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## Osterhaven, Eugene Oral History Interview: Sesquicentennial of Holland, "150 Stories for 150 Years"

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Oral History Interview with  
M. Eugene Osterhaven

Conducted February 20, 1997  
by John Maassen

Sesquicentennial Oral History Project  
"150 Stories for 150 Years"

Sesquicentennial Oral History Project  
Interview with M. Eugene Osterhaven  
February 20, 1997  
Interviewer: John Maassen

JHM: Well, Gene, where were you born?

MEO: I was born in Grand Rapids.

JHM: In what part of the city?

MEO: On the northwest side.

JHM: So what was your home church then?

MEO: Trinity Reformed.

JHM: Your parents had lived in Grand Rapids all their lives as well?

MEO: No, they were both raised in Vriesland [MI]. My mother was born there. My father was born in Grand Rapids. My father's parents moved to Vriesland when he was 15, so he was raised in Vriesland, really. They moved to Grand Rapids just before I was born.

JHM: I see. And you were the oldest child?

MEO: I was the oldest.

JHM: What was your father's occupation?

MEO: He was a meat cutter. He had a meat market.

JHM: He had a business of his own?

MEO: He had a business of his own.

JHM: Did you work in that shop, too?

MEO: No, he never let me. "Don't get into that stuff," he said, so I never did it.

JHM: It's interesting how parents of our generation wanted something different for their kids. That's so often the story. I assume that in those days your mother helped in the shop a little bit; otherwise at home most of the time.

MEO: Yes, she worked at home. Never helped in the shop.

JHM: Do you know how you happened to wind up in Trinity Church? Was that convenient for you?

MEO: Well, my folks lived in that area on the west side. I was born on

Jeannette Street just off Leonard, and Trinity Church was only about four blocks from where I was born.

JHM: You met your wife in Grand Rapids, too, I think you said.

MEO: Yes. We went to the same church and she was a classmate of my sister, Esther, so I knew her since she was a little kid.

JHM: That's quite a relationship to know your wife virtually all her life. I think you said you went to Grand Rapids Junior College, initially. What was the reason for going there?

MEO: Well, I did not like school. I was not really a good student all the way through grade school and high school.

JHM: That's hard to believe today. (laughs)

MEO: I worked sporadically. Sometimes I'd do quite well and other times I'd do very poorly. I wanted to get out of school. My heart was in scouting and I got into that because a cousin ran the Scout office in Grand Rapids. I went to camp every summer for about six summers and we had a marvelous band in Grand Rapids at the time called the Grand Rapids Boy and Sea Scout Band. Later on it was just called the Sea Scout Band, and I played a trumpet in that. It had the finest young musicians in Grand Rapids in it. In fact, some of the kids became Scouts so that they could just play in that band. We'd go to Chicago every year. In 1933 during the World's Fair, we went there for a couple of weeks and we played one whole week in the Court of the Hall of Science. It was an excellent outfit, and half of that band would go to camp every summer just so we could practice an hour a day and then serve as counselors. I was one of those who went to camp. My heart was in that, Boy Scouting, Sea Scouting, and that band in particular. I did not like school. So I planned to get out early and just play my horn a lot, and go down to the Grand Rapids YMCA quite a bit, and do other things I wanted to do, such as sailing because we Sea Scouts had a sail boat. But the night before registration at Grand Rapids Junior College in 1932, my folks told me I had to register for college the next day. I did some weeping and

wailing, but I did register and I spent a full year at JC. Then the next two years, I was a half-time student and spent quite a bit of time working too. At Steketee's in particular. I played my horn around quite a bit.

JHM: Did you get more involved in studies and so on?

MEO: Well, I had one excellent teacher there named Mildred Hinsdale who taught at JC with her sister. Their father, by the way, was a very famous professor at the University of Michigan, after whom a building is named. She was such a good history teacher that she got me interested in history, so I do well in that. I liked it. I liked her and so I worked hard at it. I had her for a whole year in European history and that sparked my interest. But the other stuff I took, I just didn't have any heart for. I didn't know why I was taking it, so I did it grudgingly. Much of my college life was that way. I finally graduated from Hope College as a business major, but I didn't have my heart in that either. I just wanted to make money because I had no money.

JHM: How did you make the transition to Hope? What was the motivation for that?

MEO: I went to Hope because we had family members who went there. My mother's oldest brother, John Van Zoeren, was a Hope alumnus, their first chemistry graduate, by the way, back in 1912. Another distant relative, Harold Leestma, was going to go to Hope, and his parents talked to me and Harold did too. So I started Hope as a junior when Harold started as a freshman. Most of my friends went to the University of Michigan or Michigan State when I transferred from Junior College.

JHM: It sounds to me as if your childhood and youth was not necessarily deeply immersed in the Dutch tradition. You were doing community activities like the Boy Scouts, you were going to a public school rather than a Christian School or Christian College, initially. Does that say something about your family background?

MEO: My folks were strongly Reformed Church minded and somewhat anti-

Christian Reformed Church minded, and at that time the Christian School movement was identified with the Christian Reformed Church. That's one reason why my folks were public school-minded. Then, too, at Union High School, which I attended, we had teachers who would openly speak about their faith. I remember Grace Thomasma, a famous senior session room teacher, an English teacher, talking about Christ, and I took courses in what they called Bible in Narrative, a whole year of that. The first semester was Old Testament; the second semester was New Testament. I think the public school system was a little different then than it is now.

JHM: Much different, I'm sure. In other words, if your parents had come from Friesland, the Netherlands, you might have had an entirely different environment. They would have been much closer to their ethnic experience.

MEO: That's right. My mother's family, particularly, the Van Zoerens, who came over with the Van Raalte group, but they settled in Vriesland, even though they were not Frisians themselves. But six families from Gelderland came with the Frisians and settled in Vriesland. My mother's family in particular was very interested in Americanization. They were not quite anti-Dutch, but almost. I never heard my grandfather speak Dutch, unless he had to, and he was born in Vriesland in 1859.

JHM: Yes, those are the early immigrant years, aren't they. The early settlement years.

MEO: Yes. They believed they had to be Americans, and they resented those who were, as they used to say in those years, typically "afgescheiden," although in the old country they themselves were "afgescheidenen," or separatists. But in this country they felt that the environment was so different that they had to be good Americans. This was a big issue in our family.

JHM: For the sake of whoever may transcribe this will you please spell afgescheiden?

MEO: Yes. A-f-g-e-scheidenen.

JHM: All right.

MEO: By the way, I never knew Dutch as a boy either. My mother couldn't even speak Dutch. But I did learn to speak it and read it later. So that's why I know a little Dutch now.

JHM: What impact did Trinity Church have on your development socially, spiritually, intellectually, whatever?

MEO: Well, my mother, particularly, was a pietistic Dutch Calvinist. My father was, too, but in a more quiet way. He was one of these Frisians who didn't make confession of faith till I was 12 years old, by the way. Although they always went to church with us. But my mother was what they called in the old country "Trend A", or "richting", that's the Kampen School, the early secession of 1834. She was not of the Kuyperian type, which was around 1880 and later.

JHM: For the sake of the transcriber Kuyperian is spelled Kuy...

MEO: Kuyperian, yeah.

JHM: You mentioned a Dutch word too. Can you spell that?

MEO: R-I-C-H-T-I-N-G, they called them richting A and richting B; Richting A or Trend A, was Kampen, 1834, and thereafter, and Richting B or Trend B was the Kuyperian movement, a neo-Calvinism, more intellectual, more organizational, and somewhat less pietistic. My mother and her family and, in fact, the early group here, Van Raalte, Vander Meulen, Ypma in Vriesland, were all of that first group, Trend A. So we were taught to pray diligently and to read the Bible every day, you know, and all the rest of it, church twice on Sunday and catechism and young people's, and that was life. The life was built around the church.

JHM: Was Trinity quite an Americanized church?

MEO: It was an Americanized church. It came out of Seventh Reformed, in which my father was baptized, incidentally, and it was started in about 1913, shortly before I was born, as an English speaking church. So in Trinity we had English speaking families too. We had a half a dozen

Hungarian young people, like my wife and so forth. They came to Sunday School there because it was a non-Dutch church. Most of the people were of Dutch background, but they wanted to be identified with Americanization and the English speaking group.

JHM: Were there pastors who had a particular impact on you in that time?

MEO: Yes. I'd say that Edward Masselink, who came when I was 12 years old, and then after being there a couple of years he went to the Christian Reformed Church, influenced me very much in impressionable years. He was a young guy, just came out of Princeton Seminary, and an excellent fellow. After him, we had Raymond B. Drukker, who made a big impression on both my wife and me.

JHM: He was an early youth leader, wasn't he?

MEO: Yes, he became denominational youth leader later on. But he made a tremendous impact on a lot of us young people. In fact, we had a young people's group there at one time with 80, I remember. I was very active in it myself.

JHM: Now, leaving Grand Rapids Junior College meant that you left home. Right? And you came to a dormitory here in Holland?

MEO: Yes I lived in the old Seminary dormitory in Holland, which cost me \$45 for that first year. 1935-36 I remember.

JHM: And as you said, you took a business and economics course basically. What happened to lead you toward the ministry?

MEO: Well... I'd always had an interest, of course, in religion, and had been very much attached to the church. But Dr. Dimment, who was the ex-president of Hope College and my economics teacher at Hope when I was an economics/business ad major, suggested that I go to law school. He said, "If you do that and get in with a good company, you'll soon make \$10,000 a year." (laughs) I didn't have ten dollars. It sounded so good to me that I thought I'd do that. So after graduation I stayed out a year, the year of 1937-38, working and sitting in on cases in the courts in Grand Rapids, and trying to save my money, planning to go to



the University of Michigan Law School where I had some friends attending that year. But the further that school year moved along, the less interested I became in law. I became so disillusioned after sitting in on court cases that I didn't know if I could stand law emotionally. I got to so dislike some of the stuff I had been hearing. At about the same time, different people talked to me about going to seminary. I remember some of them very well. One was a tremendous soft ball player in Grand Rapids named Cy Schipper. He was kind of a hero of all the young people on the west side there. He talked to me once. And Peter Leestma, the father of Harold, talked to me about it. A couple of other people did too, a couple of the ministers. I wasn't sure until seminary opened that fall. In fact, the two weeks before seminary opened, in 1938, I stopped peddling ice, I quit my job. I was so upset with my uncertainty. I went up into Northern Ontario with a friend on a canoe trip. We were gone two weeks, and all that time I struggled with that tremendous problem of where to go to school. I already had a deposit on a room at the law school at the U of M. But when I came home, I was still a little uncertain, although I was leaning toward the seminary. But the day before seminary registration, I got a call from the personnel man at the American Seating Company, asking if I would be interested in a job there. Somebody turned in my name, I guess. So I struggled with that that day, and I decided that I wouldn't take it but I'd go to seminary. So it was a last minute affair. I had an awful struggle.

JHM: We'll go back to that in a minute. I'm thinking about your transition from Grand Rapids to Holland. Were you well acquainted with Holland before you came here?

MEO: Although we lived in Grand Rapids, I never considered that our real home. Our real home was Vriesland where I had many, many relatives and both sets of grandparents when I was very young, and we had other relatives living in Zeeland and also in Holland here. So we'd visit in

Holland occasionally. I did know Holland. It seemed to me as though my identity was really with this Ottawa County Dutch Colony. That's the way I felt in my heart.

JHM: If you were to describe Holland in those days, briefly, what would you say?

MEO: Well, I always thought of it as a Dutch community. My recollection was that there were about 10,000 people here, when I was a boy, and they were all Dutchmen. I'd go down the street and I'd hear people talking Dutch yet, on occasion. I figured it was a nice town. I thought it was a very fine place. It wasn't as large as Grand Rapids, but I used to feel, as many of the old timers did in this whole area, that it was the city. As the Dutchmen used to call it, "De Stadt." People from Vriesland or Drenthe or Forest Grove or Overisel, they called it "The City." They'd come here sometimes for special purposes. I'd come here with my grandparents or other relatives, sometimes, for some reason.

JHM: There wasn't that much traffic then with Grand Rapids as far as the Ottawa County colony was concerned?

MEO: I'm not sure...

JHM: It was probably quite a long distance for them in those days.

MEO: I think so. Yeah, that's right. In fact, my grandparents, I remember, were a little shocked when I'd say at seven o'clock in the evening that I was going to Grand Rapids from Vriesland, or so. "Do you have time for that yet?" They had that mentality. No, Holland was the center...

JHM: And the safe place.

MEO: The safe place too. Oh yeah, yeah. In fact, when we first moved to Holland in 1945 we never even thought of locking doors. For seventeen years we lived on the South Shore Drive, and we never locked a door. Never. It was very safe.

JHM: What were your impressions of Hope College when you arrived?

MEO: Well, I thought it was small. Grand Rapids Junior College was larger in numbers, and my friends were at the University of Michigan and Michigan

State. They let me know that they were in a large school. So I thought it was very small. There were about 500 students, as I recall. I thought it was cozy, intimate. I felt like a soul brother, so to speak, when I got here, because it was composed of people largely of my own background. Dutch-Americans and from the Reformed Church, so I felt very much at home right away.

JHM: Any particular faculty members that you remember?

MEO: Yep. I had one tremendous teacher named Nella Meyer.

JHM: I had her too.

MEO: I was so shocked when I got here to learn that I had to take a second year of French. I'd taken one semester of French in high school from a Latin teacher whom I got to love, an old lady named Jennings in Union High School. I so liked her that I took a semester of French with her just to be with her. Then in Junior College, I took a whole year of French, my first year there, and I thought I was done with it. Then I had two more years at JC, taking a half course. I never thought I'd have to catch up on French, and I got here and I learned that I had to have two years of foreign language, so I was put into a French class. I was very angry at first. But in a couple of weeks, Nella Meyer had won me over, and I got to like French because I liked her so much. She made the greatest impression on me, I'd say. We got to be very close friends, and later on while I was teaching at Hope, she was still teaching at the college. When she died, I had that funeral and I'd see her very often. I loved Nella and she liked me too.

JHM: Her sister just passed away.

MEO: Her sister just died. I saw her very, very often, too. Marguerite. I knew the old people. I knew Nella's sister, Willie Reed, very well too. I was at the house there very often, especially when Nella got sick. She made a great impression on me. I'd say that Dr. Dimment did, too. I got to know him very well. I had him for economics in college, and then I also had him for my first year of Hebrew in seminary, because our

professor died during the summer and somebody had to teach us Hebrew, so Dimment did it. He was somewhat of a near genius and knew languages particularly well.

JHM: While you were in college here I suppose you went back for the summer and spent your time home.

MEO: Yes, I did. I'd peddle ice in the summer

JHM: Was that an adjunct to your father's business?

MEO: No, no. I worked for a private company on the west side the first two years, and then I worked for a downtown ice company the next couple of years, Consumers.

JHM: Now, you made the transition from Hope College to Western Seminary in good order. In other words, you did not take any time out or anything like that. But you had no pre-seminary training. How did that work?

MEO: [I took out the 1937-38 year.] Well, my last semester at Hope I took a course in theism, they called it "Theism," and we used a very good book by James Orr called, I think, "The Christian View of God and the World". I think I still have that book. It made an impression on me. I read it, I didn't read it regularly with the class, but before the exams I read it, and I thought, "Hey, this is something." That sparked my interest. So I did some heavy thinking that semester about theological issues with the help of James Orr, the author. No, I didn't have any philosophy. I had to catch up on all that later on in seminary at Western Seminary, and then in post-graduate school later on when I went to Princeton. I had excellent instruction at Princeton in that type of thing because my teachers there saw how weak I was in it. So I had personal instruction from John E. Kuizenga, who once taught at Hope College, and then Western Seminary, and went to Princeton in 1930 when there was a lot of trouble at Princeton.

JHM: Let's spell that a minute.

MEO: K-U-I-Z-E-N-G-A He took me under his wing and told me that he wanted me to do this and that, and so I did exactly what he told me to do. But

when I started Western Seminary in 1938, I had no Greek either, so I had to catch up on that. But I do like language, and in six weeks I had gone through the grammar and memorized a lot of vocabulary that our professor, Vander Meulen, told me to learn, and he complimented me for doing it so soon, so fast, and I got to like it. It was not a burden to me.

JHM: Now you said you were an indifferent student pretty much through college. What happened at the seminary? Did things change?

MEO: Yes. My first year at Western Seminary, I had a tremendous teacher named Albertus Pieters. I've never had a greater teacher than he. We had him not only for English Bible that first year, but also for Church History because Dr. Siebe Nettinga, the Church History professor had died that summer. So we had Pieters six hours a week all year. In Church History that first course we had with Pieters was Inter-testamentary History, which sparked my interest. Pieters was a masterful teacher, and he knew his material. Then we had Ancient Church History, and then we got into a little Medieval Church History with him, too, and I loved it. I also loved his way of teaching Bible. It captivated my interest, and motivated me, tremendously, to study. I think that was a big turning point in my life right there. Having Pieters as a teacher.

JHM: How would you characterize the seminary when you got there? Who were your classmates, for example? Was it a large class?

MEO: We had a small class of eleven persons, and, of course, there was a great spread of talents and gifts and what not. I had couple of classmates who were excellent students, namely Kenneth Hesselink and Robert Steegstra, and we had very close associations in that class.

JHM: Was the size due to the Depression do you think? Because you were still in the Depression when you started seminary, were you not?

MEO: That's right. I'm not sure about that. I don't know. I remember that a couple of years before, the classes were larger because I was living

in the Seminary dormitory. There were larger classes just before us, but we had only 11 in our class. One dropped out, but then we picked up one other, so we graduated with 11 of us. There were six professors, and, as I say, Pieters was the outstanding one. We had him only for a year. But after that first year, I went to see him very often, I got to know him so well. I'd talk to him. I even talked to him about girl friends and what not. He told me how to pray about that whole matter, too. (laughs) When he died, I spoke at his funeral on behalf of the students, and his wife gave me some very valuable books which I then turned over to the seminary library, including a 16th Century Calvin's Institutes.

JHM: I catalogued his collection at the Archives last fall or last summer. Quite a task.

MEO: Oh. I believe it, yes. But Pieters was a great man. A great man. A great mind.

JHM: Many faceted.

MEO: There were six in the faculty. In Old Testament, it was Dimment the first year and Lester Kuyper the next two years. In New Testament we had Jacob Vander Meulen all the way through. Church History, it was Goulouze the last two years, Pieters the first year. In English Bible and Missions, we had Mennenga the last two years, Pieters the first year.

JHM: As you developed your seminary career were you thinking in terms of the pastorate, or did you have more scholarly pursuits in mind?

MEO: I was thinking largely in terms of youth work. I liked young people. I was very sociable in those years. I'd been social chairman of the Grand Rapids Christian Endeavor Union that year that I was out of school. I was used to being around my peers, young people, through Scouting and at camp and all that. It was suggested to me that I go into youth work. Different people thought that might be my calling, so I had that in the back of my mind. I never thought I would teach. I didn't like school

well enough when I started seminary. So that was my last thought, to teach. I was thinking in terms of youth work largely. I didn't think so much in terms of parish ministry either. I don't think I thought at all about that, frankly.

JHM: Were your summer assignments quite pleasant?

MEO: Yes. I had a very good summer my first year in Dog Pound, Alberta, 40 miles northwest of Calgary, and that changed some of my thinking about the parish ministry, by the way. It was a very primitive area out there, no church, but I preached in three school houses with people few and far between. The next summer I was assigned to Ft. Miller, NY, 45 miles north of Albany. I liked that, too, in that old Dutch Reformed Church up there. So that may have changed some of my thinking about parish ministry, too.

JHM: And I assume as far as Holland, Michigan, was concerned, it still was pretty much the town that you remembered from early years.

MEO: Holland was about the same in 1940 or so. It hadn't changed much. No.

JHM: And you graduated from seminary in '40.

MEO '41.

JHM: Obviously in your senior year you had to do some real thinking about what you were going to do. What led you to the path that you did take?

MEO: As I neared the end of my seminary course here in Holland, I became more and more interested in study. I didn't live in the dormitory after my first year, I lived with an aunt and uncle; these Van Zoerens. He was a chemist and was starting to make out quite well. He had a very large house on 9th Street. They invited me there, and I had a good room and lots of time to study. I liked it more and more, just learning.

JHM: Were you becoming perhaps a little more of a loner instead of such a social individual?

MEO: Oh yes, very much so.

JHM: What was the reason for that do you think?

MEO: I think I just became much interested in the life of the mind, as some



would call it. I liked the books and I liked theology. I liked languages. I liked Church History very, very much, especially the history of dogma, and that's influenced me all my life: how doctrine developed. Then my wife had been out of school for two years. She came to Hope College when I started seminary, and after my three years at seminary she still had a year of college. We became engaged during my second year at seminary. When she started college I never thought we'd go together. I knew her well, but I just didn't think we'd be going together. But when I finished, she had a year, and she felt that she should finish that year, although I kind of wanted to get married. I didn't want to go to a parish alone. So I went on to school. Some of my teachers, too, suggested I go on to school. I was late in enjoying study, so I determined to go on. I had a close friend named Harry R. Boer who graduated from Calvin Seminary that same year. I'd known him when we were students together at Hope. He decided to go to Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia, and I decided to go to Princeton Seminary, largely because it had a new doctoral program which was supposed to "enhance the dignity of the American theological doctorate," a the literature read, I remember. The head of that program was John E. Kuizenga, a friend of the aunt and uncle with whom I lived in Holland, who had once taught at Western Seminary. I knew his name from some of my teachers who had him as a professor at Western. So that's why I went to Princeton. Also, I was given a scholarship to go there. I didn't have any money when I graduated, of course, and I got a very ample scholarship, which helped me a lot. I didn't know what I was getting into. I thought maybe I'd just be at Princeton for a year, I wasn't sure. I knew that doctoral program would take longer. But I thought, well, I'll see what happens at the end of that first year. But I liked the work more and more as I got into it. A very heavy program there, and a difficult program. I talked to my teachers there, I talked to four or five of them, and they told me that at the end of that first



year, which was 1942, that I should take the candidate examinations, a whole battery of exams, which I took, and I passed them. That's how I got into that Ph.D program at that school. I came home, got married, went back to New Jersey, lived there in a little Presbyterian manse, or parsonage, that summer, and served that little church, and got back into the Princeton program that fall.

JHM: You served a Reformed Church in that period too, did you not?

MEO: Yes, my first year at Princeton, I visited friends, Elton Eenigenberg and Rowland Koskamp, with whom I might have graduated had I not been out of school for a year. They finished at Western in 1940, and I knew them very well here at Western. Rollie Koskamp had a church only sixteen miles from Princeton. It was the old Third Reformed Dutch Church. I'd go there often, weekends, to see him and his wife, and I'd sleep there sometimes. I was there on Pearl Harbor day on December 7, 1941, when we heard about the bombing of Pearl Harbor. That shook all of us up, of course. During the course of the next year or two, Rollie Koskamp, who was taking work at Princeton, by the way, toward a master's degree, decided that he should go into the Army chaplaincy, so he did that. After my two years at Princeton, I took over his church. I discussed this with my professors at Princeton and with Rollie. He and I talked and prayed about this very often. He became an Army chaplain; I took over his church while continuing my studies at Princeton. Some of my teachers then told me that I should think in terms of teaching. I said I never wanted to teach because earlier I had hated school. They said, "That could change, too. Stay with the program even if you don't want to be a teacher." I remember very specifically, two of my professors who had come from Europe during the war to teach at Princeton, one from Germany, one from Czechoslovakia, said, we need fellows with advanced training in the ministry, too, in parish work. So I thought I had better stay with the program. I was so deeply involved in it. There were five language exams I had to take, three ancient languages, and

then German, and one other modern European language. Dr. Kuizenga made me learn to read Dutch. I was so involved with that whole program that I stayed with it until I had taken the comprehensive exams in the spring of 1945, while still in the church. By that time, Rollie Koskamp, my close intimate friend, had been captured in the Battle of the Bulge in Germany. He'd been made a war prisoner, and then he was tragically killed while a war prisoner, so that just shook me up. Already in 1944, when Hope College needed somebody to teach Bible and be college pastor, there were overtures that I come there. But Dr. Kuizenga, my revered professor, advised me not to take the job. He said, "I want you to read with me for a while," and he said, "I don't want you to go into a church-related college, because after the war," he said, "I think some of those schools are going to go under." (laughs) That was his word to me. Well, I listened to everything he said, of course. He was such a tremendous teacher and wise man, so I stayed with him. I studied for another year. But then, during the course of 1944-1945, I did accept the offer to go to Hope College, and we moved out there in August.

JHM: When were you ordained?

MEO: I was ordained on May the sixth, nineteen forty-three.

JHM: While you were at Princeton.

MEO: While I was at Princeton. I was ordained there and I was the Stated Supply of that Third Reformed Dutch Church in Raritan.

JHM: And that was which classis?

MEO: The Raritan Classis, at that time. It was a wonderful experience being there. We made many, many fast friends who are still our friends. The war was going on. I had a troubled conscience about not becoming an Army chaplain as Rollie Koskamp had become, or a Navy chaplain as Harry Boer had become. But I did what I was told to do. They told me to stay with the program. I was also in touch with some of the teachers here at Western Seminary while I was at Princeton, namely Drs. Mulder, and Kuyper, and Pieters would write me once in a while. I think Mennenga

wrote be a couple of times, too, and they all said stay with that program, so I did.

JHM: You had a number of mentors, didn't you? In other words, you certainly didn't do it by yourself. You had mentors all the way along.

MEO: At Princeton, I got to be very, very close to Otto Piper from Germany. He was the major professor of Jim Cook and Bill Brownson. His wife, too. She used to bring me a little bouquet of flowers, put them on my desk in my room, the first year, especially. Then Josef Hromadka from Prague, Czechoslovakia; these were great scholars. In fact, after my work was done and we were living here in Holland, they came to visit us here. They were almost like relatives, I got to be so close to them. John Kuizenga, too. Then, other teachers at Princeton I got to be very close to, especially Frederick William Loetscher who'd begun teaching at Princeton about 1905 or so. A very, very fine... a famous scholar. A couple of others there, too, with whom I talked about what I should do. One old retired professor, William Park Armstrong. I had him for two courses my first year. Even though he was retired he took a few of us in. He'd started teaching at Princeton about 1899, I think, and was a great scholar.

JHM: So you had a tie to an earlier generation, didn't you?

MEO: That's right. These people were of the "Old Princeton School," which was very rationalistic--I've written papers on that, by the way--all very rationalistic, all very Calvinistic in certain ways, and extremely scholarly. I'm thinking of the Princeton before 1930, when they had the big change there. So I had some teachers who were of that "old school." I had others there, too, whom I might mention. Henry Snyder Gehman in Old Testament, I took three courses with him in Hebrew and Greek and, a couple times, he made us do Latin translations, too. I got to be very close to him, too. Talked to him a lot.

JHM: You came back to Holland, of course, to start teaching at Hope College. You were married, of course. You had two children, I believe?

MEO: We had two children when we came back, right.

JHM: And how old were they?

MEO: One was two and one had just been born on [date removed], 1945, the year we came back.

JHM: At that time the war was still on, but it was certainly moving in a certain direction, wasn't it?

MEO: Germany was out of the war at that time when we came back. We came back on August 14. As we moved across the country in our car, pulling a trailer with our stuff, my wife carrying the baby in her arms, we heard about the Japanese surrender on August 14, 1945.

JHM: And you rented a place to live here in Holland?

MEO: Yeah, we rented a cottage first for a couple of months, and then we bought the home of a retiring professor at Hope College, Albert Lampen. We bought their home on 14th Street and lived there for three years.

JHM: You found yourself in a different situation now in Holland having a family. Your relatives were still close at hand, I assume. In fact, her relatives as well.

MEO: Oh yes. My wife's relatives were in Grand Rapids. I might mention that I had a lot of relatives in Holland here, cousins and so forth. I didn't mention that when I was a college student, when I came in 1935, I was so poor that I came with twenty two dollars and fifty cents. Although I peddled ice all that summer, I gave most of my money to my folks. But I'd go to have meals with my relatives, cousins and an aunt and uncle. A free meal, and I was so naive that I thought that they were happy to see me. (laughs)

JHM: Well, they were probably proud of you later. Were they pretty much in the reformed church?

MEO: Oh yes. Quite a few of them went to Hope Reformed Church.

JHM: Where did you start worshipping when you came here?

MEO: Third Reformed. And First Reformed, too. I went there quite often. First and Third.

JHM: Those were, of course, convenient to the campus, too, in those days.

MEO: Yes, they were close to the campus and I had friends who went there. Later, when I was a seminary student, I taught catechism at Third Church for two years.

JHM: Now, you came to the college, and you started in the fall of 1945, in september. Then, during the first year, the roof must have fallen in, as far as enrollment is concerned. Do you want to talk a little bit about that.

MEO: It was a hectic year. John Hollenbach wrote a paper on that for a group at HASP, Hope Academy of Senior Professionals. I was in a little group of about fifteen of us, we all did a little paper. I had to do one on the Hungarian connection of Hope College. John Hollenbach, did one on that first year, because he came in 1945, just when I came to Hope. We had about 400 students when we began the year, and I think there was something like 1,200 or so at the end of that year, with all the service men coming back. So, although I was the only Bible teacher in September of '45, by the Spring of '46, I think we had two or three others teaching, helping me, including Albertus Pieters. Then, the following year, John E. Kuizenga. So, we had some learned faculty members in that Bible department.

JHM: Were some of the local pastors called in to defray, too, as part time teachers.

MEO: Professor Thomas E. Welmers, Dr. Welmers, helped me read papers. He didn't actually teach. We had one or two other persons called in to help teach Bible. I can't recall any active pastors who did that right now. Bill Miller came and taught the second year. He taught here for a few years. And we got a man from Hungary named Zsiros who came here. He came here Christmas Eve, 1947. I met him at Union Station in Grand Rapids when he and his wife and little boy arrived.

JHM: Were you fluent in Hungarian?

MEO: No. My wife could speak it, but I could not. It's a very difficult

language. But quite a bit like Hebrew. With prefixes and suffixes.

JHM: How recent was her family's immigration?

MEO: Her father and mother came as teenagers at the turn of the century. But they always spoke Hungarian in the home.

JHM: And there was no Hungarian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids?

MEO: No. There was one in Kalamazoo. I just preached there last Sunday, by the way.

JHM: Was her experience quite ethnically oriented?

MEO: Yes, it was. Almost all her relatives were in Hungary. Just one aunt came to this country. All the rest were in the old country. There was a small group of Hungarian people in Kalamazoo (tape ends)

JHM: You talked about Dr. Zsiros coming to the faculty. How did that happen?

MEO: That's a long story. I had come to know about the Sarospatak Reformed Academy; that means "muddy stream," by the way. I came to know about that in the school year of 1941-42 through a graduate student at Princeton who came from there. He contracted tuberculosis and he was a favorite student of professor Otto Piper, who came in my room one afternoon and made me go with him to the sanatorium 45 miles away when I was very busy with my own studies. But, Piper wouldn't let me say no. So I accompanied him to meet this fellow, whom I really didn't know before that. But we got to be rather good friends. I visited him with Dr. Piper different times. We went to his funeral together, and we were in his room the day he died. This fellow told me about Sarospatak. During Christmas vacation, when I came back home, I asked my future father-in-law where they got their ministers. This was a test question. He said right away, Sarospatak. So that rang a bell. Then, during my first year teaching at Hope, some of the women students, a group of them, came to see me once. They said they wanted a project, and they wondered what in the world they could do. It was right after the war, and these were wonderful young people who wanted to do something, to help somebody. So we thought, and I did some letter writing, and we

thought it might be well to choose a school of the same religious background as Hope College, and preferably not from the Netherlands, because we had so many connections with the Netherlands at that time. So, I suggested that there was a big reformed church from Hungary that I had known a lot about and heard a lot about. Maybe we should see about a school there. So I did some letter writing for them, and it was suggested by different people that we choose Sarospatak, the oldest Protestant school in that part of the world, founded in 1531. So we sent a letter to the school and they responded. It was just like a message from heaven, because they were in such poor shape, almost destitute. Then our letter came. They'd been praying, wondering what to do. They'd been so ravaged during the war. A friendship was formed, and the students at Hope College did a tremendous piece of work getting clothing together and packing them in boxes that we'd be getting from Steketee VanHuis's, Printers. Then, later on, we made our own out of lumber because we needed large boxes. We shipped over seven tons of clothing to Hungary.

JHM: That was in what year, '46?

MEO: It began in the spring of '46, and it ran until 1951.

JHM: What you're telling me then is Dr. Zsiros came as a result of your interest in Sarospatak, not presaging him.

MEO: The school year '46-'47 was the year the relationship with Sarospatak grew very rapidly. By the early winter of '47, Dr. Zsiros came, as I mentioned, by Christmas Eve, 1947, he and his wife. I was supposed to go to Hungary with my family, if possible, but the situation in Eastern Europe was deteriorating so that it became impossible, but it worked out well.

JHM: Did that drive also impact the city of Holland, the people of Holland? Or was it pretty much a campus experience?

MEO: First it was a campus experience, and then because of the needs in Eastern Europe, the students sent out a call to the citizens of Holland



who cleaned out closets. So our students, many, many students, I think scores of them, went through town picking up bundles on porches.

JHM: Is that right.

MEO: And there is one joke because some stuff had been put on the porch for a dry cleaner, and that got picked up and shipped to Hungary (laughs). One of my own sweaters went to Hungary during that way, too, by mistake.

JHM: It started with a clothing drive?

MEO: It started with a clothing drive, and then because of the need for money for shipments, too, and even cash, so that the church bell could be repaired, the bell of the church right next to the school, the old Reformed Church in Sarospatak, the church got into it. The classes of the Synod of Michigan approved this as a legitimate benevolence and the Pella Classis did, I recall, and I think one of those in Northwest Iowa. Then the Christian Reformed Church got into it, too, the Holland-Zeeland Deacon's Conference of the Christian Reformed Church. So a lot of money was contributed and it ran into thousands of dollars. This was used for medicines, shipments, we sent some cash in, and school supplies, and so forth.

JHM: Then things began to shut down, right?

MEO: Yeah. In 1948, the Communist Party took over the government in Hungary. There was an agreement that year that, whereas over 1200 schools of the Reformed Church in Hungary would become nationalized, the four historic schools would be untouched. These schools were Sarospatak, Debrecen, Papa, and Budapest. Debrecen is sixty miles from Sarospatak, south of Sarospatak, Papa is in Western Hungary near Austria, and Budapest is a newer school. These other older three schools all go back to the 1530's. They were organized as evangelical schools. Budapest, 1855, but still it was the school of the capitol, so the Communist Government promised that these schools would be untouched. Three years later, they reneged on that promise, and the high schools in Budapest and Sarospatak were closed down as church schools, the Gymnasium, and the seminaries



were closed. The gymnasiums were nationalized and Sarospatak's English college was closed, and the Peoples' Institute was closed. Only the high school remained, and that was made a public school. In Papa, too, everything was nationalized, the seminary was closed.

JHM: When that happened, of course, that ceased any relationship between Hope and Sarospatak.

MEO: No relationship with Hope College anymore. But my wife and I kept it going personally. We kept corresponding with these people. They were allowed to teach in the school, although they could teach no Christian doctrine, nor could they go to church. But they could still teach.

JHM: And their mail was not censored?

MEO: Mail was censored.

JHM: How about incoming mail?

MEO: I don't know about mail going out of Hungary but mail coming into Hungary was censored. I know that because my letters were censored and money was taken out, and the recipients were warned never to let their friends in America do that again.

JHM: Were you able to do any Christian witnessing in your letters? Would that be censored out? What did they censor out of your mail do you think?

MEO: Well, they would read what I said, and I was very careful what I said. You see, I didn't want to get into trouble or get them into trouble, either. I was told by my friends there to be very careful, and Dr. Zsiros was here. He couldn't go back, by the way. The faculty over there warned him not to go back, so he stayed teaching at Hope and finally died in this country.

JHM: Is that right. What a fortuitious opportunity for him in a sense. It's tragic not to go back but at the same time it saved his life.

MEO: Yes, and his disposition was such that he would have been in deep trouble in Hungary. He would have been in prison or probably killed or something, because of his disposition. Other people there could take it

better than he could, the change.

JHM: Going back to your Hope experience in terms of teaching, what were the requirements as far as Bible was concerned, initially? Then let's talk about what your duties were as chaplain.

MEO: The students had to take a course in religion each year, one course, either semester each year. The first year was the life of Christ that I taught there. The second year was the Book of Acts and some of the Epistles. The third year was Old Testament History. The fourth year was a course at first called "Christian Evidences" and we changed it to call it "Philosophy of the Christian Religion." Then we had electives, too. I taught some of the electives.

JHM: Suddenly you had a different type of student coming in. Most of them, I suppose, were related to the Reformed Church, but still, a much broader scope. How did they react to the Christian courses?

MEO: There were some with whom the college had some difficulty. On some of these I had to call on as college pastor, because their background was altogether different. But some others who came in from "the outside," so to speak, with a non-Reformed Church background, and in some instances a non-Christian background, these people were converted. I can give names of people who got to be leaders among the students. Some of them, for example, became great athletes at the school. I got very close to these fellows, and we had radical conversions. One of them, for example, was responsible for getting the money together for Dykstra Hall at Hope College, Gene Campbell, who's now in heaven. He got married to Delores Freyling, and he was just a wonderful guy. He came from a non-Christian background in Muskegon. He was a great football player, captain of the team in his senior year. Another all-Conference player was Robert Collins, "Rip" Collins they used to call him. He got to be a coach in Grand Rapids. He came from a strongly anti-church background. He was converted, too. And others like that.

JHM: What was your role as chaplain?

MEO: I was chairman of the chapel committee. We planned the worship for daily chapel which was required at that time.

JHM: Was that committee student or faculty?

MEO: It was a combined student-faculty committee. I was on it and Mrs. Snow, the organist, and possibly one other faculty member some of the time, and then two students. Often they'd be persons who were going to go into the ministry or actively religious.

JHM: At that time, of course, it was a required chapel service each day. There was an active YMCA and YWCA program, which was really a Bible study program.

MEO: Yes, I was in charge of those. My wife was in charge of a group called Kappa Delta. They were girls interested in religious education. I think Trudy (Maassen Vander Haar) was in one of those. I'm sure she was. I can see here in the picture, yet.

JHM: How long did you continue at Hope before you...

MEO: I taught at Hope full time from 1945 to 1950 and then in 1950 in the fall, I started teaching the middlers at Western Seminary.

JHM: So you didn't really take a "lector" position at that point. You were just on contract, so to speak.

MEO: At the seminary? Yes, there was an emergency at the seminary. The first year students, consisting of men like Lambert Ponstein, Bud Ridder, and another group, -I think Bud Van Eck, a large group, were in that first year seminary class. They were very restless for reasons I am not sure of. Well, one was a new building going up and the talk of a new building. The president was very busy with planning for the new building, and he was getting older, too. These students petitioned the board that they have another instructor for their second year of theology.

JHM: Was John R. Mulder teaching theology then in addition to his duties as president?

MEO: Yes, so I was asked to come to the seminary. In fact, I was on the

executive committee of the seminary board at the time, too, as college pastor across the street in Hope College. So there was a lot of discussion and talk about what to do about this student petition. These were strong-minded students, so it was decided that I should teach that year of 1950-51, so I did. Then the following year, I taught them again.

JHM: In addition to a full responsibility at the college?

MEO: I cut down on my class work at the college, somewhat. Usually, I had 16 hours of teaching at the college, besides the work of college pastor. The work of college pastor involved me in much, much counseling with students, too. Hours of counseling. It was really... When I look back I think it was very unwise of me, if not just plain stupid, to try to do both those jobs and also preach about every Sunday, too, so that we had bread on the table at home, as they say.

JHM: In those days we all wore Superman capes.

MEO: I think so, yeah. But I was more than busy, and I have very deep guilt feelings, when I think about now, how I neglected my own family. I have a letter in my file, which I wrote to the administrative committee of the college board at one time, telling them how busy I was. One of the leading students on the campus, he was the greatest quarterback Hope College ever had in football, his name was Nick Yonker, came to talk one evening, and we talked two or three hours. He had to talk. He'd been a serviceman and I had a lot of work to do. In fact, night after night I'd work until one, two o'clock. It was very unwise. I wish I could do it all over again. But I was cheap help. I just felt called, I better do it, I had the energy to do it, so I tried to do it.

JHM: What were the circumstances that brought you to the seminary in a full time capacity?

MEO: In 1952 I began teaching full time at the seminary. There were tensions between me and the president of Hope College, for one thing. Maybe this isn't the greatest reason, but I was told by the President of Hope

College at that time, that we should never have anything said from the chapel platform, Dimnent Chapel at Hope College, that could not be said in any of the other 600 Christian colleges in America. I said, I can't tell people what they can say and what they can't say. I was the chairman of the chapel committee and I was chaplain. He pounded the table and told me that again.

JHM: That's even hard to interpret, isn't it?

MEO: Oh. It's impossible. I could talk about this for an hour. So there was great tension. I think that he wanted me to leave the college, because he told some people at the seminary that I should teach in the seminary. In fact, he even bragged about my teaching. I don't think he meant it. This is dangerous to say, but he said that they hadn't had a teacher of religion at Hope College like me since Albertus Pieters who taught there in the 1920's. That was nonsense, I'm sure. At any rate, he wanted me to leave. I was uncomfortable with him. I felt that he didn't have strong Christian principles. That's a long story, too. I recall that one of the other professors, whom I very much honored at one time, said that college president was the greatest opportunist in Holland, Michigan. Instead of being given a little \$200 raise in salary or \$300 raise each year one year I got a raise of \$100. I couldn't live on it. I had several offers from churches at that time. I could have gotten twice as much. I couldn't feed my family. My parents, my wife's parents gave us money, a couple of thousand dollars each, at one time, just so I could pay bills.

JHM: That's a disgrace, isn't it?

MEO: It is. In fact, a cousin of my mother, Roy Hoven, in Detroit, who was going to a large Baptist church in Detroit and married Hattie Vande Bunte, said to me once in the presence of George and Florence Cook from First Reformed Church in Detroit, very prominent people there, wealthy people... When he asked me what I was making at Hope College and I told him, and I think at that time it was \$3200 a year, he said, "That's a

disgrace." He came from this area. It just about did me in. But when I was given a raise of \$100 at one year, I interpreted that as an invitation to leave the school, so I wrote a letter to the executive committee, and then I got a little more of a raise. Well, others on the faculty, who had come in when I did, some who didn't even have an advanced degree, got a bigger raise. I was doing really a double job. I talked to Mrs. Marguerite Prins and Gerrit Van Zyl, full professors at the college whom I knew very well, and asked them what to do at one time, because, I said, "They're only going to give me a hundred dollar raise." I said, "I don't want to argue for money." I said, "I used to say I'd never ask for money for a raise in salary," but I said, "I can't live on this. I've got to preach every Sunday." I'd get home from Chicago, I'd preach in Chicago often, one o'clock in the morning, and I had to be on the chapel platform at eight the next morning for college chapel. They urged me very strongly to fight for a raise (laughs), such mundane stuff I have to talk about. So I did. I wrote a letter and then I got a raise. In fact, at one time I talked to every member of the executive committee of the college board and I knew them well. Titus Hager, Dr. Peter J. Kriekard who brought me into the world, Jack Prins, and somebody else I can't think of now, they all told me to stick to my guns and don't worry, don't worry what you're told by the college president and these fellows were on the board, you know. They said, "Just do your work. We know what you're doing."

JHM: Was there an obvious vacancy at seminary then?

MEO: No there wasn't. I was taking over the work of Dr. Mulder, who then started teaching Homiletics, preaching. But there were students in the seminary who felt that he did not have adequate background for these veterans coming into college and seminary.

JHM: I might also just add that in the research I've done he was swamped, suddenly, with administrative responsibilities, the GI Bill for example. The Ten Clay farm out in Dakota (laughs).

MEO: Yeah, I remember that now.

JHM: All of these things just swamped him and he wasn't prepared for that.

MEO: He was too busy to teach and he didn't study any more, the students said. So, students like Glenn Bruggers and others made a fuss about that, and so I started teaching. When I got to seminary I could give all of my work just to my teaching, just study and teaching, beginning in 1952.

JHM: Were you appointed a lector then?

MEO: I was lector then, and I became a professor at the end of that school year in 1953.

JHM: So very quickly you changed to the professor status. That was rather remarkable, wasn't it? Isn't a lectorship usually two years?

MEO: I don't know. Of course, I'd been teaching part time in the seminary before that.

JHM: So they knew you.

MEO: Then in that summer of '53, in fact, I left before school was out, as soon as I was through with my lectures I gave my exams, took my exams with me, I went to Europe and I spent from May through August in Europe, at Gottingen and Basel, you know, schools, just packing in all I possibly could. Basel is B-A-S-E-L. There were some great teachers there, world famous, Karl Barth and Oscar Cuhlmann, and Walther Eichrodt in Old Testament. In Gottingen, Otto Weber... Gottingen G-O-(umlaut over the O)T-T-I-N-G-E-N... there was Otto Weber, and a famous New Testament man named Jeremias, Joachim Jeremias, and Ernst Wolf from whom I learned an awful lot.

JHM: How were you involved in that situation? Were you a student on a program?

MEO: No, I was just an auditor. I was a post-doctoral student. I could go to the professors and I was invited to a lot of professorial colloquies, that type of thing.

JHM: You already had your doctorate a while?

MEO: I got that in '48 at Princeton?

JHM: And what was that degree?

MEO: A Th.D, a doctor of theology. So I was in the full swing of theology. I loved it. I loved the reading and loved the meeting with students and loved meeting classes. In fact, I still do. I still fill in for men here at Western Seminary when they're gone. I did this year again.

JHM: So when you came to the seminary the paucity of the students due to the war was over and there was a large number of students, a larger percentage of veterans and some very strong personalities that came through the school.

MEO: Oh yeah. Very strong. They made themselves heard.

JHM: Can you pick out a few that were particularly significant in your memory?

MEO: Well... yeah, Lambert Ponstein I mentioned, Bud Ridder.

JHM: Was Robert Schuller one of your students?

MEO: Yes, in college. Arvella, too, in college.

JHM: You didn't know him in seminary then.

MEO: I knew who he was. I got to know him well. I didn't have him as a student. In fact he and his wife went to Hungary with me a few years ago.

JHM: I didn't realize that Arvella had gone to Hope College.

MEO: Oh yeah, she was there. At least for a year, because I had her in class. There were other very vocal students. I'd have to do some thinking. A lot of strong minded people, Jim Pfingstel, Bill Jellema, even John Hesselink.

JHM: There was a period when there was almost a rebellion on the part of a coterie of students. People like Arie Brouwer, and...

MEO: That was later. I was very deeply involved in that, too. Oh man, you can't imagine.

JHM: I had the interesting experience of charging Arie Brouwer when he was ordained. I was given a commission by the classis, to be rather



specific. (laughs) I don't know if you want to make comments about...

MEO: Throughout the fifties there was a lot of unrest in the seminary. A lot of unrest. Those who were most unhappy about it, I guess, were probably the president himself, and Henry Bast, Dick Oudersluys, Les Kuyper, myself.

JHM: You were all more or less on trial.

MEO: We were all on trial. It got to be so bad near the end of the fifties that one day Arie Brouwer and Dick De Witt and Ron Brown came to our home on Southshore Drive on a Saturday morning, and they sat and talked to me. They were all going to leave the seminary, they told me. They were so unhappy. Well, I urged them to stay around and I said we'll have a course in theological method next semester if you want it, I'll teach that. I thought I could get permission to teach it. I said you can do what you want to in there. So we had that course on how to do theology. These were very bright fellows, and we had a wonderful time in that course. I know Dick Rhem was in it, too, and we had about 12 or 14 in that class. But things got worse and worse. In the spring of '59 there was a student uprising. So the board was called in. At the end of that board meeting, unfortunately maybe, the dean of the seminary, who was one of the professors, was relieved of his position. He took a job in Second Church, Zeeland. Jim Baar, Sr. said to me after the board meeting (he was on the board at that time), he said, "Well, we put out the bonfire, but we're going to let the house burn down." (laughs) I still recall. The tensions were so great and the students all... in fact, I had to be called before the board too, several of us faculty members did.

JHM: What were they looking for?

MEO: I don't know. I remember the students lined up, at least quite a number of them, in front of the board in one big row in the center commons at that time, and they were being interrogated. I couldn't hear what they were saying because I was outside the room at the time. But I know that

the next year was just as bad. Then there was suspicion on the part of some of the board members that there was collusion between some of the faculty and some of the students. I was a counsellor of Dick Rhem, so Dick Rhem and Henry Bast and I were all interviewed, and there was a court reporter taking everything down in shorthand. They didn't have tape recorders in those days. They asked different embarrassing questions. I'd been saying to the students when they complained to me, "See the board. Don't talk to me. See the board. I don't want to get in trouble."

JHM: It was really theological interpretation, wasn't it, to a large extent?

MEO: Somewhat, I guess.

JHM: Some pietism, perhaps?

MEO: Some of that, yeah.

JHM: Incidentally enough, none of these individuals went in the same direction once they got out.

MEO: No, no, no. At that time, although, they were very, very orthodox.

JHM: They went into five different directions almost.

MEO: But at one time during this period, during the fifties, Henry Bast called me. (He wasn't on the faculty yet). He said, "Hey, Gene. I want to warn you." I said, "What's that?" He said, "You're accused of heresy. You're going to be investigated." I said, "By whom?" He said, "The board." I said, "Well, make sure it's a good one then." So I was investigated, and it's a sad story. The board divided that large class of over thirty into four groups, with a board member meeting with each group, to ask the students what the problems were. The board members had the student notes and I gave my own notes, too. I was cleared. Then the students started going after each other to find out who turned in such a report, and it was a student to whom I'd given a D, whose wife was a secretary to the president, and so that was a very unhappy situation for everyone involved, especially for the president.

JHM: I would assume that was the low point of your teaching career.

MEO: That was the low point of my teaching. There were other attempts to harass me and to make life miserable. I'd just as soon not go into some of that, where I was told, just before a class, for example, that I was in deep trouble, that I might lose my job, stuff like that.

JHM: And students had the effrontery to approach you with that?

MEO: Not students. This was the president of the seminary.

JHM: Oh my word.

MEO: I seemed to get along all right with the students, at least most of them.

JHM: I thought maybe these trouble-making students... See that was about the time when innate respect for those in authority was beginning to break down, too.

MEO: Oh yes. But it was worse ten years later.

JHM: I'm sure it was.

MEO: When our seminary president was a student, then the students liked to flex their muscles, too. But I'd get along with them all right. I got along with them ten years before that, too.

JHM: I'd like to get back now to Holland and its environment and your experiences there. You came to Holland with two little children and, of course, you had two more who were born to you. Where did they go to school?

MEO: They went to the Holland Public Schools as elementary students and three of them went to Holland Christian and one of them went to Holland Public High School. Holland Christian High School that is.

JHM: I understand you have a son who's on the police department here in Holland?

MEO: He's a reserve police officer.

JHM: That's not his full-time occupation.

MEO: No no. He works in the office at Howard Miller Clock Company.

JHM: Oh does he? I understood he was a full-time police officer. Does he have a special interest in law enforcement?

MEO: Yes, he has. We have another son who's a circuit court judge, county judge.

JHM: Where is he located?

MEO: In Eaton County. He lives on the outskirts of Lansing and that circuit moves into the City of Lansing somewhat, too.

JHM: And your daughters are where?

MEO: One daughter is in Grand Rapids. She's a school teacher, her husband's a professor at Calvin College. The other daughter lives in California. She's a housewife.

JHM: Where in California?

MEO: Thousand Oaks.

JHM: Oh yes. I know where it is. A week from today we're going to California. You, of course, moved then to Southshore Drive. Was that the time that you transferred your membership to Central Park?

MEO: Yes, it is. It was in 1948.

JHM: You've spent all your years there. Your wife has been very involved there, I understand?

MEO: Very involved in the church. Yes, we spent all our time there. We lived on the Southshore Drive for seventeen years and we moved here. Fellows from our church built this house for us, by the way. Good fellows. So honest that we didn't even know what we'd pay for it when we asked them to build it. We didn't have to know. I don't operate that way anyway. We're still members of Central Park. My wife has strong connections there with the women's groups.

JHM: You, of course, have seen a lot of changes in Holland. Comment first of all, if you will, on the changes you've seen in the churches.

MEO: Well, I think that the churches, as far as I can tell, are not as much parish churches as they once were. You know, where you have a group of people who seem to have a kind of bond or are bonded together.

JHM: That's why we lost Bethel. People don't walk to church anymore.

MEO: There's not that old loyalty to the tradition anymore or to the

congregation, so far as I can see on the part of most of them. Especially the younger people who... I think that the interest now seems to be on program.

JHM: What do you have to offer me?

MEO: Yes. What can you offer me? It seems to me a rather selfish attitude on the part of many people. We're living in a consumer society, we often hear. People want that in church, too. What have you to offer?

JHM: Very competitive.

MEO: Very competitive.

JHM: Coming from the Crystal Cathedral, I thought I was exposed to a lot of entrepreneurship, but when I got to Holland, I discovered there's even more here.

MEO: (laughs) Henry Bast used to complain to me about the competition in the church life in Grand Rapids and here too, especially in Grand Rapids, and I can see what he meant now.

JHM: And you have to live away from this area for awhile to realize how different this area is. Even at one point a certain smugness about the strength of the church in this area.

MEO: Yeah. Oh, there are tremendous changes in Holland in the fifty years that we've lived here now. Tremendous, I can't get over it. Now we don't go away for a day without locking our doors. I've had two canoes stolen in Holland here. My younger daughter, who's lived in Europe for two years, one year in the Netherlands, one year in Hungary, went to school in Hungary as a high school student, a very, very strong girl, strong-willed and so forth. She was attacked, assaulted, beaten on the street. The guy tried to drag her into a barn one night when she was walking alone when she was a college student.

JHM: In this area here?

MEO: In this area. It was right near the college and she was all beaten up. They never did find out who it was. She said she'd never forget his face. He was a person who'd moved in, a minority group. The great

granddaughter of Dr. Kriekard, who brought me into the world and who was an elder in my home church, was all cut up by someone about ten or fifteen years ago here at Hope when she was a Hope College senior. I think she had to have something like 300 stitches. It was so terrible, the fellow cut her so badly, her face and arms and what not with a knife. Tried to attack her. So it's a different ball game.

JHM: You retired from the seminary in what year?

MEO: '86.

JHM: So you were very much involved in the upheavals of the late '60's, early 70's and so on. Did that have much of a direct impact on the seminary at all?

MEO: In the late 60's, I can't see that it did so much. We had rather strong leadership then with Bud Ridder and then Hesselink.

JHM: People who understood what was going on.

MEO: Yes, they understood what was going on. I can't say that it affected the seminary so much, except that we did experiment with (I'm tempted to say "fooled around with") a bi-level, multi-site program.

JHM: Yes, I remember.

MEO: One seminary, two sites, New Brunswick, NJ, and here, which didn't work out at all.

JHM: One president.

MEO: One president. Didn't work out at all. Some of us didn't like the idea from the beginning, but we went along with it. Then after a while it fell of its own weight. But, it was a noble experiment, I must say. But the attempt to make students live there and here didn't work out, especially with married students with families and what not.

JHM: What was the condition of the seminary when you left it in the early '80's? John Hesselink was president at that time?

MEO: No. When I left in '86 Marv Hoff had been president for one year. Things were looking good, I'd say, when I left. John Hesselink was a very strong president. He had the confidence of the church and things

were going very well. He was a good scholar, a very fair administrator, very honest.

JHM: Were you wrapped up in the women's issue, women's ordination issue, at all.

MEO: I never got deeply involved in that. No.

JHM: As you think about the chapel program at Hope years and years ago, and the chapel program as developed now, would you like to comment on that?

MEO: I like what they do at Northwestern College yet in Orange City. They have required chapel. But I think it's impossible here at Hope today, or at Calvin today. I'm very close to Calvin College and Seminary, too.

JHM: Is Calvin still trying to do it?

MEO: No. They can't do it any more.

JHM: Some very striking things have happened at Hope in the last three years. Would you like to comment on that in regard to chapel?

MEO: Well, I believe that it's good to give young people as much freedom as they can handle, so I like voluntary programs. I know that about ten years ago or twenty years ago there were scores of different groups and societies, many of which were Christian, at Hope College to which students belonged. Because I attended some of them. I was invited as guest to give little speeches and so forth. Then I know, too, that these last couple of years Hope has had a very strong chapel program and that there's been a revival a year and a half ago? I think it was very genuine, very good, very wholesome. They've got a strong chaplaincy program there, I should say. A fellow called Boersma, a woman and then the Dean of the Chapel. So there's a lot of counselling going on, and I think that Dr. Gordon J. Van Wylen was a great, great college president, administrator and colleague, very wise in the way he handled things.

JHM: He engendered confidence in the people.

MEO: And also the students. Most of the students, I'm sure. Even most of the faculty, if not the great majority of the faculty. So that, for example, the liquor problem in the dormitories was handled so wisely, I

think. Finally, they turned that down. But I think it was handled so adroitly that not too much ill will was created, as has happened in many schools.

JHM: It's obvious that the gift of Max Boersma and his wife almost revolutionized the chaplaincy department. And it's obvious that, here you were, trying to carry on a chaplaincy program on a part-time basis. Even until four years ago we had only one chaplain. It was an impossible situation. I say that the person who walked away from it prior to this group could have walked away with his head high.

MEO: Oh, I have very high regard for Gerry Van Heest.

JHM: It must be difficult for him to see what has happened, but he ought to be grateful, too.

MEO: Yes, he did a great job; he did a lot of work there. A hard worker.

JHM: That gift made it possible to enlarge the chaplaincy. A God-given thing.

MEO: Another tremendous gift that God has given Hope College is the people who run the athletic department. I've got a close friend who was my student at Hope fifty years ago who was the greatest end in football they ever had, they used to say in the old years. He was the best in the whole conference for three years. His name was Clair De Mull with whom I've done a lot of canoeing over the years. He's one of my closest friends; he has said to me that he doesn't think there's a college in America with an athletic department like this one here, so far as Christian witness is concerned. I don't care how many games they win, nor does Clair.

JHM: Even in this most recent event, his five hundredth game, Glenn is giving all the credit to the Lord. That is remarkable. I would say myself, and you might want to comment on that, that Hope is more avowedly Christian today than it was thirty years ago.

MEO: I believe it. I think about this a great deal. In fact, it's my life. We've got so many family involvements. My Uncle John gave them a



fortune. In 1959 he gave over \$600,000. It was the largest gift they'd ever had. Many other relatives have put money into the college; even I've got a little in there.

JHM: You might comment on this, however. This great movement is a wonderful movement at the college, but it is not directly affecting the Reformed Church in any great way.

MEO: I don't think so.

JHM: I think a large proportion of these people are going to other churches. I think that's a challenge for the Reformed Church, to try to garner these young people.

MEO: I think that something like 17% of the Hope College students today are members of the Reformed Church. I think it's about that.

JHM: But even Reformed Church young people are being attracted to other fellowships.

MEO: Yeah, that's right. They've got other fellowships. I know that, too. But I think that the athletic department, for at least the forty years that I have been with the school, have been a tremendous help to the religious program at the school. They've helped the chaplain and so forth.

JHM: And the role models are presented in such wholesome fashion. You can't say there are really "jocks" any more. They are students as well as players. It's a remarkable thing.

MEO: They've got a lot of other excellent faculty who are strong Christians, if I may so say. My niece is one of the deans, Nancy Miller, and we know her very, very well, and she's a very strong church person.

JHM: I might just comment that I've always been amazed how well our three colleges have done in what has been less than a favorable atmosphere for the small liberal arts college.

MEO: They've done very, very well.

JHM: Well, I think we should be winding this up a bit. I know your wife and you have been very busy in the church and in the school. Are there

other areas in community life that you were... I know that you were involved in Boy Scouts, even in more recent years. You're a member of Hope's Academy of Senior Professionals as well.

MEO: I dropped out of that this year. But one can't do everything. I thought that I would give what energy I have left to try to help the school in Hungary, Sarospatak, which went back to the church in 1990.

JHM: That's right. We didn't pick that up.

MEO: 1990. A committee was formed of which I was chairman. The president of Calvin Seminary was our secretary, but I had to do most of the work, of course. Since I retired I had time to do it. We've raised a lot of money, sent over a million and a quarter dollars in cash, cold cash. Thousands of books which I've got at discounts up to 90%... (tape ends) This rather famous old school is now going strong again. Last year it was named seventeenth best high school, or gymnasium, in the country out of 240, and of all the church-related schools, including a few score Roman Catholic schools now, it was number one, the best. They have a strong English department, too. In fact, they're a dual language school, a five year course, in which the kids study everything in English, every thing. The medium of teaching is English. There are a few Christian Reformed teachers teaching there, too, by the way.

JHM: You mean from this country?

MEO: From this country. The seminary has seven or eight full time professors and twelve part time teachers with 145 students. They just graduated about 33 this last year, and my wife and I were there in September and October, when they had what they call the "big" graduation. That's when students are commissioned to go to churches, the graduates.

JHM: And is the church in Hungary in position to start supporting the school again?

MEO: Hardly yet. We were told seven years ago, "Give us five years and we'll be on our feet, but that has not worked out. The transition to a market economy is too complicated, too difficult. So the country is still

poor. Unemployment runs at 20% in Northern Hungary where Sarospatak is. Inflation has been running at 28% a year and the country is poor. It's trading partners are worse off than they are, except for Austria to the west, but to the North is Slovakia, to the northeast is the Carpathian Ukraine, to the east is Romania. To the south is the former Yugoslavia, and we know what has happened there with Bosnia, and Serbia, and so forth. So they're having a hard time.

JHM: The impression I have is that most of the aid from the United States originated in Western Michigan with your associates. Are there other avenues of aid that have been funneled in?

MEO: The Netherlands has given quite a bit of help, too. In fact, there are a number of Dutch churches that have adopted Reformed Churches in Hungary. I know two or three of these. One of these is just a few miles outside of Sarospatak. The Dutch churches sent other help, too, especially to Romania, outside Hungary. But in Romania there are over two million ethnic Hungarians, about half of whom are Reformed, and the Dutch church has been concentrating on Romania lately. They've sent them considerable help. But the need is so great there that the help that has been sent, while appreciated and while it has kept the church alive, is, you might say, a drop in the bucket as what's really needed.

JHM: Are they ecumenically related to international Reformed bodies and so on?

MEO: Yes, they're all a part of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches.

JHM: Do they get a hearing in that body?

MEO: They get a hearing, but not much else. A lot of letters have been sent, however, by officials of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches out of Geneva, Switzerland. In fact, I was active in that for ten years myself, five years of which I was recording secretary in this country, the North American-Caribbean Area Council. So I know that movement, that group, very well.

JHM: If you were to sum up your career, what three accomplishments would you

be most grateful for or proud of, if you can use that term? I don't know why I put out three, but...

MEO: Well, I'd say that by God's grace, I got to love my work of teaching theology and the students who were learning it. I got to love it, and I got to love them, too. It's by pure grace, I'm sure, because my heart isn't that full of love otherwise. Even today, when I fill in for Hesselink or Kaizer at the seminary, I feel good about it. I love it. So that was my chief accomplishment. I loved it.

JHM: From my perspective I would almost say that your Hungary connection must be number two.

MEO: Yes, I would say that connection with Sarospatak, Hungary in God's providence (and Margaret never pushed me into it, I must say parenthetically, but she always helped me, especially with the language when we'd go over there. She'd help a lot). But yes, that has been a tremendous blessing in my own life and is something for which I'm deeply grateful, that we've given them such a tremendous encouragement.

JHM: You will probably be remembered for that even more than your seminary career, as distinguished as it was, because it was unique. It was different.

MEO: Another thing that has given me great satisfaction has been that I grew up with a canoe paddle. When I retired from the seminary I was given a canoe paddle with the names of over eighty students on it whom I've taken canoeing, most of whom I took free.

JHM: How did that work out? I used to hear about that but how were they selected, what happened?

MEO: Well, I used to say I would take anybody who was sure he wanted to go, and who could rough it, and who wouldn't get sick of it after the second day. Many people think they'd like it, but after the second day they want to go home.

JHM: Was that your primary sports interest?

MEO: Canoeing and swimming. I loved water. I grew up with it in a Boy Scout

camp beginning in 1928, and I've very much at home in the water, especially in a canoe. It can be very dangerous at times on high rivers and all that. We could have drowned people at different times, in rapids and what not. But we never had a serious accident, and I've taken over a hundred people out, I'm sure.

JHM: What is the last time you went canoeing, or are you still doing it?

MEO: Oh, a year ago last June. I came down the Sand River in Ontario for the 25th time, and that's a river that drops 623 feet in thirty miles, so it's rapids or waterfalls, but beautiful, beautiful. Very few people do it because not many can do it, you know, in skill or in strength. Not that I've got so much strength, but I had strong people with me.

JHM: And you've got good life jackets.

MEO: Many a time I've been in the water. But you have to have the right equipment, the right people, the right know how, and the right area. Four things have to be right. I've gone thousands of miles. I've taken some people all the way to James Bay through Canada. I love it, still love it, but I'm getting older. It takes a lot of strength to portage.

JHM: You are in good physical shape though, aren't you. You are 81?

MEO: Yeah, 81. I've been blessed. When I retired from the seminary they had a little something at the seminary banquet that I wasn't aware of. Dave BAST gave me a paddle with 84 names on it, burned into the paddle, and money to go down the Colorado River. I wondered, at the time, if they wanted me to drown or something. (laughs) I went down the Colorado River in a little rubber raft. The Grand Canyon. It was very nice of them, I appreciated it. They wanted to show their appreciation for these trips.

JHM: Do you have other hobbies or special interests?

MEO: No. Just helping Sarospatak. I like the woods. I like to cut wood.

JHM: And reading, no doubt. You do a lot of reading.

MEO: I do a lot of reading. I love to read. Every morning I usually read a psalm in Hebrew with English next to it. I read a chunk of the New

Testament, sometimes one chapter, sometimes a half chapter. Some times two chapters in Greek. I love language. I read the same thing in Dutch, and then I do my prayers in Dutch almost every morning. I've got all the books in my room there. But this last week my eyes are bothering me so much, so just before you got here, I called Dr. Arendshorst.

JHM: That's a good idea.

MEO: I guess I have to use drops oftener or something.

JHM: You've had cataract surgery?

MEO: No, never have had any trouble.

JHM: That's not a problem?

MEO: No. My psalter which is worn out is so small, the print is so small, I have to strain to see it. So I have problems there. But I love to read and to think about stuff.

JHM: Is there anything else you'd like to share before we...

MEO: I'm just very, very grateful for a wonderful life that the Lord has given us in His service.

JHM: We call that a serendipity, don't we.

MEO: Yes, it's been a wonderful life. The motto, I think, of my existence is what the Reformers called *Coram deo*, which in Latin means "presence of God," that we live in the very presence of God, before His face or before Him, and that we should keep him in mind all the time. This is in Calvin. It's in Luther too. It was in Augustine earlier. But, especially, Dutch Calvinist pietism, which was also found, by the way, in Hungary. Over 3,000 Hungarians studied in the Netherlands, most of them at Franeker in Friesland, or Utrecht, during the course of 150 years. They brought that back with them, too. It's a type of puritanism, but not just puritanism; it's more pietistic, and that's the center of my life, I should say. There's some of it in Scotland and in England.

JHM: Well, we appreciate your giving all this time, its going to be very

valuable and we'll just turn it off right now.

MEO: Keep working on it, John. It's tremendously important.

### Initial Contact Form

Name: *Maurice Eugene Osterhaven*

Date of birth: *12/08/15*

Place of birth: *Grand Rapids, Michigan*

Mother's name (include maiden name): *Mattie Lucinda Van Zoeren*

Father's name: *John Osterhaven*

Siblings' names (include birthdates if known):

*Esther Rose Sonneveldt* [date removed]

*Wilma Ann Tangenberg* [date removed]

Spouse's name (include wife's maiden name): *Margaret Nagy*

Date of marriage: *06/11/42*

Place of marriage: *Grand Rapids, Michigan*

Children's names (include dates and places of birth):

*David Earl* *Princeton, NJ* [dates removed]

*Ellen Jane* *Princeton, NJ*

*Calvin Eugene* *Holland, MI*

*Janice Elizabeth* *Holland, MI*

Date of death: *NA*

Place of death and burial: *NA*

Religion and church membership: *Central Park Reformed Church, Holland, Michigan*

Schooling and/or other training:

*Stocking Elementary School, Grand Rapids*

*Union High School, Grand Rapids Class of 1932*

*Grand Rapids Junior College, 1932-1935*

*Hope College, Holland, Michigan Class of 1937*

*M.Div Western Theological Seminary, Holland, Michigan, 1941*

*Th.D Princeton Theological Seminary, Princeton, NJ 1948*

*Basel and Gottingen, 1953*

*Sabbatical at University of Utrecht, the Netherlands, 1962-1963*



Residential history (list all residences chronologically, noting the dates lived at each):

*Grand Rapids, MI, 1915-1941*

*Princeton, NJ, 1941-1943*

*86 E. 14th St, Holland, MI, 1945-1948*

*1792 Southshore Dr, Holland, MI, 1948-1965*

*999 Morningside Dr, Holland, MI, 1965-*

Occupational history:

*Played trumpet for weddings, etc.*

*Steketee's Department Store, Grand Rapids. Part-time while in Junior College*

*Delivered ice in summertime, Grand Rapids, 1935-1938*

*Stated Supply, Third Reformed Dutch Church, Raritan, NJ, 1943-1944*

*Professor of Bible and Chaplain Hope College, 1945-1950*

*MI Professor at Hope College and Western Theological Seminary, Holland, 1950-1952*

*Albertus C. Van Raalte Professor of Systematic Theology, Western Theological Seminary, 1952-1986*

Membership in clubs and organizations:

*Member of Board, Gerald R. Ford Council of Boy Scouts of America*