the main philosophies and main ways of
life and beliefs. But, of course, over time- even though that has continued- there have
been many other outside influences. And, of course, over time there have been a number of other cultures, especially the Spanish culture, has been slowly getting more and more integracy with Holland, and obviously those people want to be represented. They also bring something different to the table, and so there have been over time a greater variety of things- which is not necessarily bad. I think that can be good. But, of course, along with each and every culture, there can also be some bad sides, and so sometimes unfortunately that can bring friction and that can bring problems and can bring things that you totally disagree with.

CL: Kind of as a closing question. As you look back on the process of adapting to another entirely different culture, if you knew somebody that was considering that culture to cultural move from whatever situation they were in, a foreign culture, to the United States, what would you say to them- encouragement, advice? What would you offer to them as wisdom of your experience of the whole "ordeal"?

JB: OK, I would simply tell people to come on in, jump right in. Join us. And I think today it's probably easier than ever before, simply because the American culture and English, not only English as a language, but the ideas certainly are much, much better known to most foreigners. Obviously, though education, through television, radio, through the many types of exchange programs, would make such a transition today much, much easier than what was the case with myself. So, most people would probably have an easier time in many respects than what was the case 50 years ago.

CL: Are you generally, obviously, pretty glad that everything kind of worked out for the best and the way it did?
JB: Yeah, personally, I'm very happy. I'm very thankful really to my parents that they decided
to make that decision. Obviously, I didn't have really a say so in the matter. I was only a
twelve-year-old kid, and I just had to go along with my family. But, I'm glad that my
mom and dad made the sacrifices that they did. I'm not sure looking back at it now, that
that was something that I really appreciated at all. I didn't typically as a twelve year old
boy understand that I think I do to a greater degree surroundings, maybe, thankful to my
parents and certainly appreciate what they did for us kids, because it's made big difference
obviously in my life, my brother's life, my sister's life. I think we've all done well in
many respects, not just financial, but we had opportunities to go on, to educate ourselves,
to choose professions and to live places, and to buy property and to travel. We’ve had
opportunities for service, which otherwise we probably would not have had- serving not
at the beginning, maybe later on in today's society, that might be different. Yeah, I'm very
happy that my parents made that choice at the time.

CL: Well, that's kind of all I've got. I just really appreciate the fact that you had a little time
today, missed your gardening.

JB: You are welcome, I don't mind reminiscing sometimes a little bit, trying to even clarify
my own thinking on some of these issues. Well, and appreciating simply the background
that I have, instead of looking at it as something negative and looking at it as something
as a hindrance- looking at it as something that, to me, has made my life richer, has given
me opportunities, has given me in a sense an advantage. Because obviously if you're born
in a certain culture, if you're born with certain standards and education and a language
where you join up into another culture, that gives you a second language. I was fortunate
enough to be able to study German and acquire a third language, and hopefully one of these days, with some of the things that my wife and I hope to do, we will learn more about other cultures and perhaps learn another language. So, I'm happy in that respect. It certainly has made my life very, very interesting and helps me to appreciate certain things and hopefully understand some different ways of thinking and living. It has made my life, I think, very rich. So, I'm happy with how things are in the present time, and certainly thankful to the good Lord for placing me here and giving me all the things that he has given me.

CL: Great, thanks a lot.