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Nelis, Harry and Sandy Oral History Interview: Sesquicentennial of Holland, "150 Stories for 150 Years"

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Oral History Interview with
Harry and Sandy Nelis

(unedited)

Conducted December 5, 1997
by Larry Wagenaar

Sesquicentennial Oral History Project
"150 Stories for 150 Years"
LW: Sandy, could you state your full name and your date of birth for me, please?

SN: Sandra Elaine Nelis; [date removed], 1935.

LW: And you were born where?

SN: Grand Rapids, Michigan. I'm not a Holland native.

LW: We'll have to talk a little bit about that. Harry, your full name and date of birth.

HN: Harry Nelis, Jr. Born in Holland, Michigan, [date removed], 1934.

LW: Life-long resident.

HN: Right.

LW: Tell me a little bit about growing up in Holland. What your memories are of childhood and any highlights you may have, Harry.

HN: I guess my first recollection is Tulip Time when I was a small child. Probably at the age of three or four, I remember that we had the tulip farm, which had all of the activities right across the street from our house. I wasn't allowed to go across the road and help them over on the other side. I had to stay back with a babysitter while my parents worked at the tulip farm.

LW: What kinds of things were featured at that tulip farm on Lakewood?

HN: Back in those days we had a big tulip display, and we used to take bulb orders for tulips. We sold a few different flowers like pansies and mums. We cut flowers and we sold the cut flowers. We had simple things like little windmills and things that I
can recollect. Also postcards. So everything was pretty much...not a whole lot of different souvenirs or things like that back in the early days that I can recall. Later on, it got a little bit more involved.

SN: Did you have food booths?
HN: No, I don’t remember that we had a food booth. We had kind of outhouses for bathrooms. (laughter)

LW: Had your father been in town...Did he grown up in Holland also?
HN: No, my dad was born in the Netherlands.

LW: So you're a second generation Dutchman.
HN: Right.

LW: Did he speak Dutch in the home?
HN: Only when they didn’t want us to understand.

LW: Did that work?
HN: Yes, it did. We also had another tulip farm next to us called Van Bragt tulip farm. In their household (and I used to hang around with their son, Bob), he would speak Dutch. Now they did speak Dutch in their household.

LW: When had your father and mother immigrated to the United States?
HN: My mother was actually born in Chicago. My dad went to England before to learn the English language. At the age of seventeen he was sent by my grandfather, the oldest of thirteen children, to go buy some land in America. He ultimately bought this land in Wilhelmina, Missouri. A Catholic priest from Chicago wanted to start a settlement, and it was read somewhere in a newspaper in the Netherlands. So my
grandfather sent my dad there. We got a piece of land, and ultimately that is where he met my mother. My mother's side came from Chicago, there also. Both families of which were going to be farming people. Well, they couldn't even grow weeds in Wilhelmina, Missouri. Ultimately, after a year and a half, the whole thing kind of fizzled out, and both families moved to Chicago. My dad's family worked in factories. I think my dad worked in a shoe factory in Chicago. My mother worked for the telephone company, and her dad was a plasterer in Chicago. From there they kind of knew each other because they were in Wilhelmina, Missouri. Some years later they heard about Holland, Michigan, through one of the Van Bragts. My dad went up to Holland and located some land there. The family all headed to Holland, Michigan, ultimately. Then the Glass family, which my mother is, decided he was going to try farming again. He tried it for a few years, and after a couple of years went back to Chicago, back to plastering. That's when my dad wrote my mother, and said, "If you're interested in me, you'll answer this letter." That's what his proposal was. (laughter) So, she answered his letter, and they got married about six months later, and they moved back to Holland. That's kind of how it all got started.

LW: How did your father get into the tulip business?

HN: When he moved to Holland, they were into vegetables. They grew vegetables on the farm and tried to make a go of it. It was very difficult. They supplied some of the hotels in the Holland area, the hotels which are now gone. In 1929, my dad was approached by a cousin from the Netherlands, and because they were having a very difficult time, asked if he would grow some daffodils for him. Ultimately, he told
him I will pay you like, two-thousand dollars if you will grow these daffodils. That kind of sustained the whole family. So he did that in the second year, he said, second or third year, I don't remember exactly, he said, "Well, if you're growing daffodils, why don't you grow some tulips?" Whether that was my dad's idea or my uncle's idea, I don't remember; but ultimately, we got the tulips on Lakewood Boulevard there. The first year, really nothing happened. But the second year that we grew them, we started getting quite a few people that were coming to Holland and looking at the fields of tulips that we had.

LW: Do you remember roughly what year this was?

HN: Well, it's got to be somewhere around '30, '31, '32...

LW: About the time Tulip Time was beginning to start.

HN: That's right, because, I don't know if Lydia Rogers saw this and thought of making a festival out of it, or whether she just did it on her own volition, but it was about the time, really, Tulip Time started. Then my dad would go out in the field and take a few bulb orders. The second year he realized that people were interested in it. That is kind of how it all got started. A little later on, we also got into the nursery business along with tulips. We kind of went completely out of the vegetable business. That's why our original business was Nelis Nurseries. So "nurseries" and "tulips" were kind of synonymous.

LW: I should ask you what your father's full name was and your mother's maiden name.

HN: My father's name was Harry Nelis, Sr. My mother's name was Wilhelmina Glass.

LW: Sandy, you grew up in Grand Rapids. Tell me a little bit about growing up in Grand
Rapids, and how you ended up in Holland.

SN: My childhood was very normal. My dad had a trucking company.

LW: Were your parents immigrants? Are you of Dutch heritage?

SN: My parents were both immigrants. My father was also born in the Netherlands. He was born in ____________, and his parents immigrated when he was two years old. My mother was Irish, but she was born in Scotland because her dad was a ship builder.

LW: How did the Dutch-Irish mix work?

SN: Good, I guess. (laughter)

LW: They obviously didn't speak Dutch in the home because...

SN: My dad didn't. His mom died when they were...she was pregnant on the boat and when she had the baby, she died six months later. My grandfather remarried, and he left one of my aunts here with a couple in Holland, Michigan. He never took her with him to Grand Rapids, because he had four or five children and couldn't take care of a baby. For years she never knew that those were not her real parents. Later on in life, I don't know at what given point in time, her parents told her that she was part of this other family. But then my grandpa remarried, and my dad's stepmother had children also. So when my grandpa's children got to be about 14 years old, they were just kicked out of the house. So my dad didn't have a very...So he went to live with his brother, and he delivered ice by horse and buggy.

LW: That's how it was done then.

SN: Yes. He was introduced to my mom by a friend of his. So they went out on kind of
like a blind date. She dated him for a year and a half, or two years. He should have been Christian Reformed, but from the time he was kicked out of the house, he really didn't practice any religion then. My mom of course was Catholic. My grandparents were very upset that my mom was going to be involved with someone who wasn't Catholic. So they sent her out to relatives out east, in the Boston area, and she stayed out there for two years. Then she came back, and she was standing on the corner waiting for her bus one day, and my dad drove by and saw her, and stopped and picked her up. Away they went. My dad did turn Catholic, and my grandparents ended up just loving my dad.

LW: It all worked out.

SN: Yes.

LW: Are you both Catholic now?

SN: Yes.

LW: And were you raised Catholic also?

HN: Yes.

SN: There is a part of the Netherlands that's like eighty percent Catholic, in the southern part of the Netherlands. A lot of people in Holland don't realize that. Because I had this aunt in Holland, I came into Holland and spent a weekend with my aunt and uncle, and my cousin fixed me up with a Frater from Hope College. We went to this party out on Lake Mac, and Harry crashed the party. (laughter) So that's how we met. About three years later, we got married. We just celebrated our fortieth anniversary in June.
LW: Congratulations, that's wonderful.

SN: Thank you.

LW: What your impressions of Holland when you came? Was it significantly different than Grand Rapids from your growing up days?

SN: It seemed like a much smaller town. When I first moved to Holland forty years ago, I had a difficult time in Holland because, Holland people at that time, tended to congregate within families. It was very difficult to get acquainted when you first came, and because I married a Nelis, I wasn't considered a newcomer.

HN: When I'd take her home, she used to cry when I had to take her back to Holland.

SN: We'd go to Grand Rapids for the weekend.

LW: Did you ever consider moving to Grand Rapids?

HN: Oh no. Never.

LW: Your father had you sort of primed to take over for him?

HN: When I was a kid, I wanted to be an airline pilot. The next thing I know I'm working at the tulip farm.

SN: Tell them how you started working at the tulip farm.

LW: Yes, that would be wonderful.

HN: You mean when I started?

SN: How you started, with cut flowers.

HN: Oh, yes. Well, we cut flowers. When I first started, my first job was selling little windmills for twenty-nine cents, or nineteen cents, or something like that. I was like, four or five years old. I got across the street where the action was. (laughter) So I
could make change by that time. My job was to sell windmills and postcards. So from that time on, I was primed in tourism all the way back to those days. I can still remember these old buses coming in, and all of the car traffic that would come in. Exciting time back then.

LW: Was it pretty steady throughout the summer, or was it just a huge number at Tulip Time and then kind of trickled the rest of the summer?

HN: Yes, it was strictly almost like a weekend... Weekdays at Tulip Time were relatively slow in the beginning that I can remember. It was kind of like the weekend, where it was real busy. The weekend before and the weekend after, we had a little bit of business, but not a lot.

LW: So really, the rest of the year was spent growing and tending other items...

HN: Yes, take care of the tulips. For years we had a mail order catalog. A color catalog back years ago. My early recollections of growing up were in the fall my dad would work for like, six weeks packing tulips, working from seven o' clock in the morning, until five. and then coming home to eat, and then working from six o' clock until nine, ten o' clock at night. I used to go over there and help them fold boxes and do menial jobs as a kid, if I didn't have homework. Summers were devoted to getting the crop out of the ground, peeling tulips, and getting the daffodils out. We had work all summer long. We used to hire about twenty or thirty kids. Many kids still come to me, not kids anymore, but people come to me, "Oh yeah, I worked at your dad's tulip farm." It was us and Van Bragt. Of course, there weren't very many jobs for kids back in those days. These kids would come in by bike, or walk, or whatever and get
their twenty, twenty-five cents an hour. For hundreds and hundreds of kids, it was their first job.

LW: Sounds like it was a good first job. How was the competition between Van Bragt and... weren't they across the street if I recall?

SN: They were side by side.

HN: Yes, they were side by side. We had a fence between us. We were kind of the first one. They were the second one. I can still remember them saying over the loudspeaker, "On this side of the fence is a Van Bragt Brothers tulip farm, and we give the best prices," and all this kind of stuff.

SN: Toni Van Bragt McKay is one of our best friends now. We laugh about this. There is a correction in your account because Toni told me your father was instrumental in bringing Van Bragt to this area.

HN: You think so? I don't remember...

SN: That's what Toni told me.

HN: Was it? But there was I think another Van Bragt, but I'm not sure, because there are different Van Bragt families in there. There is the Van Bragt who was a park superintendent, and I don't know if he was related or what the relationship there was.

SN: He was a good friend of Grandpa's.

LW: Do you remember what the admission charge was for getting into the park back then, and the tulip farm?

SN: There was no admission.

LW: You basically relied on...
HN: Just the traffic. Just to have the cars come in...

SN: By the time I came on the scene, the traffic was so heavy that it was one way going west on Lakewood, and then they would go up to the airport road and send them east back into town. There was two lane traffic...

HN: On the Ottawa Beach Road.

LW: When were you married?

SN: Fifty-seven. That was probably about fifty-five when we were first dating.

LW: How long did that last where traffic stayed at that density?

HN: Several years. I would say that was kind of the height of the car traffic. I would say the car traffic, because things changed. Now it's a much higher percentage of bus traffic and a much lower percent car traffic, except for the weekends. Back in those days, as I can recall from the first years, there was an occasional bus. But it was kind of the exception to the rule. You might get one or five buses in a day, or you might not see any. But it was in the bus industry infancy.

SN: It was a fun time, especially during the forties, when the Holland Furnace Company would bring in the celebrities and then they'd bring them out to the farm. Grandpa would name a tulip after them.

HN: We had the Andrews Sisters or something, I can’t remember, we had different celebrities come out there. We used to get quite a few people that would advertise their product, like farm equipment, certain farm equipment. Sometimes they'd have a certain car or something like that. I can remember these type of things.

LW: Was there a point at which you took over the farm? Tell me a little bit more of the
Like I said, my dad started a mail order catalog back in the thirties, probably thirty-seven or thirty-eight. My dad was just barely able to hold his head up above the water until 1939 when we got what we called the car order. The car order was for three to four million tulips and I believe, I'm a little vague on this, I don't know if it was where they sold them at gas stations as a premium, or gave them as gifts. Or if it was the Springair Mattress Company. They had a promotion too. They put up a little windmill at the tulip farm, Springair. The agreement was, they could promote this mattress for ten years. After ten years, that windmill would be ours. That was really the first start where my dad could make more than just the interest payments on his house. It was kind of the boomerang to get things started. In forty-one, of course, the war came, and we had a mail order catalog. We had our best years during the war years because we grew our tulips, and we could also buy them from a couple of other sources in the United States. Needless to say, none of the bulbs were imported, coming in from the Netherlands during the war. So our best years were for 1941 through 1945. After forty-five, we struggled with that catalog, because there was so much competition coming in. The Netherlands had so many tulips to get rid of, that prices were dirt cheap. So from that time until 1957, we had a color catalog. In 1957, we decided to build something along the highway someplace to sell our tulips along the highway because Lakewood Boulevard was kind of out of the way for tourist traffic. So in 1952, my dad bought this piece of property, thinking someday we'd move the whole operation here. Well, we never did move the whole operation. We
found that we put the first building up which had the windmill here, but by opening up the land for the tulip area, we'd get these winds and everything would get full of dust and so forth. We tried a few different places to have the display, and it really didn't work too well. So we decided to go to just kind of formal gardens. Keep the tulip farm where it is, but supply the place on the highway, which originally was called the Dutch Market. The first name we called it was Nelis Tulip Farm, and then the second year, because we had a couple of Dutch buildings, we called it the Dutch Market. Ultimately I bought the name from Sip Houtman, who is the fella that worked at Little Netherlands. I bought the name Dutch Village from him.

LW: He was using the name at the time?

HN: He just had it coined. That's when we started Dutch Village.

LW: When did you take over Dutch Village from your father?

HN: Well, let's see, '57, wasn't it? I got out of the service, my brother was out of the service and he was working at the Tulip Farm, and my brother Fred. We decided that we're going to start doing something out here.

SN: In December of '57, Grandpa retired.

HN: '56, wasn't it?

SN: '57. It was when we got married.

LW: You got married and took over?

HN: Well, my dad was planning this. He wanted to know what my intentions were when I was in the service. I said, "Well, I guess I'll come back and work there. I don't have any other plans."
SN: We were married, and I was pregnant.

HN: Yes, and so we came back in December. In January we started making plans to build the first building out here. Also at the time, because they had been struggling with this catalog and basically turning money over, it cost so much to have it made up, and maybe for the last ten years they were struggling with it. We just decided to put any money back into the Dutch Village, all the money that we could, and just grow, we felt it had growth out here.

LW: How long had the highway been here when you built?

HN: I don't know exactly when the first lane was built, but it was out here, and it must have been some time around '52, maybe before that. When we had our first building, it was only a two-lane road. Later on, they added the east lane onto it. The only thing that was out here at that time was WJBL and Kalkman Ready Mix.

LW: Which was right across the highway from where you are now.

HN: Yes.

LW: Tell me a little bit about the growth of the village. What buildings came, and some of the decisions that had to do with certain things.

HN: We broke ground when Harry was just born

SN: I was in the hospital with Harry when they put the footings in for this building.

They're both going to be forty this year, the village and our oldest son.

HN: We decided to make it with some Dutch architecture, so we put the windmill on top of the building, and unfortunately we didn’t have the gabled roofs, we just had a facade on this building, which we’ve always been sorry for because flat roofs aren’t very
good. We were selling tulips and some left over souvenirs. Back in the '50s, my brother and another friend Dick Matchinsky started selling souvenirs, and then they started selling cheese and other things over the course of the years at Tulip Time. They were starting to sell more and more souvenir-type items. At one time we used to have a big tent set up and they used to sell souvenirs in there. So when my brother and Dick got old enough and they got out of high school, they decided, "Well, why should we have somebody else selling the souvenirs? We might as well do it ourselves." I also got into it when I got out of high school, and I spent a couple years in college--I was kind of waiting for the draft. So we started selling souvenirs back then. Our first sales, like I said, were souvenirs that were left over from Tulip Time and tulip bulbs, and also at that time we had a little postcard business. We started wholesaling a few things around. We started wholesaling souvenirs to the stores downtown. So we were kind of half-heartedly in the souvenir business.

SN: The village actually opened on July 3, 1958. How much did you do the first day?

HN: I think it was something like eleven dollars and twenty two cents. (laughter)

LW: Obviously it didn't stay at that level, because you're here today.

HN: What really was surprising then on July 4th, which I thought would be a good day, we only took in four dollars. (laughter) But eventually, it built up. It was a little discouraging at first, but when you open it up on a shoestring, a lot of places nowadays don't do that.

SN: The day that he got up almost to a hundred dollars, he stayed here. He stayed way beyond because he was like 97-something and he wanted to hit a hundred. They had
one lady, Mrs. Lillian Seif, by this time, he had a helper.

HN: One employee.

SN: We had a car. The car had to be parked out in front, because if there was not a car out front, it didn’t even look like the place was open. He had to have the car out there, so when you work seven days of week. It was a struggle in the beginning.

HN: The first few years, what I used to do is buy a couple of wrecks and just park them out front and make it look like it’s busier. (laughter)

LW: Did you really?

HN: Yes. Cars that didn’t look too bad, you know.

SN: They didn’t have to run, they just had to sit there.

HN: To park there, just let them park there.

SN: Now during this time frame, his brother Fred was running the farm. Fred stayed behind and he was...

HN: We decided that I would run the village, and he’d take care of the farm, and supply me with all of the stuff while he was taking care of his regular routine of growing tulips and so forth. This lasted for four or five years. But he would come out and help in the off season, and we put up all of our buildings ourselves. Back in the old days, you just went down, you made up a...

SN: Take a placemat and turn it over, draw your building.

HN: You’d draw out your building, or what have you. By that time we had a fella that worked for us, just part-time and ultimately worked for us full-time. So you’d draw something up, and he was a builder, but not an architect back in those days. You’d
go down to the township office and give them their twenty-five bucks, and you could start your building. You didn't have any inspections or anything like that back then. So as it went, our first building was this building. The second year we decided we've got to have something to keep these people a little longer. Let's just open up a little coffee and sandwich thing. So we started that, and ultimately it turned into a little restaurant where we seated forty people. So that grew and grew. After the second or third year we decided to put up another building. This building would be used for delft and food items, and that building would be used for souvenirs. Then we decided maybe we should put in a canal and start another building, and we'll house different things in that. We had a fella called Louie Mulder, who was working for the museum, and we hired Louie away from the museum. He's kind of like a curator, so to speak. He and Sip Houtman both worked on Little Netherlands. Sip Houtman was the originator of Little Netherlands, but Louie used to change things around, add things, and keep it going and so forth after Sip kind of got...

**LW:** Where is Little Netherlands located?

**HN:** Windmill Island.

**LW:** Is that Windmill Island?

**HN:** Yes. So we hired Louie Mulder away from the city, and Louie would make and design a lot of things.

**SN:** It wasn't originally at Windmill Island.

**HN:** It was originally behind Netherlands Museum.

**SN:** That's were Louie was when you hired him away. Yes, that's where we hired him.
HN: Originally, see, it was behind the museum there. So Louie really gave us a lot of ideas, and we kind of tried to create a master plan. We had an idea of creating a Dutch village. The way we originally set and the way it ended up is entirely different. We were thinking at one time of having a motel with all little Dutch buildings and little Dutch houses. We never got to that part of it. Each year we were building another building. Each year we had another idea, and probably one of the biggest changes came around 1970, I'd say, when we decided...

SN: '65.

HN: '65. When we decided that we're going to charge admission, because we've got several buildings, we've got formal gardens, and so forth. Even at the tulip farm, up until that time, we weren't charging admission. So we started charging at the tulip farm, and we charged here.

LW: Do you remember what that first charge was?

HN: Twenty-five cents.

LW: At both places?

HN: Yes. Well, it was fifty cents here for a carload.

LW: A quarter a person or fifty cents a carload?

SN: No, the quarter a person was at the farm.

LW: Oh, I see.

HN: And it was fifty cents a car...

SN: I used to stand out in the main drive there, and people would come in and I'd stand out there and take their money. Fifty cents a car.
HN: Yes, back then, of course, we had a big parking lot. Then we decided maybe it
would be more fair if we just charged them. So we charged a quarter.

SN: Per person.

HN: Per person, yes. Because we had a problem with the buses. What do we charge for
the buses? By this time, bus traffic was definitely on the rise. I would probably say
after the war, we saw a steady incline, increase in the buses. So after that, we
added...

SN: Dutch dancing.

HN: We started the Dutch dancing. We went to the city and wanted to use the city
dancers, but they didn't want us to because of private enterprise. So we went ahead
and created our own dance from music, from our Amsterdam street organ.

SN: No, you didn't have it yet.

HN: You're right, we didn't have it yet.

SN: You used to dance to a tape recorder.

HN: Yes, we would dance to a tape recorder the first year.

SN: And you and Fred went to the Netherlands.

HN: Yes, that next winter we went to the Netherlands and we bought our first street organ.
I guess we improvised or something. We changed the dance to coincide with the
music of the songs that were on the organ.

LW: You'd hire the local high school kids to dance then?

HN: Yes, we trained them ourselves. The dance was kind of created by, I don't remember
who...
SN: I don't either.

HN: I don't remember who started it.

SN: Margie maybe?

HN: Margie and Shelley...

SN: Oh, you know who else I bet was in that? That dancing teacher. I bet you she was in it too. She eats in our restaurant all the time.

HN: Yes, yes, could be.

SN: I can't think of her name.

HN: But, that's kind of...

SN: And that still works good for us today, because of the girls that we hire in the spring, they work all through the summer. They get to clerk.

HN: Most of these kids, these girls, are their first job. So we went along and then we decided we were going to start a school program for teaching kids about the Netherlands. So we have a guided tour program that we started, and that's when we decided to add the theatre building because we wanted to show a little movie of the Netherlands, a little history about the Netherlands, and so we added the theatre building.

LW: What year did you add the theatre building, do you remember?

HN: It's hard to say, I think we have it written down where all these buildings were added. Probably in the early '70s. Somewhere around there.

LW: So you started bringing school kids into Dutch Village?

HN: Yes, and that program has been successful over the years. So each year we were
always thinking about what can we do next year to make the village a little bit more authentic. Somewhere along the line we decided all our buildings got regular shingles on, let’s put them out real Dutch roof tile. We took the existing buildings and put roof tiles on there. So that goes back in the ’70s somewhere, too. But either my brother or myself would go back to the Netherlands and get ideas, take pictures, and so forth. We kept adding more canals and different things. In 1974, my brother had a heart attack, and after he recovered, he decided to get out of the business. So I bought my brother out in ’74. We kept the tulip farm going until 1980, and the couple, who the wife was Margie Kolean and she was my dad’s secretary and came here and was my secretary, worked for us for 58 years I think it is. Her husband, Harry Kolean who ran the farm along with my brother, he was going to retire in 1979. I’d been training a young fellow for three years to take over his place. Three months after Harry Kolean died, he decided, "I think I’m going to do something else." So at that point it was too difficult for me to keep the village going totally, and take care of the farm, and take care of the crops. I just decided I was going to close it down, which I did.

LW: Was the farm making money?

HN: Yes, it was profitable. We never did make big money at the tulip farm. But it was also our warehousing, the buildings over there would warehouse all of the souvenirs and the items that came in from the Netherlands. We used to bring the stuff over by truck every day. Harry Kolean would take care of all of that also. With the equipment, we found that by using different equipment we could harvest the tulips
easier. It wasn't as big of job as it used to be back thirty or forty years ago. So we kept always sticking money back into the village, putting up new buildings. We got a carousel, we got a swing ride, we got the Dutch barn and farmhouse.

LW: So every year there would be another project for that year. Is that true still today?
HN: Well, not so much anymore.
LW: Kind of landlocked a little bit more.
HN: Well, yes, but after awhile you get to a point you say, "Well, if I put up another building, then I have to maintain it. Am I going to get that many more people?" I've got like thirty buildings here, and whether you have one more or not probably isn't going to make that much difference. What we've tried to do now is to have new things. Try to educate the people a little better about the Dutch life and so forth, or more internal type things. We've gone to a schedule where we have activities going on every 15 minutes. This is going, and have demonstrations, show people how pottery is made. We've always been making wooden shoes here, but put all of these different things on a time schedule, so that they can see other times, but the real demonstration is going to go on at different times. What else have we done, can you think of?
LW: Has attendance continued to increase or has it levelled off in recent years?
SN: It has levelled off.
HN: It's levelled off.
SN: There is so much competition out there. It used to be when anybody, when springtime came, everybody came to Holland. We had a tulip festival, and everybody
came for our tulip, but you know, now, if you look in the Sentinel and the list of events of what is happening. Every little town has some type of festival going every weekend, and this goes on all summer long. Everyone is trying to establish their own identity.

(end of tape 1, side A)

HN: ...And go back, go back home. Of course now-a-days you never see that anymore.

LW: Yes, you don't see people riding tailgates anymore. I'm trying to remember where we were. We were talking about attendance at Dutch Village, and all of the competition, I think, is where we sort of stopped. Did you have any other thoughts along those lines, you were in the middle of a sentence when we stopped.

SN: One of the reasons that, when Horizon came and wanted to buy the property, Harry really wasn't interested in selling it. But when they agreed to their mall (?) in Dutch architecture, the reason, the one and only reason that he did that was because he felt that the mall would be a big draw, and that it would boost attendance. We went from being to a seasonal operation, where we closed in October and opened in the Spring, to being almost a year round operation. We closed our park, but we keep our restaurant and our shops open all year. It didn't materialize because they were having a difficult time with their own, they don't have the right mix of stores in it, it just doesn't draw the people that it's supposed to.

LW: It probably did in the early years when people were sort of checking it out.

SN: At the very beginning when it first opened, and it was at that time, our whole village faced the highway. In 1988 Harry had to literally open the village up to
manufacturers, and begin having two fronts, and no back. And then they put in the
building down on the waterfront. And they built the bridge so that people could walk
from us to them, back and forth. That's when we went to the point where our shops
were no longer inside the village, but our shops were outside the village. We had to
adjust with the times, too.

LW: Tell me about the process of Horizon approaching you and your decision. You talked
a little about that just now, but, what went in to the...?

HN: About Horizon?

LW: Yes, did they approach you?

HN: Yes, they approached us a couple of years before and wanted to buy the Dutch
Village. Actually negotiations broke down fairly soon, and we thought, no, this isn't
going to work. They were going to have me run the village and they were going to
build the mall behind, and so forth. Everything kind of sat for a year or so, and they
came back a couple years later and said, "Hey, how would you like to have this right
behind you?" I said, "Well, you've taken pictures of the Dutch Village." He says,
"Right." He says, "How would you like to have an outlet mall when it looks like this
right behind you?" I said, "Well, that sounds pretty good. It makes a big mammoth
complex that way. As long as they don't sell the same product as I do. An outlet
mall sells clothing and shoes and this type of stuff. I said, "You know, I think it will
work." We started negotiations, and I said, "The thing that is important is that you
have got to have Dutch architecture." It never ended up the way...The first time I
okayed it. After that, there was like 48 changes to it. It wasn't near as Dutch as I
wanted it to be.

SN: It wasn't as authentic as Harry wanted it. When he sold to Horizon, it was listed. It was written into the contract that he would approve all of the buildings. So when they sold the outparcels, those also had to be in Dutch architecture, and Harry approved the style and so forth. The bank is a beautiful building, and Shell did it--everybody did it and it really worked. The only glitch was the movie theatre, and the reason that happened was because a friend of Harry's had purchased the property, and it was landlocked. He asked Harry if he wanted to buy it. Harry, being the nice guy that he is, instead of him buying it and selling it to Horizon, he just said to Horizon, "Hey, this is the price he wants. If you want to buy it, you might as well just buy it from him."

HN: I had the option on it. Never giving it any thought, it got put through--they just went ahead and purchased that directly themselves.

SN: And then it didn't fall under the Dutch architecture, so when he tried to enforce it for Star Theatre, it couldn't be enforced because Horizon didn't, it wasn't in their contract. So that is why we have one building that didn't use Dutch.

LW: But the motel...

HN: The motel went along with it. I had been negotiating with Dick Den Uyl, at the time I owned that piece of land, to put up a motel, because I felt it would be a good place to have a motel here. So we had agreed upon doing it in Dutch architecture, so that did go through with the Dutch architecture.

LW: So Dick Den Uyl owns the motel?
SN: Yes he does.

LW: It's a nice motel. I've housed people there.

HN: You know, you ask me has the business gone up or down. Well, I think since 1988, I think that was the peak of our best years. A couple of things happened since then. Number one: Tulip Time has added many, many more things to do. I think since Kristi Van Howe got in there, she added more things; and Mary Duistersmars is in there now. They have a lot more shows going on. They can keep these bus people busy without seeing any of the attractions. You see it with Windmill Island, what's happened to them. Why is their attendance gone down? Their attendance has dropped considerably, a big portion of it at Tulip Time because of that, because there are so many other things for the people to see and do now, that it's literally cut way down on attendance.

LW: Have you had discussions with Tulip Time to try and keep them from adding more and more shows, or do you feel that's something you really just don't have any input into it?

HN: They aren't going to do that. They're a non-profit organization, but they're in there to keep out of the red too. And they've done a very good job at it. You've got to have shows to bring busses nowadays. It's not the simple, little old Tulip Time that it used to be years ago. You have to have different entertainment. The klompen dancers, for example, is a terrific add. And I keep telling busses that they're missing one of the best shows and it's free--seeing the 1700 Dutch dancers in the middle of Holland, all dancing at one time, that's really something. But there's more
competition out there. Not only at Tulip Time, but in the summer. Every convention bureau is fighting for that tourist dollar. These bus companies nowadays, what's the question they always ask you--"What's new?" When you're in business forty years, it's always hard to come up with something new. We're not a Cedar Point where we can put a couple of new rides in every year.

LW: Let's backtrack a bit. Was it a difficult decision to close the farm? Your dad had started it, your brother had worked there, and you had worked there. Was that a difficult decision?

HN: Yes, sure it is. It's closing down part of your life. But I just felt that it was just too difficult. You can't just dump tulips in the ground and expect that you're going to have a nice display. It takes a lot of work. You've got to know the land, the ground, and I had been away from it practically my whole life. I'd never really worked the ground myself. Harry Kolean did. It was just too difficult to try and get somebody to run it, it's almost impossible, because they don't know any more than I did.

LW: You were kind of torpedoed by this young man who decided all of a sudden just kind of...

SN: Well, you know, that was such a shame because...well you wouldn't know, but we have three boys. And had we known that was going to happen, we could have put our oldest son out there.

SN: Harry was at Notre Dame at the time.

HN: Yes, they were still in school.

SN: But he still could have been there summers.
HN: Yeah, but you can't just run it for the summer months.

SN: No, but to get the experience from cleaning, he could have been there summers.

LW: Have your children, obviously your daughter is here, all five are involved in the operation?

HN: Yes, all five are here.

LW: That's quite a tribute to the business you have built. A lot of children want to go off and do something else.

HN: Well, I never said to any one of them that I want them to come in the business. Tourist business is hard. I said "Do your own thing." I've said that to every one of them, but every one of them came back in the business. Of course they worked here from little up. The boys cleaned bathrooms and worked in maintenance and did the outside work, the dirty work. The girls were Dutch dancers here, and worked in the restaurant afterwards. So I guess they like this type of thing. My oldest son works in the village, manages kind of the outside part of it. My youngest daughter does the internal, the ordering, and is in charge of that part of it. Steve, our second son, does the books for all of the businesses and runs the car wash. We put in a car wash this last summer.

SN: That's our latest addition.

LW: How is the car wash doing?

HN: It's doing all right. It's a slow start. It was a slow start, but it's coming. It's going to take some time.

LW: You've got some heavy-duty competition in town with the car wash business.
HN: That's right.

LW: They're pretty aggressive in their competition.

HN: They're good people.

SN: But we're in a good location. It's amazing what this weather does. Just as soon as the sun comes out now, the car washes get real busy.

HN: Joe runs my wholesale, my youngest son. He does very well at it.

LW: Tell me a little bit about the wholesale business.

HN: It kind of started way back in the '50s, when we were selling to just a few little places in town. It kind of stayed a little sideline for quite a few years. We sold to Wooden Shoe, Veldheer, Windmill Island, us, and some stores downtown. Periodically we'd get outside people coming in and wanting to buy some souvenirs wholesale. I was doing it mainly myself and about ten, twelve years ago, Delphine Sanger, the gal that works for me, took over the wholesale. She really started having it climb. She's really good at selling.

SN: She's good at everything.

HN: Then she ran it for four or five years as a separate entity. She decided she was going to retire, so Delphine trained my son Joe for a year. Now he's taken it over and going with it. Since that time, Delphine has unretired, and is back kind of like a consultant, but yet more so because she works about half-time, about 20 hours a week, something like that. She's involved in other work like the Garden Club...

SN: It's really good for her because Harry doesn't restrict her at all. When she's busy doing other things, she schedules her time. But when something is pressing out here,
she's here. It gives her the freedom to be involved, and yet do her own thing, so she loves it.

LW: Best all worlds, it seems like.

SN: Harry and Delphine grew up together.

LW: Oh really?

SN: Her husband was his best friend from first grade or kindergarten. So they go back a long time.

HN: So we hire now. We have employed here between the restaurant and the village in season, 120, 130 people, something like that. We're very labor intense. I can't say that's all good, specially with the labor market.

LW: I would imagine it's difficult right now, with the unemployment level being what it is.

SN: Especially the restaurant.

HN: It's very difficult. The restaurant, of course, is the worst.

LW: We've noticed, being patrons at restaurants in the community, that the level of service has declined as people who probably formally wouldn't have been hired, had to be hired. Has that been your experience as employers?

SN: Not our wait staff. Susie is very particular about her wait staff, and we have a nucleus that's just fantastic, so we can hold that up. Where she notices it the most is in her kitchen, she just nicely gets someone in and gets them trained, especially cooks. Then someone else needs a cook desperately and off they go. Every time someone walks in your back door, they want more than the person that walked out. So it's hard keeping your costs in line. The restaurant's a real struggle from the kitchen end of it
right now.

HN: Very difficult.

SN: The kitchen end is a real struggle.

HN: And you know with so much more retail, that's a whole segment...

SN: Service oriented people.

HN: Yes, service oriented, and restaurant help goes into that part of it. The cream usually ends up in manufacturing where the money is. There are a lot of people that don't want to be in manufacturing, that's why we've got people working as clerks and kitchen and restaurant help.

LW: Let's move away from the Dutch Village and talk a little more broadly on a few topics. You've been in Holland all of your life. How has Holland changed from your point of view?

HN: From the little Dutch town to the bigger city effect. Yes, Holland has changed a great deal. Quite a religious little town to big time town. When I remember as a kid, my dad used to hire Mexican families to come in and work on weeding and stuff like that. Back in the old days, the whole family would get out there and work, except the two youngest ones. The youngest one and the baby would be sitting in the car, and the youngest one would be taking care of the baby. But all of the rest of the four or five kids and the mother and dad are all working. That's the old days that I remember. I remember when we used to get milk with the horse and buggy yet. As you get bigger and you accept more and more people, you get in everything from the bigger cities, and unfortunately, we've gotten elements of people we just as soon not have.
SN: Gangs and crimes. We've seen that part of it change. I think basically Holland's nucleus is still strong, and I think that the majority of the people still carry on Holland.

HN: We've still got a strong religious...

SN: We all feel our roots are here, and I still think it's one of the better places to bring up children. I was from Grand Rapids, and when I first moved to Holland I didn't want to be here. But it wasn't very long, and I made up my mind that I never really wanted to go back to Grand Rapids. But it also used to be, I could get in my car and I could drive any place I wanted to go in ten minutes. Now it takes me ten minutes to get from our house out here to the corner, not even at the village yet because there are so many lights and so much traffic.

LW: Probably one of the ways we can mark the growth is just in the proliferation of traffic lights.

SN: It's just incredible.

LW: There are several more slated for this year.

HN: But I think Holland is still a good town.

LW: Have you noticed crime here at the village? Have you been a victim of that?

HN: We've always had break ins for many years, but I can't say it's any worse now than it was fifteen, twenty years ago.

LW: When we first sat down, we talked a little bit about religious background. You mentioned that you were Catholic. Did that cause difficulties in a community that was heavily Dutch Reformed?
SN: Not for us.

HN: I think my parents saw it a little bit more than I did. We used to have Washington School right near us, and we had a little bit of a rivalry.

SN: Going to school, you mean at St. Francis?

HN: Yeah, but nothing much. I really can't say that.

LW: Did you run into resistance because you had the village open on Sunday?

HN: In the beginning, there was some people who would come in and say, "You shouldn't be open on Sunday." but...

SN: But it wasn't like when McDonalds decided to open on Sunday, and all of the ministers came out in the paper. We never had that.

LW: I remember the picketing at Meijers when I was growing up.

SN: No, we never had that really. I can't say. But you know, by the time I came to Holland, GE came here six months ahead of me, and I think from breaking down barriers, if you will, I think that GE was the one that really opened Holland up.

LW: Do you think they were sort of the watershed?

SN: I think so, because they brought a lot of people in from various areas and a lot of people from out east. I think they were far and away the largest contributor to the Catholics. They brought a lot of Catholics--there are a lot of Catholics out east, and I think that it opened up the community. I think that now, I myself don't think of Holland as Reformed or Christian Reformed community any more. I think it's a little more cosmopolitan than that. I'm not sure, I don't know if that's good or bad.

LW: Did you play a role in starting the new parish on the north side? I assume you live on
the north side.

SN: Yes, we did.

HN: Yes, we were. Of course, what they did, is they segregated that from the bridge north is the new parish. I think in town, stayed. Yeah, we were involved from the beginning.

LW: Tell me a little bit about that, the change and growth.

HN: I went to St. Francis school. When it came time to build a new church, they hit me up for some money for that. I was about 20 years old I guess, 20 or 21. We put all of our kids through St. Francis. What year did they move out to the north side?

SN: Well, we built the church that burned. Harry's mom always wanted a church on the north side. That was always her dream, to have a church on the north side. Unfortunately she didn't live. She died in June, and they announced the parish in September. But Grandpa lived for six weeks after Grandma died. He gave a big donation in Grandma's memory to the new church. It actually ended up, it's all gone now. Have you been out there lately? Looks like we've been hit by a bomb. But all of the oak in that new church was contributed by Grandpa and Grandma. The pews, the lectern...But anyhow, Harry was on the building committee for that. When we first started out, we met in Waukazoo School, and of course you talk about growth in Holland--there were only 300 families. We knew everybody, and everybody knew us. We were out of town for a week and you went back the next Sunday, and Father Nash asked you where you were. It was that small. We now have like 1200 families.

LW: Growing by leaps and bounds.
SN: Well, the north side is growing by leaps and bounds. If you are of another
denomination, you can pick any number of churches, but if you happen to be
Catholic, then the bishop says that if you are on the north side, you are a member of
this parish. You don’t question it, it’s always been that way. So our church is just,
same way as happening to West Ottawa High School, and grade school.

LW: Bursting at the seams.

SN: It’s a little difficult because there are so many people in the parish that we don’t
know. In mega-parishes, if you’re used to being small town...you asked how has
Holland changed. I can remember shopping in downtown Holland, and I could walk
in a store and they’d know me by name, and I could take whatever I wanted home on
approval. I didn’t even sign anything, you just walked in and you looked at it. If you
wanted to take it and try it on your children or whatever, and you would just bring it
back the next day. I think downtown Holland today is getting back to that. There are
specialty shops, and they know their people. I like that. I like the fact that that’s
coming back again, because a mall is a mall is a mall is a mall. It’s impersonal. I
kind of feel a megachurch becomes to be impersonal. We just happen to go to nine
o’clock mass on Sunday, if we would by chance go on Saturday night or eleven
o’clock, it’s like you’ve gone to a different church. As a rule, you look around and
think, "Where did all of these people come from?" But see, we winter in Florida so
we’re not active in the church anymore. We’re not on committees, so that makes a
difference too.

LW: What about the ethnic diversity of Holland? You’ve seen a lot of change there in the
course of your life. Any remarks on how the ethnicity of the community has changed?

HN: Well, of course from Dutch to the Spanish element. Back when I went to kindergarten or first grade, we had one Spanish boy, Aranis, in our class. As time went on, you could start to see more and more Spanish, Mexican people coming in. I really like the Spanish people. I think that they get along good with the people from Holland. I think that's why a lot of them have settled here, such a big percentage. In the beginning, I didn't see any colored. We might have had one family that I can remember on the north side out here. Of course now it's getting to be a little bit more, and there's more Asian. I really can't say.

LW: You've just notice that growth...

SN: You just notice it. When you live on the north side, especially. Although we have all nationalities that work in our restaurant and on our grounds. Juan, our...(?)

HN: We have some Spanish that work for us.

SN: He gets up here for our witches trial. He's just a wonderful man. guy.

HN: They're nice people. The younger element, I don't know. I know more of the older element, and over the years I've had Spanish working here all of the time.

LW: How has the role of women changed?

SN: We have two girls out here and our three boys. When Harry's father retired and stepped out of the business, he literally gave the business to the boys. He was very fair. He made up monetarily to the girls. He figured what the business was worth, and he divided that in half, and Harry had four sisters, so he took that same amount of
money and divided it in four and gave it to the girls. But I mean, there was never even, it just didn't happen. We have five. Our girls are as active as our boys. They are as vocal as our boys, and they feel they are as deserving as our boys. (laughs)

HN: They're probably more active than the boys, per se. Yes, women equality, you know, is here. I hire more women than I do men here, by far. But management wise, I've got more women on management level than I do men. It's been a good mix.

LW: What controversies have you witnessed in Holland?

SN: Like the area center?

LW: Any one that you'd like to pick. That's a current one. What are your thoughts on that particular issue?

SN: I think it's very political. Very frankly, I think they goofed in the way they handled it. I'm not so sure that the site they picked isn't where they should be. But I think it left a bad taste in everybody's mouth the way it happened.

HN: The only controversy that would be related in my business would be what's going to happen with Windmill Island. It think what they're going to try to do is to create a Williamsburg, Virginia. Personally, I don't know how they can make that project successful. I'm not involved in it, although I was involved in it when they first brought the windmill over here, to a small degree. I think you need a lot of money to maintain such a venture.

SN: You need a Kellogg...

HN: Williamsburg is backed by what foundation?

SN: Rockefeller?
HN: Rockefeller. I think we're going to come up short. Are we going to get 65 families to move out to the island? Are they going to want to be told you have to do this and you have to do that? You can't do this and you can't do that? I think that kind of remains to be seen. I think that trying to make what would be a business center, or whatever they're going to try to have exhibitors there, I don't quite understand that part of it. But to me, it just seems that, well, I guess someone has visions that I can't see. I don't think it's going to affect me that much one way or the other. I sure hope they know what they're doing, if they're talking a 44 million dollar project.

LW: You mentioned the church and we talked about that. What other organizations have you been involved with over the years?

SN: Oh, I've been in almost everything. I've been in the garden club for years, and different organizations through the church. We belong to the Holland Country Club, and Harry was in the Jaycees. We haven't been that involved on the civic level. Harry actually worked, probably anywhere from....Well, I'll tell you what he worked, he worked from Easter Sunday until Memorial Day, he actually worked seven days a week. And from Memorial Day to Labor Day, he would go in at noon and he would close, which would get him out of here at ten or eleven. Then he would get up at seven and he would open, and he would be off at two. Then he would be off from two that afternoon until eleven-thirty the next morning. That was our schedule from Memorial Day to Labor Day. From Labor Day until the village closed, he would have to come out and open if was his weekend, but he wouldn't stay here because we just lived right around the corner over here. And then he would come back and close
it. But it was his weekend on duty. By the time we got through the Village closing, from November until Easter, was really the only time we had weekends and evenings.

And we were raising five children. We just didn't have time. We were running to swim meets, basketball games, volleyball games, and we just were not...

LW: Doing what parents with kids do.

HN: We weren't in a lot of, to speak of, any big fundraisers per se. But, I mean except church things. We were in a lot of church activities.

SN: I was on the school board and belonged to the ladies’ club.

HN: Sandy was president of Circle Michigan later on when the kids got bigger, which is a state organization of promoting motorcoach traffic to Michigan. She got involved in that and became president for three years. We were involved in a lot of things associated with tourism. I was, like I said, basically outside of the realm of things. Jaycees was pretty much it. Sports and different sports activities.

LW: Was there ever a tension between being out in the township and not being out in the city? Maybe that's not a good question. Did you ever sense you were kind of an outsider when it came to city issues or was that never an issue? You're part of the greater community, but you weren't part of the city proper. Like with Windmill Island and those kinds of things that happened in the city limits.

HN: No, I really can't say that. We used to have little frictions with Tulip Time. I'm always one to speak up when something comes up. I was on Tulip Time board for three years, and one of the things I wanted to put through on the 50th--I was on the board for the 49th, 50th, and 51st year--but what I wanted to do was to make an
eight-day festival. It kind of got turned down because of the fact that they just... We did a lot of research on it. Don Stoltz and the one from the museum was the, I can't think of it. He's dead now. He was with the Netherlands.

LW: You're thinking of Bill Wichers?

HN: Bill Wichers, myself and Don Stoltz were on the 50th committee to investigate the possibility of making the Tulip Festival bigger. It ultimately got turned down. Why it was, I don't know, because I didn't meet any big opposition to it. But some years later when Kristi took over, she just kind of automatically did it without any big fanfare. We were in Florida, and come back and all of a sudden it's like an eight-day festival. As far as other organizations and things like that, I've never been that involved.

LW: Has there been a significant turning point in your life? That's a question we've been asking everyone.

HN: Yes, I'd probably say that when I sold our land to the mall, back in '88. We'd been making a living on tourism, but it kind of gave me a so-called retirement per se. It's kind of like hitting the lottery, to some degree, but I still had to pay a lot of money in taxes, because what I had to do was dissolve all of the business because the land was in the business. If I would have sold the land, the money would have gone into the business, because I am sole owner I would have declared dividend and still pay taxes on that. So I still would have gotten hit both ways, but I dissolved the business and started over, started with four different companies, having the land company and the restaurant separate, the Dutch Village separate and my wholesale business separate.
So that was significant. A few years after that I felt I could let the kids take over more and...

LW: Start to enjoy some of the time.

HN: Yes. And believe me, the tourist business is not a real rich business. It’s not a business to get a lot of wealth from, believe me. The problem is, for years and years and years, everything you’ve got you stick back into the business. And you hope you get some rewards. Over the years, yes, it’s been reasonably well. We work on a shoestring budget, compared to a lot of places. We’ve always been trying to make the place better, and it’s been a difficult business over the years.

LW: Did you sell the land to Bosgraff that developed the Bayview?

HN: Yes.

LW: Were you happy with what ended up...?

HN: Yes, I originally wanted it to be a golf course. I had it in the contract with Bosgraff to make the land into a golf course community because I thought it has the most beautiful aspect to it. The agreement with us and Van Bragt, and we met with Toni, she was a Van Bragt but she is a McKay now. That’s how we kind of got back to knowing them again. We worked out a deal that hundred and so many acres would be used for development for a golf course. They actually had options on four hundred acres of the whole property all of the way around. But they tried getting it through the DNR and met tough opposition, Bosgraff did. Ultimately the Audobon got involved in it--some kind of a bird or something--and Ted said to me one day, "I've spent sixty-five thousand dollars on blueprints trying to lay it out so that DNR would
approve it, and he says I'm still nowhere." He said, "I cannot buy under those conditions." So ultimately I agreed to just sell him the land. Hopefully he's going to build a nice place there. I did sell the land partially because I owed the government so much money in the, because it all happened at about the same time. In all of the, the amount of money in taxes. Because I had always retained earnings from over the last forty years, or fifty years, or whatever it was.

LW: It all hit you at once.

HN: Of Nelis Nursery, this goes back to my father's day. So I had to get that, so that's one reason that whole check that I got from selling that land all went to Uncle Sam. The whole thing.

LW: Do you think that there is a perceivable generation gap in Holland?

SN: No, I don't.

LW: Ok, that's...

SN: You know, I was thinking, too. You asked if we were involved civically. I was on the tourism board for the Chamber and we were the ones that started the convention bureau. I was the first president.

LW: Oh really? Tell me about that.

SN: The Chamber of Commerce has these monthly meetings, and we were this little tourism committee. We never had any money. We had such a little bit of a budget.

HN: Two thousand dollars.

SN: The attractions were trying to get up more money so we could put an ad in AAA, for example, but we just didn't have a budget.
HN: Lou Hallacy and you...

SN: Mary Kempker, Dick Den Uyl...

LW: What year was this that it got off the ground?

SN: I don't know.

LW: Ballpark. Late-'80s, mid-'80s.

SN: I would say in the '80s.

HN: It was before we sold the land? Mid-'80s?

LW: That's a significant change, because they do a lot to promote.

HN: Sandy was the first president for a year or two. I think partially it was because of the fact that she had just come off being president of Circle Michigan, which was a state organization.

SN: So that would have probably made it '83, '84, or '85. Somewhere in there I think. I'm not sure. Life passes quickly when you're having fun.

LW: I asked your husband this question and now let me ask you this question. Can you describe a significant turning point in your life? Let's see if you have a different one than your husband.

SN: When I came down to Holland for that weekend? (laughter)

LW: Ah, the weekend that changed your life.

HN: Any others since then?

SN: A significant turning point? I don't think so.

HN: I told him when we sold the land.

SN: Well, that's from a business standpoint. I guess I was thinking of it from a personal
standpoint. I think from a personal standpoint was when we finally got our last one through college.

HN: I personally think, from a personal standpoint, is when we started spending more time down in Florida.

SN: Got our last one through college and...

(end of tape 1)

HN: ...Oriented to being behind a desk or operating it through the chain of command. I'm the type that goes from top one down to the bottom guy and work with him. That's been my problem since I've kind of sat back and that is I'd go right down to the source and talk to him. They want me to go through their boss, their chain of command, and they sometimes get mad at me for doing that.

SN: Harry drives a little red Spitfire, when we get back from Florida this spring, he comes tooling through the gates and that Spitfire comes in and the kids go, "Oh, no."

(laughs)

LW: As you see it, what role does Hope College play in the community?

SN: I think Hope College plays a strong role in our community. I think they are a very good influence in our community, and they offer many benefits. We're really lucky to have such an institution so well run.

HN: In fact, we're trying to work with something right now. We've been meeting with Kristi Van Howe.

SN: It's something not off the drawing boards yet, so we won't get into it.

HN: But we would like to work with Hope College in some capacity in the future on it.
LW: We've talked about Tulip Time. Role of industry--how has it changed in Holland from your point of view? You mentioned GE awhile ago, and that was a significant turning point in your evaluation. How about other industry and the growth of...

SN: Well in growth, look what it has done to our labor market.

HN: Holland's been a thriving town. With Prince Corporation and some of these others coming in. You know Prince is a younger organization than mine. It's hard to believe that. (laughter) They do a few hundred more million dollars a year than I do. About 900 million. (laughter)

SN: I think Holland is blessed because our industry is so diversified. When one segment goes down, we don't get hit like Flint or Detroit, because they're so directly related.

LW: To a particular industry.

SN: Theirs is cyclical, and ours is a little broader which I think is really good for the economic growth in Holland.

LW: Would you say that the concerns of Holland residents have changed over the last 50 years?

SN: I think so.

LW: How do you think they've changed?

SN: Well, they're more concerned about crime now. I, myself, don't even like to drive down River, like between 16th and 8th, at eleven o'clock at night.

HN: There are certain areas that have gone down.

SN: It used to be, we never, ever locked our doors. We wouldn't even think about it. And now when I'm in the house by myself, I don't even have the house open. We
have a fairly large house, and if I'm in one end of it, someone could walk in and I
wouldn't even know it. I don't think I'm alone. I think people in Holland are
generally concerned.

LW: The news report in the Sentinel yesterday would point at a concern with the suspect
picked up for the plan.

HN: I know that fella.

LW: You know him?

SN: Duffys.

HN: I golf with him. But, yes...

SN: It's a sign of the times.

HN: It's not necessarily just Holland, Michigan. It's all the way across the country.

LW: With growth comes good and bad. I should say for purposes of the tape, a student
was picked up for planning a murder on the south side of town (reference Sentinel,
12/4/97). I think I've kind of come to the end here. Any other remarks that you
have that we haven't covered? Topics? We have talked a lot about Dutch Village and
talked a lot about Holland. Any areas I've missed as you've reflected.

HN: No.

LW: Well thank you for taking time to chat with me today.

HN: Okay, all right. It's been fun.