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Nienhuis, Carolyn Oral History Interview: Sesquicentennial of Holland, "150 Stories for 150 Years"

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Oral History Interview with Carolyn Nienhuis

Conducted November 4, 1997 by Ena Brooks

Sesquicentennial Oral History Project "150 Stories for 150 Years"
EB: I'll just start by asking you to state your full name and your date of birth and the place you were born.

CN: My name is Carolyn Joyce, Essenburg is my maiden name, Nienhuis is my married name. I was born [date removed], 1928.

EB: The day after Christmas.

CN: Right, my mother’s birthday was Christmas day.

EB: Don’t we have the luck. Where were you born?

CN: In Holland.

EB: Your mother’s full name, your father’s full name, and include your mother’s maiden name.

CN: My mother’s name was Josephine Jekel, as we pronounce it Jaekel, another common pronunciation. And her married name is Essenburg. She was born east of Holland. My father’s full name is Jacob Essenburg, and he was born in Borculo.

EB: Do you have any brothers or sisters?

CN: I have one sister and she was born twelve years after I was.

EB: Wow! Was that an accident?

CN: Well, yes, it was. I’m sure my mother would have loved to have another child before that but...

EB: Your spouse’s name?
CN: My husband's name was Donald Elmer Nienhuis. He always hated his middle name. Even if he was living, he would rebel at that. He was born in the South Olive area.

EB: And the date that he died?

CN: He died on August 8, in 1973.

EB: Do you attend a church in the Holland/Zeeland area?

CN: Yes, I'm a member of Grace Reformed Church, which is north of Holland, kitty-corner from West Ottawa High School.

EB: So your family is all from basically the same area, the near Holland area, so you have a lot of recollection of this area. Why don't you start by telling me what your life was like as a child and how that has changed today.

CN: When I was a little girl, we lived on Lincoln Avenue, later on 7th and Columbia where the Pizza Hut is right now. I would say our family and all the families in the neighborhood were in the mid to lower income range. I was never aware that maybe we didn't have a lot of money, because everyone I knew was in about the same situation, and so I wasn't aware that there was some rich kid down the street and that I couldn't have the same things they had because we all had the same situation. Then we lived on East 13th, almost to Fairbanks Avenue. The whole area of Fairbanks Avenue has changed a great deal from the time I lived there as a girl. Where Smallenburg Park is, and the stadium, and the Hope College athletic field - was all just woods. There was nothing there. Maybe, there was an old home back in there somewhere. It was just very open. As a little girl, I can recall, during the depression when my mother and father couldn't afford a car, we walked everywhere
we wanted to go. We didn’t live very far from church, but there were aunts and uncles, or cousins that lived in the general area, and we walked everywhere. Since I was an only child at that point, probably four or five or six, I can recall both arms being very high - one holding my dad’s hand and the one holding my mother’s hand. I was walking very fast trying to keep up with them, because they were tall people. That’s what I kind of recall of that kind of situation of walking with them. Whether it was summer or winter, we walked. We just bundled up and went, because otherwise you wouldn’t go anywhere. Generally speaking, we weren’t too worried about locking doors. As I grew up, as a young teenager, we walked all over Holland. I would leave home and meet a couple of friends on a corner, and then we would walk a little farther and meet another friend. And so, maybe five or six of us would congregate. In the winter, we would walk over to Kollen Park where there was ice skating. Then we would walk back and maybe stop for hot chocolate somewhere. There was no concern about being afraid or walking the last couple blocks home alone. By the time I was married at 19, I was already getting uncomfortable. There had been just a few situations around town where people were harassed or that kind of thing. I was already beginning to feel uncomfortable walking alone on the streets. I recall that very distinctly. From very carefree to feeling a little uncomfortable.

EB: Why don’t you kind of expand on that? The fear differential - from when you were a child to when you were 19 - the fears that children and up to late teens have now compared to when you were 19.

CN: I think as a little girl and as a young girl growing up, nothing had happened that we
ever heard about... none of our friends ever were stopped by someone or harassed or anything like that. That just wasn’t done. Then I can recall, once when we were about 16 or so, two of us were walking down Lincoln Avenue, and a couple of guys in a car stopped and blocked us from crossing the street. We finally turned the corner and ran right into a friend’s home - barged right into the home as if it were our own, because we knew that’s how we could just get them to be discouraged and leave. I think that’s about the first time I remember that I had any qualms about walking anywhere. As I look at it now, as a person of 68 years old, even in this condo - I live behind locked doors, because of the society we live in. The strange happenings. The people who barge into your home. It’s so different. For my grandchildren now, they don’t know what it is like not to have doors locked and not to be warned "don’t go walk to the car alone out of the mall," that sort of thing. It’s just a far different society that we live in. I guess it took awhile for it to get to Holland. I’m sure that when I was young, those kind of things were happening in New York and Chicago and bigger cities, but eventually all these kind of things infiltrate all little towns.

EB: About your childhood, what different things about this city, about school, did you notice, as compared to today?

CN: I went to Lincoln School in the old building which you people wouldn’t have any idea what it might have looked like at that point. It was an old boxy looking two-story building. School was more basic. We played outdoors. I don’t recall a formal gym time. There wasn’t a gym. In high school, yes, but not in elementary. There wasn’t
anything like that. Just more basic education. When I think of it now, the children
have many more opportunities for alternative things that they might want to do, or
tings they might be interested in. That sort of thing wasn’t offered when I was a
child, in elementary. I think life for the children, even in school, the influences
around them, the people that they are with at times can be a dangerous situation at
times, depending on where they are, what school they are in and what age they are. I
think we had a much more carefree life as children, than young people do now.

EB: Did you attend middle school, or was that part of the grade school?

CN: We went to grade school through 6th grade. Then 7th grade was in a school they
called Froebel School. That building was somehow in the general area of where
Hope College campus is now, if I remember correctly.

EB: I think I recall seeing a picture of that, yes.

CN: I think that was 7th and 8th. Then we walked over to the high school. The old high
school. No, the junior high was probably just 7th grade. Probably, Froebel was just
7th. Then we walked over to the junior high and then the high school. By the time
we were in high school classes, we were going between the two buildings. One on
River and the other on Pine. And as far as getting to school was concerned, we
walked. The only kids that came by bus were the kids who came in from Overisel
and Hamilton. It was, of course, before they had a system of their own. From the
north, those kids came by bus. But anyone who lived in town walked.

EB: That could be quite a walk for some people.

CN: It was, yes. I walked from almost Fairbanks Avenue across town to the high school
off River. Went home at noon for lunch, ate lunch, and went back again, and then back in the afternoon after school. It was a hefty walk, but we were rather accustomed to it.

EB: Did you attend college after high school, or no?

CN: No, I did not. In fact, I did not finish high school. About half way through the 11th grade, I had caught a flu bug. It kept me out of school for three weeks. I had made a decision when I started classes that fall which was not smart. I had taken typing and shorthand at the same time. When it came to timed tests for shorthand and typing, as soon as I had the pressures, I just kind of fell apart. So when I had missed three weeks of school, it just looked like a mountain that I couldn’t get over to make up both of those. Plus the fact that my father had been ill for several weeks. My mother and dad were really in bad straights financially that winter. I made the decision to quite high school, and I went to work full-time. I had been working part-time for a place called Standard Grocer. They were a chain of grocery stores. This was where the wholesale things came in. I worked on packaging small things like candies and that kind of thing. I had done it part-time, so I went to work full-time.

EB: For Standard?

CN: Yes, for Standard Grocer. Whatever I made that winter, I contributed to my families coffers. Then in the spring, I finally started saving some of my own money, rather than giving it all away. So that colored my decision to quit. Then several years later after my husband passed away, I took GED tests and passed it. Now I have a certificate that is a high school certificate.
EB: Where was the Standard Grocer located?

CN: It was on River Avenue, just south of the railroad tracks as you are going out of Holland. I think Fris Office Supplies is just north of the railroad tracks. This building was just south of the railroad tracks. It was on the south east section. I can't even say right now. You know how you go by something and you don't pay attention, if the building is there or not; I don't even know it's there anymore.

EB: Did you attend Grace Reformed as a child?

CN: No, I went to Sixth Reformed Church. Most of the time as we moved around the east end of Holland, we were always fairly close to Sixth Reformed and that's where my mother and dad went when they were first married and moved into Holland. I went to that church until I was married.

EB: Were you married in that church?

CN: No, I was not, because the pastor had just left our church about two months before we were married. We had gotten to know the pastor of my husband's church and so we were married there.

EB: And what church was that?

CN: That's South Olive Christian Reformed Church.

EB: What role do you think the church has played in Holland's history?

CN: I would say it's really played quite a large role in the make-up of the city. For some people, I think they would say Holland was a pretty narrow-minded town. For a short period of my life I lived away. I lived in California. I really realized what people meant when I lived in Modesto. Then I would compare my life there to here.
I think it was prejudice, maybe, which a lot of people don’t like to hear.

EB: No, they don’t, but many have said that. Many people feel that way and many people don’t feel that way. It’s just the way you perceive things, I guess.

CN: I often said I felt that every person who was born like I, in Holland, and grew up and lived in this area, most all of my life, I think it would be good for everyone to live at least one year in a town very different than Holland. I think you gain a broader perspective and you gain more tolerance, more understanding, more compassion for other people, rather than a prejudiced attitude.

EB: Since you mentioned prejudice, do you think there is any of that within the different ethnic groups that are here in Holland, and was there ethnic diversity while you were a child growing up, and how has that prejudice changed?

CN: In my experience, the prejudice that I realized as a young child was more a prejudice of Protestants against Catholics than it was in ethnic groups. I don’t recall there being, in my experience, as much prejudice against people of another nationality as much as it was this difference in the faiths and the lack of understanding of one another. As the Hispanics came into the Holland area, by that time I was a young person raising my children and not as involved in the city as I had been as a child and a young person. That’s when more of the ethnic prejudice crept in. I think now, Holland has grown and has incorporated so many different nationalities, that I think in a sense it’s becoming less of a problem, but I’m saying that from a view point of a person who is as old as I am. I realize that for the young people in Holland right now, it is a real problem - the gangs and the things that I’m reading about are very
real. Peoples' perspective in this day is very different than it was fifty years ago.

EB: Do you think today that the prejudice is lessened or stayed the same, or changed from when the ethnic diversity came about?

CN: The prejudice as far as one religious group against the other, I think that’s faded a great deal. I hope that the prejudice among nationalities is changing, but I think that it’s not as much, it hasn’t changed or lessened as much with the young people, as perhaps with older people who have learned a little bit through life that we all have something to offer one another.

EB: How did you decide to attend the church that you currently attend now?

CN: We were going to a Christian Reformed Church and we were not entirely happy with some things there. Grace Reformed Church was a new church meeting in Glerum School. We decided we would give that a try. Since I was brought up in the Reformed Church and my husband was brought up in the Christian Reformed Church, it took some thinking and asking a lot of questions and a lot of soul searching on his part, more than it did for me. I think between those two denominations, the hard feelings were there. He had heard them, of course, over the years and so he had to deal with some of those things for himself. That’s what prompted us to make the change at that point. Even when I lived in California, it was only for one year, I just left my membership right here.

EB: What role has the Reformed Church played in your life?

CN: It’s just a really big part of my life. It always has been. When I was a child, life revolved around your home, your church, and your school, basically. Because my
parents came from the rural, farming families, that was the way life was for them. They carried those traditions over into my life, into the home I was brought up in. So that was a big part of my life. The activities of the church were a major part of our life. When I was very young, through the Depression, there wasn’t money to expand your horizons and go very far, so again the church was a very important part. As far as my faith is concerned, if it wasn’t for the training and the spiritual depth I gained in the guidance of the church, my life just would have been very different. Everything that has happened would have been a very different experience and my approach would have been very different, I think.

EB: What role does Hope College play in the community and what role does the community play in Hope College?

CN: Hope College brings a lot of young people into the town. That is part of what makes Holland a unique place. The young people that come in. It’s always been there. I went to Lincoln School and right across the street was Hope College. We walked through the campus a lot when we were kids, before it grew as much as it has now. It was just always a part. I think for the culture of Holland, it really has contributed a great deal. The performances, the plays, and all the things the College offers. I went to the concert that Mr. Lewis did a few months ago, on a Sunday afternoon at 4 o’clock, a recital. Those kinds of things, plus the Great Performance Series and the plays, have just really contributed a great deal. And the Vespers is something very unique that you just don’t have that opportunity somewhere else. I think it has really enriched the town that way a lot.
EB:  You said you walked through Hope College a lot, and you lived in the downtown Holland area? How has the college campus changed? How has it grown?

CN:  It has just built up tremendously from the time that I was a child. It wasn’t as beautiful - the walks and the lawns and everything - it was a little more than a path that we walked through and just the older buildings. Now, it has built up so much that when I do walk on the campus it is a real joy to walk through there. And to think, "Oh yeah, we used to walk through here." There were a lot fewer buildings and it wasn’t as manicured as it is now. It’s grown much larger.

EB:  Where did your parents come from?

CN:  My parents are Dutch in background. My father’s mother, I think, was from Vriesland. His father was the Gronigen Dutch. I can remember as a child hearing a lot of the kidding and jiving about the temperament of the two different groups of Dutch people. That’s kind of why that stays in my mind. My mother’s ancestors were also from the Netherlands. None of my grandparents came here from the Netherlands. They were all born here. It was, maybe, their grandparents, but I really don’t know exactly if it was their grandparents or their parents that came here. But my grandparents were all born here. There is no other nationality, it is all Dutch. I think my husband’s family is pretty much the same with the Dutch background.

EB:  Holland has been recognized as one of the top ten All-American cities. What characteristics, do you think, qualify Holland to be considered one of those cities?

CN:  I think that one of the things that people have said over many, many years is that they
feel that it is a good place to raise their children. Which says a lot of things. One person may feel that it is a little safer here than it might be in someplace like Detroit. Another person might be thinking that they felt that the schools are very good. Another person might feel that there is a Christian atmosphere that they really appreciated. So I think it’s different things. My brother-in-law was just here a few weeks ago from California. His wife was born and raised in California and had not travelled too far out of California in her lifetime. She was just absolutely taken with Holland. She loved the homes. She said, "I really could want to live here." She thought that the homes were just beautiful, and she thought that this would be such a nice place to live. Coming from California, she liked the idea that yards are rather open. We’re seeing fences a little bit more now than we did years ago, but she just couldn’t get over how open everything was. Another thing, I think that impressed her a great deal was the fact that there are not a lot of tract homes here, like there are in California. She had lived in one and said it was so refreshing to see homes as individual buildings rather than just exactly like everyone else on the block. It is really interesting when someone comes from the outside, so to speak, or from another area, and they just feel that it is such a beautiful town. And it is, I think, kept up very well. I think that Mr. Prince has done a lot for the downtown of Holland. And has probably encouraged and inspired others along the way. Many others have done things too, but I think he is the person we think of in the most recent years.

EB: Do you think he had a lot of say in the developments of Holland?

CN: I think he did influence it to some degree, perhaps more than some of us might
realized, because we are not involved with the council or other groups in the town. He may have had more influence than some of us were aware. There is always a lot going on underneath the surface that a lot of people don't know about. That may well have been.

EB: How has the role of women changed since you were a child to now?

CN: When I was a child, my mother was home. That only changed for a short time, when my father was ill, when I eventually decided to quite school. But other than that, my mother was home. My mother canned a lot of things in the fall. A typical Dutch family - there was a lot of baking. Always, mother was there. When I left for school and when I came home, mom was there. I think that was a stability that a child didn’t even realize was so special, because it was always there. Now I think that womens’ role has changed so much, because many of them work. They try to take care of children, keep their home, make that contribution to the family income, which in many ways, I see as a very sad situation. Children go to a babysitter so soon after they are born. I think that is very sad. The whole life of our nation and the demands of our country and taxes and so on has had a lot to do with women having to go to work. Some women choose to work, I realize that, but I think that a lot of women could really enjoy and feel fulfilled at home, if their finances would allow it. It has changed a great deal. When I was a child, I wasn’t aware if there were women in business; there probably were. It was just not something I paid any attention to. I think women’s goals have changed a lot and just society in general has influenced a great deal of that.
EB: Have you noticed any controversies in Holland over the years that may have affected the town?

CN: I suppose there have been some, but nothing comes to mind at the moment. I'm sure there have been some. There had to be. How can a town go on, year after year, without there being controversy? I guess the most recent one that comes to mind is the building that they talked about putting one place and now they are talking about it should go another place.

EB: The community center?

CN: Yes, and I'm sure those kinds of things have gone on. But I think that in general, I'm sure that I must have been aware of them at the time, but they just weren't major things in my life and they didn't stand out as something I really remembered a great deal.

EB: Jobs that you have held here? You talked about the job you had the grocer. Tell me about some other jobs you have had here in Holland.

CN: When the A&W Root Beer was an open stand, I worked there as a fifteen-year-old, I worked through the summer. That was a most enjoyable job. I was a carhop. We put the tray out on the car and that kind of thing. When I worked during the day, I worked inside and got to know the couple that ran the place. They were just an absolutely terrific couple. They never had any children of their own, but they took all us girls under their wing. He would just pack us into his car like sardines and he brought every single girl home after work, when it was night. If we were done at six o'clock, that was different, but when we were done at 11 or whatever, he brought
every single girl home, and he did not leave until he saw that she was in her home. They were just like a favorite aunt and uncle to all of us. They were a terrific couple. Then, I worked for the Klaasen Printing Company, which was on 8th Street. It was right across the street from the A&W Root Beer stand at that point. It was print shop and I worked with publications after they came off the press. I did begin to work a little bit with a linotype, and I was just beginning to get interested in that sort of thing. I left there and I went to Steketee-VanHuis, and I worked in the bindery department. At that point, the business was housed in the building just east of the Women’s Literary Club on 10th Street. I don’t know what is in that building now. I know the building is still there. That’s where I worked in the bindery department. Then, I was married and I think there were some part-time jobs here and there in a restaurant or a fast food place. I worked on the grill in some places - Jack’s. Then I worked for West Ottawa, in the library system. I was working there when I made the move to California for a year and came back. I worked for the Seminary for a time. I was alone by that time; my husband had passed away. I was responsible for my youngest son, who was then in high school, and I had to have something else. There just was not enough money coming in. I then got the job at Haworth, and I set up the library at Haworth. There wasn’t anything there. That’s one area that just stands out very bold in my mind that the Lord opened a door. I needed this job. I made some phone calls and asked companies if they had a library. Through my phone call to Haworth, an interview followed, and I got the job. It was just like the Lord kept opening those doors. It worked out. So I set up that library.
I did not have college, you see. I had gotten the G.E.D. certificate. I audited some Master of Library classes at Western Michigan University. So I got some good background. When I worked in the West Ottawa system, I worked in the libraries. My desk was next to the librarian's, and I had a one-on-one education from her. She will never know what she gave me. I told her that so many times. She could not possibly understand how much she gave me, because she taught me every step of the way. She gave me the very simplest thing to do then she gave me the next difficult and she built it up. Pretty soon she gave me fiction books and said I want you to catalog it. Then she would review what I had done, tell me what I had done wrong, and so on. Then she gave me nonfiction, and it just went on from there. It was just hands-on training and the auditing of the classes. The professors were very kind to me; they let me take the class, write tests, graded me. I felt very fortunate, because they could have said, "you can just listen and get what you can," but they allowed me to participate. That really prepared me for a basic in library and the love of it. So I set up the Haworth library. I worked there for thirteen years until I retired.

EB: What brought you to take those classes at Western Michigan University?

CN: It was my having been taught the basics in library and wanting to know more about the cataloging and classifying. That was a real joy to me - I loved it. I really enjoyed that part of it. That’s what prompted me to do that, to give me some more depth in my understanding so that I could take a hold of more material and process it properly. Then I audited another class in library computer, because I had no background in computer at all. The first time I took one of these computers home
and did some work on it and then took the stuff back, it controlled me totally. I just was sweating. [laughter] It was a very scary experience.

EB: I can see that.

(End of side one.)

EB: How old were you when you took those classes at Western?

CN: Cataloging and Classifying - I was probably in my early forties. The computer class was taken after I had started the Haworth Library, so I was probably fifty or fifty-one at that point.

EB: So would you say that your Haworth Library job was the job you enjoyed most of all your jobs?

CN: I like library work more than anything I was ever given to do, I loved it. The library work at Haworth was a real challenge, because now I was working with very technical material. I was classifying very technical material. The library was set up very different from a public library or a school library. There was nothing in it that was casual. Everything was technical and it was done for engineers, or management, or finance. We built up a vertical file collection, which were articles that came out of magazines. A lot of that was done with engineers in mind. We had audio-visual material; that was geared more toward management. It was just very different, unique. Working in a library for a corporation - you feel like you are in a very tentative situation, because if a company changes management and they don’t see any value in a library, your library could be pulled out from under you with one word. You have no recourse. This did happen to a few people. They had started a library.
They were working on it very hard to build it up and make it useful to the people of
the company, and the decision was made by a new president. He didn't see much
value in this. And these people could just stand there and watch employees come in
and pilfer, from our viewpoint, the material that you had worked very hard to
accumulate and make available to people. And it was taken all for their own use.
Being in a corporate situation, the pay is much better than it might be in an institution
or in a public library or in a school, but your job is also much more tenuous. You
really have not guarantee of anything. I realize that in a school, a high school
situation perhaps, a library is like a stepchild, and it may be the first place they will
cut people working there. It's the first place they look at to cut. In a corporation,
it's a pretty scary time on occasion. You find yourself, sometimes, verbally on the
spur of the moment, defending your existence. It's a challenge, but I enjoyed every
minute of it.

EB: Now, you volunteer at the Archives. Why don't you talk about that and if you have
any other places you volunteer. Also, if you are involved in any other organizations
or activities.

CN: I went to the Archives because it's kind of like a second cousin to library. I enjoy
processing. I did a lot of processing of church records. I love all that sort of thing.
I have just done some collections of an individual. That, too, I also find very
enjoyable. The hands-on is what I enjoy the most. As far as that type of thing is
concerned, I am working almost single handedly with the historical material from my
church. My working at the Archives has been like a classroom for me for working at
my church. All of the material is in an orderly fashion now, and I have a contents list. I just have not done the historical part of it or that kind of thing. If someone wanted me to look up something, I could go to it very quickly. I have enjoyed that a great deal. It has helped me to make the historical collection in my church more available and to protect it in a way. Similar to the way you have to protect the Archives. Another thing that I did at my church, when the church was first built and we were getting established, I set up the church library. And that too had been a good stepping stone for me for when I set up the library at Haworth. I work for Manpower, at Manpower. I went to Manpower and I said, "I would like to work just Tuesdays and Wednesdays." This was after I had retired. They said they had something at the Zeeland office that maybe I would enjoy. This was in the payroll department. So I went there, and I have been doing this for five years now. It's a challenge. It's different from library work, and yet it isn't. In library or in archival, it's always a factor, you want things in order - alphabetized in some cases, or you want them in order. That is the very same with handling checks. You want them in their numerical order, or you have to keep them in alphabetical order. It's just kind of a challenge every day. So two days a week, I do that. I like the situation with Manpower from the standpoint that when I'm going to be away for a few weeks, I tell them that I'm going to be away for a few weeks. I don't have to ask if I may have the time. That is an advantage when you are retired.

EB: I'd enjoy that also!

CN: Yes, I think you would. [laughter]
EB: So you are not really involved in any organizations beyond those?

CN: No, I am involved in my church. Another way, I chair the staff relations committee, which is a fairly new committee in my church. We are involved with working with the staff evaluations, being a support to them, being a liaison between them and the congregation. No, I'm not involved in any other organizations at this point.

EB: Have you noticed a generation gap in Holland between your generation and the generation of kids nowadays?

CN: Oh yes, there is always a generation gap. Some of the things that come to mind just pop right out at me: the loud music. I can remember coming down into my older boys' bedroom when they were studying. I opened the door and the music blasted at me. I said, "TURN THAT DOWN!" They said, "Why? I can't study if it's so quiet." "Oh, you're going to go deaf!" "Oh, Mother!" That's one thing. I remember when my mother and dad were my age that I am now and the things that they were concerned about with my children. I would think, "What are you so worried about?" Now I find that I'm on that end of that all. I'm looking at my grandchildren and the things they do and the places they go, and my concerns for them - with my children looking at me and they probably think, "Oh, mother!"

There is always that gap. I do think that I cannot really know what my grandchildren are living with, because my life as a child at their age was much more free of the dangers, the temptations, the problems that my grandchildren come in contact with. That also makes a gap in what I would maybe want to talk with them about or feel would be important. Their life is very different.
EB: How is just an ordinary day today different from an ordinary day when you were growing up?

CN: Doors were open. We ran in and out of each other's homes with much more ease. People were much more neighborly. When I was growing up, our home and our neighbors' home - there was more sharing of food with one another. Maybe not even because of an illness, but maybe they tried something different, baked something new, or made a different batch of soup and decided to share it with the neighbor. A much more family feel among neighbors. When I remember my mother and father-in-law, who were older than my parents, there was more time to visit in the afternoon, especially in the winter. They were almost all farmers, so the summer was very busy, but later fall, winter, and early spring there was time to sit for an afternoon. A whole afternoon to sit and visit and have coffee. There was much more communication in the home, because there wasn't television, and in some homes there wasn't even a radio. There was much more give and take. There was much more time spent at home together, because children weren't dashing off to as many activities as they do now. Some of which are good, and some of which I think are just a little overkill. But then, maybe, that's the Grandma part of me coming out.

[Laughter] Now, neighbors don't really know one another. For me, personally, part of the reason that I don't know my neighbors as well, is that it has to do with how we are always affected by our life and things that happen to us and how we react to that. I think I closed myself off from my neighbors more after I became a widow than I did before. There are a whole lot of reasons why you do those things. I just didn't
know my neighbors well. Part of that had to do with that I lived in Modesto for a year where I didn’t know anyone. I went shopping in a grocery store or in a mall and never would meet a person I knew. You become very accustomed to just doing your thing. You don’t even look for people you might know, because you don’t know many people around you. I think that affects your behavior later on. You continue to kind of maneuver in that mode where you are just doing your thing. You don’t even recognize most people around you. But no, I don’t think people are as neighborly as they once were.

EB: What was a turning point in your life?

CN: I think the greatest turning point in my life was when my husband died. I still had some children at home. I had to begin to deal with paying bills, which he had done almost exclusively. I knew what was going on, but I didn’t take care of it a lot; he did. I had to have a job that paid more money, because now I was the sole bread winner. I had to begin to deal with the whole grief process, which changes your life a great deal. I think that was the biggest change in my life.

EB: Tell me about someone important who had a great effect on your life.

CN: A lot of people. There are so many people who have had an effect, but one couple who have really made a lasting impression on my life are the minister and his wife at the Reformed Church in Modesto. Reverend and Mrs. Menning. They were just the most warm, helpful, accepting kind of people who just became very good friends. Even though I haven’t lived in California and they are no longer there, we keep up writing with one another. If I can go where they are, I try to visit with them for a
few days, or they try to see me if they come this way. They have just lived their Christianity. You just saw it in them. Just an exceptional couple. They’ve made a big impression on me. As a child, grandparents. There are so many over the years, but I think they stand out in my mind, as someone who has really influenced me.

EB: One thing that I forgot to ask you at the beginning - your children. How many were there? What were their names? Where were they born? When were they born?

CN: Now you are going to test my memory. My oldest son is Duane, and he was born in Holland on [date removed]. My second son was born [date removed]. He was born in the Holland area. Then my daughter was born on [date removed]. Then a son who was born [date removed]. And I hope I’m remembering all these right. Then we had a baby that we lost; she was born [date removed]. She was born a year and a day after that son, Curtis. I didn’t name them all, did I? I started with the first one.

EB: Name them in order.

CN: There is Duane, and then James or Jim, and then Cynthia called Cindy, and then Curtis called Curt, and then the baby we lost, she was born a year and a day after Curt, and her name was Kathlynn. She lived two days. And then in [date removed], my son Daniel was born. So we had six children in ten years. Right now, my oldest son lives up north near Mears. My second son, Jim, live in Wyoming, Michigan. He works for Herman Miller. His wife has a business of her own. She is just really an unusual business women. My daughter just passed away in January. She left two daughters, ten and twelve, and her husband. Curtis lives north of town.
He has two children, a daughter and an adopted son, a Korean. And Daniel lives north of town and he has two daughters, seven and nine. There are seven granddaughters and one grandson, and he’s the adopted one. My children had only girls.

EB: Wow, that’s really amazing!

CN: It is really interesting to me that as these babies came along - I remember one of them saying, "Well, maybe we’ll have a boy, mom!" There was never a boy!

EB: I guess I have no more questions for you. Do you have anything that you think would be important to add, or anything that you want to expand on?

CN: No, I don’t think so. I think the questions that you asked were interesting to me from the standpoint that I just didn’t know which way they would go. I hope whatever there is might be something that might shed light on Holland some day.

EB: Well, thank you very much for letting me interview you.

CN: Well, thank you.