11-11-1997

Postma, Don Oral History Interview: Sesquicentennial of Holland, "150 Stories for 150 Years"

Ena Brooks

Oral History Interview with
Don Postma

Conducted November 11, 1997
by Ena Brooks

Sesquicentennial Oral History Project
"150 Stories for 150 Years"

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Interviewer: Ena Brooks

EB: First I'll ask you to state your full name, and where you were born and the date of your birth.

DP: My full name is Andrew Donald Postma, and Andrew is a family name. My father, and grandfather, and great-grandfather also had it. I was born [date removed], 1929, actually in Grand Rapids because there was a hospital in Grand Rapids, but I grew up in Holland. My family was living here, so they just went to Grand Rapids to have me, my mother did. I grew up in Holland.

EB: Who were your parents?

DP: My father's name was Andrew, and he was a building contractor. At that time, he was actually more involved in real estate development and that type of work in the 1920s. My mother's name was Ruth Evereen Barber. She was an outlander and came from Petosky, Michigan, where her father had owned a drug store that he and his father had founded there in 1884. He was involved with and part owner of the Petosky Evening News, and had been mayor of the town at one time. So, my mother had quite a different kind of a background, and she was certainly not Dutch. She was Scotch-Irish and English. It made an interesting change for her to come to Holland. She went to Kalamazoo College to be educated and was a teacher, and moved to Holland to teach, and that's where she met my father. They were married, as our family story goes, they were married on July 12, 1927, and two hours later, I was

born and two years later also, they hastily add. Their wedding date and my birthdate coincided. The two big things that influenced people of our generation and our era were the Depression and World War II. The Depression came in the fall of the year I was born, and my father, like almost everybody else in that era who was in business, had a lot of money outstanding. He was living on the paper economy that was prevalent at that time. So when the Depression came, he was wiped out, quite literally. He managed to hang on to some property, and how in the world he kept it during those Depression years, I just simply don't know. It was difficult, they transferred titles around among the family members. My grandfather had a building business, and my dad went back into the building business with him, but from 1930 until 1936, they would not have a single contract to build a single structure of any sort. At one time, my grandfather had been quite an active builder in town, one of the better known ones. But for that many years, they just existed on repair jobs and very modest kind of work because nobody wanted to build. They didn't have any money to build. Finally in 1936, they got a contract to build a house for the circulation director of the Holland Sentinel, a man named Orley Bishop. That house still stands at the intersection of Central Avenue and State Street, where they run into one another up there around Twentieth Street. It's a little white house over on the corner. That was the first job they got after the Depression. It was a godsend, and I remember they all celebrated. My grandfather, because he had been a little active in local politics, got a contract to build a big state hospital in Cutlerville over near Grand Rapids. By that time, things were beginning to ease a little bit, and business

was getting better, so they were able to continue to survive. But my dad never went back into the real estate business. He continued on in the building business after that because it was a little more reliable. For most everybody, certainly in Holland, and really throughout America as I know now, the Depression didn't end until World War II came along. That's what really inflated and rebuilt our economy, which is a tragic kind of a thing--you have to depend on a war to make you economically healthy again. But, that's kind of the way it happened in those days. Now, do you have other questions, or should I continue to talk?

EB: You can continue to talk.

DP: I should probably look at my prompt sheet here. In the era of the thirties--you know it's interesting, I was thinking of this the other day. It is hard to believe how really kind of naive and non-technical our world was. For example, people still delivered ice in horse-drawn carts around town. We would follow the ice trucks, and the guy who delivered the ice would jab off little slivers of ice with his ice pick, and we could take that and suck on it in the hot summer. Aeroplanes still were enough of a novelty in the late 1930s that when the weekly mail plane flew over from Grand Rapids to Milwaukee, many of us would run out to see it fly over, and the event was regularly reported in the Holland Sentinel. The roads were mostly gravel once you got out of downtown. Out where we lived, on the corner of Twenty-Eighth Street and Central Avenue, there were no other houses. We were the only house there. My dad had built it in 1927 as a wedding present for my mother, and at that time, he had owned almost all of the property from there to Thirty Second Street. And, of course after

the Depression he lost most of it, but meanwhile, there wasn't anything there. Now, of course, it is completely residential. A lot of the roads were not through. At that time, and even up into the nineteen forties, one of my good friends was named Paul Kroman. He lived on State Street, almost exactly parallel to our house, right across, parallel to it on State Street. So, he lived just south of Twenty-Eighth Street, or where Twenty-Eighth Street ultimately would be. Right then, there were vacant fields. In the morning when we got up early to go away on trips, and I'll talk about that in a little bit, I could look through the fields all the way from Central Avenue to State Street to see if the light was on in his kitchen window, then I'd know he was up. And if he wasn't, if I didn't see a light, I'd have to call him on the phone, usually waking up his parents. That was how empty the land was then. The roads were all gravel. I thought about it this morning, down here where the little park is right across the bridge on River Avenue, Van Bragt Park, I believe it's called, was the town dump. That's a big landfill. That's where they dumped all the garbage and everything and filled it in, because mostly it was just a swamp. That's what they did with the land. And where the Brewer's City Coal Dock was part of it, it was a huge, big, expensive, big expanse of reclamation area, and that was a place where we used to go when we were a little bit older to shoot rats, and it was perfectly alright. Nobody ever thought there was anything wrong with shooting a twenty-two rifle down there at that end of town because the city limits of the town were really pretty clearly defined. Thirty Second Street was the south end of town, and the river was the north end, and while there were a few structures and buildings beyond it in either direction,

there weren't many. That was just about it. There were only seventeen thousand people remember, most of them were Dutch. It was not uncommon at that age, at that time, in the middle thirties particularly and up until the beginning of the war years, to go downtown in the mid-morning or mid-afternoon, and find that most of the business people were having coffee kletz. They'd take time out for coffee, just as we do today, but it was not uncommon to hear a number of them still speaking Dutch. Now, a lot of them were born here in America. My grandparents were, but they had retained the Dutch language from their families and still used it. Even I, as a child, was familiar with enough phrases and words in Dutch so I could hear them when my grandmother would speak it, and she was not native Dutch either. They both had been born in this country, and yet that influence lingered on in this kind of community just because it was so small and close-knit. The migrant workers that came to town and now comprise, of course, a good portion of our population, they're no longer migrants they're citizens, members of the community, were strictly seasonal labor. They came to work in the fields and picked the cherries and blueberries around here in the late summer and early fall. They lived in migrant housing, which we know today were pretty poor. Usually out on the north side of town. They were grateful for the jobs. They were all trying to learn English. I'm kind of amused at my age to hear this great _____ going on now about having to have multi-lingual capabilities. In that era, it was a sign of your willingness to become a citizen and your desire to be in this country if you learned to speak English, and almost everyone did. They were anxious to learn. The J. C. Penny store was on the corner

of Eighth and River where the Baas Clothing outlet is now, and that was a popular place for the Mexican community to shop. The prices were right, and Earl Price, who was the manager of the store, usually had a couple of clerks that could speak Spanish or Tex-Mex, really, and so they felt a little more accustomed to coming in there. It wasn't uncommon for some of the younger children of these migrant workers to sort of line up along the River Avenue side of the store where there were fewer windows and you could just kind of loiter there without creating trouble, and they would ask as you went by if you would talk to them. They were trying desperately to learn English. And we would. We would talk to them because we wanted to learn a little Spanish too, or Tex-Mex border Spanish, really. It was kind of interesting to see this tentative reaching out to begin to understand a new culture and a different culture, and that was about as far as it went. They didn't mingle with us at all, nor we with them. There were no black families, of course, living in town. There was a family living north of town, off Port Sheldon Street, but we really didn't know much about them. In fact, the only reason I know about them at all, came about some time later, after the war when my best friend was killed in a motorcycle accident in nineteen fifty one, and the son of this black family was killed in Korea in the war on the same date. My friend's mother was so distraught and in her distress and anxiety, she went out and looked up this black woman to console her and to be consoled by her. That was one of the first real contacts that I know of that occurred between a black family and the rest of the town. It's interesting to think of those things today where we are so accustomed to having multicultures, and those of us that

have lived elsewhere have been exposed to it most of our lives. So, that was kind of a change. Holland was very parochial, I suppose, in some ways, but there were some good aspects to it. Nobody debated much about what was right and wrong, we all knew. I knew that I would be in trouble if I ever dreamed of pulling some of the pranks that I thought about, or that my friend, Park DeWeese, and I thought about. But, we never did. I don't even think we tipped over outhouses on Halloween. We were pretty well raised. Environment wasn't a problem in those days. We had clean air and clean water. Lake Macatawa was a great lake for fishing in those days. One of my disappointments in moving back here was to discover that there were only sheephead and catfish in the lake and relatively few "good" fish throughout it. When I was a youngster, we would ride our bicycles from even grade school, and I went to Longfellow School way up on Twenty-Fourth Street. We'd ride our bicycles down to Kollen Park and fish off the docks down there and get good perch and sometimes bass, and that was a common thing to do. When we got a little older, we would go out to the South Pier, which in those days, was just as inaccessible to the public as it is today. The only difference was that nobody ever thought of arguing whether or not they should have access to that piece of public property on the pier or the lighthouse that went with it. That just wasn't done. The property leading to it was privately owned, and nobody trespassed or interfered with private property rights. We had too much respect for it. So, a fellow named Casey Burkhuro was kind of a fixture around here. He had been an old Coast Guardsman, and he had purchased a couple of Coast Guard power dories when he retired, and he set up a little ferry service out

to the pier for all of the fishermen who wanted to go out there and fish. For fifty cents, Casey would loan you a bamboo fishing pole and give you a bucket full of minnows and transport you to the pier--and bring you back, of course. That was a favorite sport, and interestingly enough, most people went to the South Pier with Casey, even though you could get out to the North Pier by scrambling over big rocks and boulders. Very few people did. And as far as I know, the fishing was probably just as good on the North Pier as it was on the South Pier, but Casey was an institution, and everyone went out there. He started running his boat at six o'clock in the morning, if I remember correctly, and a lot of us got up at five thirty to ride our bicycles out there to be ready when Casey started his boat to go. Goodness, I can't believe we were so active in those days! In the winter, there also was a big ice fishing village, right on the lake near Kollen Park. Black Lake as we called it then. Lake Macatawa, you know, didn't come along as a name for quite a few years after that. We all thought of it as Black Lake. There was an ice fishing village just west of Kollen Park, every winter. And people would go out there and put up ice shanties and leave them until the ice would melt. Now, that's all gone because the fishing's deteriorated so much. So, those are the kinds of changes that go on as more and more people fill up a community. But, there is obviously just no other way to do it. Some of the other things I was thinking about as we were talking about this were (chuckles) local celebrities. I was fortunate enough, I think, and kind of blessed in high school to have been taught by Lida Rogers, who is the purported founder of Tulip Time. At least most of us of our age always were told that she was the lady

who founded Tulip Time. Now, I know there's another version to that story, and it may or may not have some merit, but certainly in the late thirties and the forties, Lida Rogers was the person who was most closely identified with being the founder of Tulip Time and a very active environmentalist in the area. She is the one who, more than anyone else, founded the public school forest out on Lakewood Avenue near about 152nd or 164th Street, almost to Lakewood Boulevard to the Shore road, rather. One of the things that all of the students in her biology class had to do every year was to go out there to that vast expanse of sand and plant pine trees. Every class had to spend a day going out there, heeling in pine trees, because so much of this area had been cut over and blown over with sand over the years after the pine was cut down in the big deforestation era, and this was a way to re-seed it. In that era, the Conservation Department, which subsequently became the Department of Natural Resources and now has again changed its name, used to give pine seedlings away to anybody that owned property along the lakeshore and was willing to put them in. In my own family, we had forty acres of land out on Ransom Avenue at a place called Ventura Beach. That was in the same kind of condition. We put in fifty thousand pine seedlings there, our family, all by ourselves, over a period of several years, obviously; the whole family did it, and it became a big epic piece of work. Many of them are still there. I see them whenever I go in that direction. So, that was what Lida Rogers did for conservation in that time, and the other thing she did that was always fun and interesting. Biology was a required course at Holland High School. You could not graduate without taking this course. Lida Rogers was the

only teacher. Even the football team members had to take biology and had to pass. And Lida was tough on them. She taught the chlorophyll theory, which is the old concept that plants get water from the ground and energy from the sun, and they combine to form chlorophyll, which is the way they grow. I simplify that, and it's probably inaccurate, and forgive me Lida! But she had it all written down, and you could not graduate from her class until you had memorized the chlorophyll theory and publicly repeated it and recited it in class. Even the members of the football team had to do it, and a number of the members of the football team were not too well versed in book knowledge, and it was very difficult for some of them. As far as I know, she never gave in to any of them, nor did she give in to the coaches or any of the other members of the community that might have wanted to twist her arm and get her to give them a little easy break. She was tough, but you didn't get out of high school unless you had memorized Lida Roger's chlorophyll theory, and I suspect there are people with better memories than I have who can recite it today. You might try Mike Van Ark, it is very likely that he would know. The other thing I remember about Lida that was sort of funny: I think we were maybe in the tenth grade when we had to take that course, tenth or eleventh grade. She had broken a leg, and she was a fairly heavy woman, and she did not take kindly to being laid up. So she came to school and taught with a heavy plaster cast on her leg, which is the technique they had in those days, and she supported herself, not with a cane like most people would, but with a regular ruler. She just used a yardstick to point out things on the blackboard anyway, and so she'd just use that, and of course she would lean on the

ruler, and the ruler would bend. And it would bend some more, and three or four of us who probably should have paid more attention to our studies would sit in the back of the class and lay little side bets on when the ruler would break. As far as I know, the ruler never broke, and Lida did recover, and her broken leg healed, and she went on to teach several more years of chlorophyll theory to subsequent classes. But, it was interesting to watch, and it's interesting to have seen someone like that and to get to know her as a person who really did have an influence on this community because, without question, whether she gets the credit for it or someone else, and I prefer to give it to her, Tulip Time developed into a life of its own, and it was one of the things that helped pull this community out of the Depression, without question. It provided a means of income, it provided an incentive, it gave people in this town some hope, and it was a great thing to see. I remember as a boy in 1937 or '38, for three years of my boyhood life, we spent our winters in Florida. Not because we were wealthy, but because we were poor, or at least impoverished. One of the things my dad did to retain our home and keep title to it was to lease it out. He leased it for several years to the local manager of the telephone company. That meant we had to live somewhere else. In that era, it was cheaper for my father to move back in with his parents into their home, and my mother to go with her family to Fort Lauderdale or St. Augustine and live in Florida for the winter months, than it was for us to try to rent an apartment here in town. So, they lived that kind of a life for three years, and I went to school in St. Augustine and Fort Lauderdale for three winters. I was kind of a strange sight to the natives of that area because not very many northern kids

came down there to live or go to school. Of course there were some tourists that would come down, but the local natives never had anything to do with them and vice versa. But here I came, and I went to school, in St. Augustine, I remember most clearly. I went briefly in Fort Lauderdale too, but my mother was very upset with the quality of education they had there, and so she proceeded to teach me herself. That was a mixed experience for all of us. I'm not sure that we profited a lot as a result, but I did go to the Orange Street School in St. Augustine. A few years ago, I went back and found it still there. Like the buildings right around here, it was being used as an administrative building now. But it was interesting because in the separate but equal facilities concept of that era, there was a colored school for Negroes, as we called them if we were well raised, built right next to this school. They were two identical structures on the same piece of property, two schools: one for colored and one for whites, and they were separated by a big, high, brick wall that came way over our heads. I would guess, thinking back, it was probably six or seven feet high, and I'm almost reluctant to say this, but this is really what was the case, the top of the wall was embedded with broken glass bottles, barbed wire, and all kinds of sharp metal objects so people couldn't easily crawl over from either side. They were absolutely determined to separate the races. I grew up in the era where drinking fountains were separated for white and colored and they so stated, and obviously restrooms. We didn't think much about that at that time, and we certainly didn't think anything about a backup here in Holland, when I was back here, because we didn't have any blacks in Holland, just the one family out in the outskirts north of

town. So, it wasn't really a problem. I didn't get to know Negroes as a race, as people, as human beings, until I went away to college. I know that sounds a little incredible today, but it wasn't uncommon then. That's just how it was. We spent our recess days in that era collecting broken pieces of wood and fabricating clever little darts that we shot with rubber bands and having bombing contests over this huge brick wall between the schools. That's what we did for recess activity. Not very nice play today. I'm sure that the educators of our modern era would be appalled by it. We didn't realize there was anything wrong with it, of course, nor did we realize, back in this town that there was anything wrong (and I don't know that there was) with having very active snowball fights, sometimes pretty hard snowballs between the public school students, who had to walk for junior high and senior high all the way to Sixteenth Street and River Avenue, and the Christian Reformed students whose school was up at the intersection of State and Michigan Avenues and Nineteenth Street. Those of us who lived in the south end of town as I did on Twenty Eighth Street and came down Central Avenue and down State Street, having to go right by that school, we formed gangs, protective associations, because you couldn't get by without being pelted with snowballs, and of course, we gave as good as we got, or tried to. Sometimes we would set up ambushes of our own. I don't know if that was good or not, but that was something that happened. I think that there was more awareness because Holland was so small and religion was as important then as it is to many of these people today--perhaps more so because they had less to fool around with, less to occupy their time--they paid more attention to it. So these differences between the

religions were really accentuated and it transmitted itself to the kids also, to the children, which was kind of interesting. A lot of that, of course, is insight that you gain over the years, it's nothing you know about at the time. Then it was just a question of whether they were going to put stones in their ice balls, or were we, and how many did you stock pile, and where did you hide them on the way home? So those were some of the episodes that made growing up kind of interesting. Gradually, some of the streets around town were being paved at the end of the thirties, and when they were paved, a new sport developed around Holland called bumper hopping, or carhopping in the wintertime, because, of course, we didn't really do much about de-icing the streets. They were plowed, or at least the main streets were plowed, but they didn't have salt and all of the facilities they have for bringing it back down to bare asphalt anymore, they couldn't because a lot of them were still gravel. But on the ones that were paved particularly, and even on some of the gravel ones, the ice would pack down so hard, they'd be very slippery and smooth, and it was great fun to run out with your rubber goulashes, which was what we all wore and hop on the back bumpers of cars. In those days, cars had bumpers that you could cling to instead of the modern ones, and we could squat down and be dragged along for sometimes several blocks, sometimes more. Occasionally, of course, people became aware that someone was clinging to their bumper and they would do one of two things. They would either speed up and try swerving and twisting to shake him off, or they would stop and get out and give him a good spanking. And you'd never be sure which was going to happen--either way it was a

little risky, but it was fun...it's wintertime sports. We also had ice boats out here, and people who had a lot of money of course, could buy ice boat kits and really, in fact, buy real ice boats, but most of us made our own out of old ice skates and two by fours and mother's bedsheet for the sail, but they worked quite well. We had large numbers of ice boats out on Black Lake, running up and down in the winter months--great fun!

EB: I can't believe that!

DP: Well, of course you can (laughs).

EB: It doesn't seem like it would work that great.

DP: No, it doesn't. They were heavy and cumbersome, and they didn't go very fast, but remember, this is a chute, this is a tunnel, and the wind comes off the lake and it just blows right down here and picks up velocity. In fact, it's interesting, even today, you can see that when the wind is coming off the lake and blowing from the west, it comes through this little narrow channel right up above us here, and that acts like a stopper in a bottle. The wind blows hard enough to keep the flow of water from coming on out into the bay and out into the big lake, and it backs up in here, and we have a little mini tide in here of sometimes as much as six or eight inches, just depending on the wind. It's a strange thing, a strange phenomenon. I didn't even know what it was when I first observed it, and I thought I was pretty familiar with this lake, but it is different. Well, what other good things would you like to hear about, or have you heard enough?

EB: Well, one thing I want you to mention, is do you have any brothers or sisters?

DP: No, I am an only child. I have no siblings, and that was not uncommon in that era because, again, of the Depression. Our parents just didn't think they could afford more children, and they were probably right. So I was brought up as an only child and that has all kinds of mixed blessings associated with it. I was spoiled in many respects, and yet I missed a lot of the give and take that you have. I see (wife) Jean has with her brother. They scrapped all the time when they were kids, obviously, and it resulted in a kind of a good, tough relationship between them and really helped form them into a family. I didn't have that, I had the opportunity to live more closely with my parents and be treated more as an adult than as a child, which is also interesting, and in some ways quite useful. There were a number of us like that, though. We just didn't know there was anything different, so we did, we just grew up that way, and it was fun. I see some other notes here that were interesting. Pheasant hunting in high school. In the thirties, and in fact I just found in the last two years, a great little memorial to pheasants in Michigan. Out on 136th Avenue, which is this avenue that comes off River and goes due north and leads ultimately to West Ottawa golf course and then links up with the U.S. 31 at about Quincy Street, I guess. It's the first street below the golf course out there. I was driving by there one day, and here is a great big cemetery marker, sitting right near the edge of the highway near the road. I looked at it, and I looked at it for about a month, I guess, and finally my curiosity wouldn't let it alone, and I stopped and I went over to see who in the world was buried here, because that's what I thought it was, a burial plot. Lo and behold, it marks the spot where the first ring necked pheasants were released

in Ottawa County in 1932. And it is there today. You can go and see it and take a picture of it if you want to. It's a mark of the kind of efforts that went on in the conservation department in those days, and really was part of what the activities throughout the state had helped bring about. Pheasant hunting not only here, but throughout the Midwest. It was a big, huge, active sport then, and people would go out particularly to the Dakotas, which had just a natural climate for pheasant hunting, to shoot pheasants. That became a huge, big sport. Today, it's almost all died out, all over this greater Midwestern area. The pheasants have disappeared, they've been shot out, there aren't as many of them, partly because there are fewer farms and less farmland to support them, and I think partly because those are strains of birds that probably in the long run didn't repropagate themselves too well around here. Whatever the reason, there aren't many now, but when we were growing up here, there were a lot of them. Pheasants were very smart. It was kind of interesting. It was kind of expected that you would skip school the opening day of pheasant season, which was October 15th. In parts of the state, people still do when the opening day of deer season comes, so do a lot of auto workers. At least here in Holland, the school principal was Jock Riemersma, and he was a little more understanding than most of us would give him credit for, particularly if we'd been called up to his office, of course, for some infraction of the rules. He had kind of a working arrangement with all of the boys in town and the three or four gals that also went out and liked to hunt pheasant, and Jock didn't really get angry with you, but it was expected that after you'd gotten your limit of two pheasant, you would come back and finish the

school day. To that end, he kept a gun rack in his office, and when you came in, you could unload your gun and leave it there in his rack, empty of course, and then go to classes. Many times people would show up in class with their hunting coats and boots still on, and a suspicious bulge in the back, where the pheasants were, and usually had to take them out and show a few people. That's not very good field practice. They should be dressed and chilled and frozen quickly, but in that era, that's kind of what we did, we field dressed them and stuck them in our hunting coats. Now, I didn't ever do that because I had a funny situation. We lived on Twenty-Eighth Street, two blocks from the city limits, and I said pheasants are very smart. On the opening day of pheasant season, every pheasant in Allegan County in the north end of the county, across from Thirty- Second Street, would immediately run across the street into the city of Holland where they could not be shot, theoretically, and of course, they would migrate two long blocks down to our backyard, and there they ran into trouble because of course, I didn't quite believe in that theory, and I baited them with corn that I had leftover from raising my chickens-- I raised chickens in those days, egg money for spending money. I would shoot them out my bedroom window with a .22, so I usually had my limit of birds quite early, in fact, many times I'd have them soon enough so I could get to class and not even miss classes. I was probably more interested than some kids in studying. My mother saw to that. So, I didn't want to miss too many classes, and that's how I solved the problem. I got my pheasants, and I also got to class on time most of the time. But, for those who didn't live in the nice situation I lived in, or preferred to get out in the

fields and take their chances with the pheasants, Jock Riemersma kept a gun rack there, and they could just show up when they got their limit, and park their shotguns and go to class. It was a lot different in the forties and fifties than it is today. That was the end of the era, the thirties particularly, I think. By the forties, of course, the war began so soon, and we were restricted with gasoline rationing and poor tires and one thing or another that nobody could indulge much in Sunday afternoon luxuries, but one of the big Sunday afternoon sports in the middle and late thirties was the Sunday afternoon drive. Families all over America, I know now, and in those days even I realize dimly that certainly they did it in Holland, would finish Sunday dinner, and they'd get in their car, and they'd drive out around the countryside or around town, just to see what was there. It was a chance for the family to be together and to talk with one another. We certainly did that. Our family drives were, to my mind, spectacular. We had Sunday dinner almost always with my grandparents who lived on Seventeenth Street in that era, a very respectable corner of town to live in then, not so much now. After dinner, my father would get my grandfather's Buick out of the barn, they retained a barn in the back from the days of horses, and that's where they kept the car too. It was a big, old Buick touring car. My grandmother, my mother, and my two maiden aunts all crammed in the backseat, and my father and grandfather and I sat in front. My grandfather smoked cigars; sometimes he rolled the window down--nobody thought of complaining. We would drive around town. The conversation was mostly between my grandfather and my father, and it was mostly a recapitulation of everything that they had built in the town as they went

along. We would drive up and down the streets and my grandfather had a done a great deal of the number of the buildings on Eighth Street and River Avenue, and it would be "Yah, there's De Vries and Dornbos. I remember that because you were out a quarter inch over that front length on the window casings." "I was not!" Then they'd have an argument about that, and that would last possibly half a mile or more. In great detail, they could remember almost every single building and every step of its construction that was done. In retrospect I see now, it was a fascinating way to learn a lot about building and construction work, which I learned about anyway without even realizing it, just growing up in the family. But, it was also an interesting way to see how conscientious people were in those days. They were really proud of their work, and it was a cardinal sin to be off a little bit. Today, people throw the stuff up, and they don't worry too much about that. But in that era, it was a matter of great pride. Our Sunday afternoon drives were punctuated with those kinds of running arguments and commentary as we toured up and down the streets looking at all the buildings that had existed then, many of which still exist today. Fun to do, interesting to see. What other things would you like to know about?

EB: Why don't you tell me about your schooling, from grade school to...

DP: Well, I was educated, after fashion. I was fortunate in some respects because I came from a family that had had some education, more on my mother's side than my father's. My maternal grandfather, had, of course, been to college, and my great-grandfather, and Jean might have told you this, this is priceless--I have the documents in my desk...Was in the first medical school that graduated from the University of

Michigan in Ann Arbor, in 1857, and I have a copy of his grades for that year. He did quite well. And medical school was only a year incidentally, in those days. That's all it took. Learn everything you need to know about medicine in a year. And, his tuition, which was ten dollars...

EB: For the year?

DP: For the year. (end of side one) That side of the family had a little more formal education, a little more advanced education. My mother and aunt had been college graduates. My maternal uncle was, as was my grandfather, and my dad had gone to Hope College, although he did not graduate. He didn't go the last semester, and he failed to graduate because he was so busy with his real estate business, he didn't think it was worthwhile, or he'd catch up with it. Well, the Depression interrupted all of that, and he never went back and got it. I think in years later, he regretted that somewhat, but it didn't seem quite worthwhile doing then. But, in any case, as long as I can remember, my educational plan had been outlined for me. We didn't have any debate about this, there wasn't any discussion in the way I grew up. I was going to, of course, complete high school, and then I was going to go to Hope College for two years. Then I was going to go to the University of Michigan and finish my work, and then I was going to go to graduate school at the University. It never occurred to me that I might not be able to accomplish those things, and it obviously never occurred to my parents. That was what was going to happen. Nobody ever thought of having me go on for a Ph.D., which I am a little bit grateful for because if it had occurred to them, I probably would have done that too. But thank God, they

didn't. And it isn't that I dislike education, but enough is enough, and I was overeducated for the kind of work I did. I started at Longfellow School, and did all of the classic kinds of training they had in those days. The principal of Longfellow was a woman named Dora Stronejans, and she was, I know now, a very effective principal and teacher. She made sure that kids were disciplined, she rapped them across the knuckles with a ruler, all those things that today I guess they haul them into court for, we just thought we were lucky if we only got rapped once. She inspired enough interest so many of us would go back to see her even after we were way out of grade school and into high school, and she was still teaching, to see what she was doing, to just let her know that we'd learned something. Not quite sure what all we learned, but we learned all the usual things that we were supposed to in those days. We went on to East Junior High School, many of us, which was over near, what was the old Graves Library building, over near the Hope College campus on Eleventh Street, which is now closed off and mostly a parking lot. But, in those days, they had a one-year, the seventh grade was held there for public school students. The Christian students, of course, went to their own parochial schools. That's where I got exposed to shop, and I was reminded when we came back here of my shop teacher, of all people, was the guy who owns Haworth Manufacturing. He was teaching at that time. This was before he developed his idea of modular furniture and really what I think, if I remember, what he first developed was a modular building truss. But, he taught shop in those days. One of the things you had to do to pass the course was to be able to plane a block of wood square and smooth. I don't

know if kids have to do that today or not, but they had to do it then. I had a great deal of difficulty with that, and he had a great deal of difficulty with me because I wasn't able to do it. He kept explaining to me in rather no uncertain terms that he didn't know why I wasn't able to do that because my whole family was in the building business, and I should be able to plane a block. I had a lot of difficulty. I tried to get my dad to do it for me, and I could take it in, and he said "No, you got to do it yourself." He was no help. Somehow or other, they finally agreed that probably I wasn't going to be doing much block planing in my future years anyway, and they let me slide through that course. I did not do very well in shop. I think I got a C. I went on to junior high school, where we were given all the requisite courses. I guess, in retrospect, as I look back at it, I didn't have a lot of trouble in high school, I got quite good grades and through. It wasn't that I was so smart, as much as it was that I think the level of academic achievement required in those days was not too high. It was really pretty standard, and there were just a handful of people that had particular interest or skills in the sciences that were outstanding students, of course, and a lot of the rest of us that were smart enough so we could get along and get through school without much of a struggle. I don't recall that I studied much in high school. I was very busy doing a lot of other things. I was involved in rifle shooting, which is a sport that I appreciated and enjoyed. Early on in those years, I became interested in writing, led by my mother, who had been inspired by my newspaper publisher grandfather. So I spent a lot of time writing, and getting a few things published in the local paper here and other places like that. And that

intrigued me, and that interested me, so I spent time doing that. Somehow we sandwiched in enough studying to get through quite a respectable grade point average so we could continue on. Hope was really a continuation of high school for all intents and purposes in those days, and I think its standards were probably not as high as they have become. I think Hope has pretty high standards today. Then, it was kind of small town college for people from the Reformed Church, and it's a nice place to go. They always prided themselves on their science courses, and they still do, and they should. And those were good, but they did not, did not overly work on it. I wasn't challenged in college until I got to the University, and then I was so challenged I was terrified because, of course, this long standing edict of what I was going to do was instantly jeopardized. I think my first semester down there, I barely had a C average, and I had just all these dreams of going on to graduate school, graduating first of all, and going on to graduate school. Why, they were jeopardized. I was terrified. I'd never had to work in my life before. Somehow or other, I learned how, and went on, and after I learned how to study, discovered that I could, I managed to redeem myself and got through with some pretty good grades. I majored in journalism. Again, I'd never thought of not majoring in it. I'd known what I was going to do since I was relatively small child. Again, probably brainwashed by my mother as much as anyone else. My dad would have probably liked to have seen me go into the family building business, but he recognized that was a lot of work. Building is a tough business, and although it produced a reasonable income for him, we would have been hard put, I think, to have provided for two families or more out

of it in any effective way. So, although that was sort of a little fancy, it wasn't a serious consideration. I think he ultimately was very pleased that I followed the course I did. In my graduate work, I took radio and television, because even in those days, any idiot could see that television was going to be the coming communications field, and so you wanted to prepare for it. And the only place to get it was in the speech department because they didn't know where else to go with it, so they put it in speech as the place to study it. It was pretty small potatoes in those days. There wasn't much to it. But it was the best anybody had, and Michigan's television production group, staff, was probably one of the better ones in the country then. It wasn't much, but we did have an opportunity to learn a lot, and I did start in that business. Well, no I shouldn't have continued in that, I did the right things. But, at least I had the opportunity to continue in it, and chose deliberately not to. It was, in that era, as it is today, a very stressful way to make a living, and you either starved to death out in the small stations in the hinterlands, or you get in big time television and you are so pressured that you barely make enough money to cover your ulcer bills. Neither quite appealed to me, so we didn't do that.

EB: What year did you graduate from U. of M.?

DP: 1951, and then I went to grad school. The Korean War was on, and most of us who had grown up and lived through World War II, and that's interesting. During World War II, like a lot of others in my age, I just missed the war, but everybody in this country was so anxious to win. We were so geared up with patriotic fervor to go out and help win that most of us in high school, we had kind of a little ritual. There was

a group of youngsters I hung around with in those days, some of them are still here, Billy Price and Del Van Tongeren, who is now dead, and Tommy Malawizs, and Phil Luth, and a couple of others. We would go down to the Model Drug Store for lunch. You could get a greasy hamburger, pretty thin, and a Coke for twenty-eight cents, I think it was. Then we would go have a hasty lunch. We had it all arranged in those days, because we were seniors by then. We were big, important people, and we had arranged so we had study hours for the first class after lunch. Holland was pretty good about that. If you were getting good grades, they didn't insist you had to get back to study hour, so we really, in effect, had a two-hour lunch break. We would run down to the Model Drug Store, gulp down our greasy hamburger and drink our nickel Coke, and go next door, two doors down was the recruiting office for the armed forces, at least the Army--I think all of them then. We'd all go in, and we'd all try to enlist. It got to be kind of a game, because we were obviously under age, we weren't old enough, and the recruiting sergeants that were stationed there were very tolerant. They recognized all that, and by and large we'd go in and say, "Can we sign up this week?" and they'd say, "No, not yet. You gotta come back in another six months," or whatever time it was. "Don't worry about it. The war will still be on." Well, the war wasn't on, but we would try. Then we'd go down across the street, kitty-corner next to the bank building to Bill Blum's pool hall, and shoot pool until it was time to go back to class. That's kind of how wild and irresponsible we were, high school in those days--not very. But, we didn't realize, of course, how ripe we would all be for the Korean War, and it was going when I graduated from

college. By that time, we had been inundated and had been going to college with veterans. And had heard their side of the war, and most of them wanted no more of it, and as a result, we had all become very skeptical about this business of going off to save the world for democracy. So most of us were trying to find ways to avoid that as long as we could. I don't think there was anybody in those days that did anything silly like burning a draft card or running off to Canada, as they did during the Vietnam war, although I must say, I don't particularly blame those people either because we had no idea what we were doing in Vietnam. We didn't have much idea of what we were doing in Korea either. Most of us, though, tried to delay it if we could. I delayed it for a year by going to graduate school, and then I enlisted and went into the service for three years. But, when I came back, of course, that was all over, and we were ready to start our life of work, which was quite interesting. I had a lot of fun with it. But, it's a long way from Holland, and we got back here just on vacations, and we had a little summer cottage that we had built at Port Sheldon on property my father had managed to save from the Depression, and enjoyed it. We enjoyed it so much that ultimately when it came time to retire, we looked around and said, "Where would we like to retire to?" We had, by that time, the opportunity of going all over the country to look for retirement homes and locations. We liked them all. We've been to all those places, they're fun, and enjoyable, and nice people. But, Jean is the one who kept saying, "We ought to come back and look at Holland more closely because it's very nice, they've got a good school. Hope College had improved tremendously since the years I was there. It's close to Chicago when we

need a big city fix, and we know some people there, and we know how the system works. The more she talked about it, the more reasonable it seemed. I was concerned about staying here in the winter, and she said, "We can go somewhere else." And that's what we've been doing, and that's why we did it. So far, it's worked fine.

EB: Where do you go in the winter months?

DP: We've been going out to Scottsdale, Arizona, a suburb of Phoenix. Well, we went to Florida a couple a years, and it's all right, but Florida is very crowded. We like Arizona better, the climate's a little nicer, and we kind of enjoy it. So that's what we've been doing. Whether we'll continue to do that, I don't know, but we are now, and it works well.

EB: Sounds good to me.

DP: Oh yeah, anything to get out of here.

EB: Yeah, exactly.

DP: So, that's what we do, and that's kind of what it was like. It is funny. It's interesting to come back to a town. We had not been back here, except for vacations for forty- five years. And to come back to a town you grew up in, is really strange. I never thought I would do that. I just never believed it. We have seen so many of these things that happen of course, when I go down the main streets of town, and much of it looks quite familiar to me, and yet, you see a change in the people, and you see a change beyond the old city limits of the town that had sprawled out. Holland and Zeeland are kind of one, and Holland and Grand Haven are getting to be

that way. It is hard to believe the vast amount of empty space that used to be between those communities. Now, you just go from one cluster of buildings to another. It's kind of like the east coast, where from New York to Boston is just a strip mall. That's all it is.

EB: Growing up, what role did the church play in your life?

DP: Not an awful lot. We just automatically went to Sunday School and to church. My family belonged to Hope Church, which was the more liberal of the churches around here in that era, catered to a lot of the college professors and teachers. My grandfather had grown up in the Christian Reformed Church, but left it under a great deal of disagreement with it. The story my family told and what I know of it, is that they had wanted the church they belonged to, I don't remember which one it was, but they wanted to build a new church, and they had asked him to build it at his cost, with no profit. My grandfather just didn't think that he wanted to do that. The consistory kept haranguing him, and as I finally heard the version from my grandmother said, "Well they kept talking to him about doing this, and he kept talking to them about how he didn't want to do that, and they couldn't reach any kind of agreement, and so finally, he just quit." (laughs) And, that's what happened. I think probably because of my mother's background, religion was not one of these all-consuming things in our family. It was there, we did it. We did it automatically, didn't pay a great deal of attention to it. I had a couple of spells of looking at it after that, and became curious about it at one point in time. When Jean and I were early married, we tried to get more involved. She'd been raised in quite a religious family,

into the church activities, and I was even a deacon for a while in a Presbyterian church. But then we had some very, very poor experiences with the Christian community and they involved all kinds of things that you read about and hear about...the preacher running off with the Sunday School teacher and this kind of thing. That happened to us a couple of times. The last time it happened, we were really irritated because the church was a closed community, and there was a little clique that controlled it. We didn't realize, being rather, well, not naive, but certainly we were not in that clique, nor were we that involved. We had relatively recently moved back to Detroit from Cleveland, as I recall, and were going to this Presbyterian Church, and the first thing we knew about all of this problem was when somebody called up Jean and said, "Could you fix dinner for the minister's family this week, or one of these evenings? Which night would you like?" Jean said, "What's the matter, are they sick?" or you know, she thought there was some kind of a catastrophe. Well, this gal assumed that Jean knew all about this, and said well, you know, ever since he ran off with the Sunday School teacher, the kids haven't had proper food or anything, and their mother is not around much, and one thing or another, and they need help. Well, it turned out that these two idiots, this preacher and this woman, had gotten all involved and enamored with one another, and for whatever reasons, decided that they couldn't just go off and rent a motel room for two hours. Instead, they'd break up two families and five children. They left five children without viable families, and really without a means of surviving comfortably. So the little inner clique of the church decided they would take it upon themselves to

help these two families, whom they felt sorry for, not thinking there was anything morally too wrong about this, I guess, and they started putting together these little meals-on-wheels for them, among their little inner sanctum, and they never told anybody else in the church about it. They kept it a big secret, and it wasn't until we stumbled into it, through this business of being asked if we'd help, by somebody who made a mistake, that we even knew this had been happening. Then we started asking questions, and finally, reluctantly, a little bit of it leaked out. They never wanted to admit there was anything going on. They just thought, "Well, they'll get it resolved." That just so thoroughly irritated us--Jean was working full-time, we had children in school ourselves, and as she said, "I wish somebody would fix me a hot meal when I come home at night." We decided that we didn't need anymore of that brand of Christianity, so we just kind of left, and we've never regretted it.

DP: You don't like that. You don't care. The recorder's simply running, it doesn't matter. I'll tell anybody that.

EB: It irritates me that that happens.

DP: Well, it always irritates you that it happens.

EB: That's amazing.

DP: I think the thing that's interesting about it, is we made a decision then, and we made it a little bit in the heat of anger, that we were capable of leading more ethical lives ourselves outside of the church than within it. So far, we haven't seen any reason to change.

EB: I think a lot of people do that nowadays.

DP: I think that's right. Oh yes. If you look at the statistics, you know there are only a little less than two thirds of the people in the country have any kind of religious affiliation at all. Maybe those are parts of the reason why. Well, anyway, we won't bother with all of that. I guess if you've been baptized a Christian, you are a Christian until you die, whether you want to be or not, but we are certainly not practicing it. But I hope we're leading pretty ethical lives.

EB: It seems pretty good to me, I don't know much about it.

DP: Well, we try to think about other people. I keep thinking there probably are other funny little things that happened that add to this thought of Holland in the thirties and forties. A couple of things here I jotted down. We'll run until we're either out of tape or you're tired, how's that? You wouldn't remember, but one of the big scares of the late thirties was the outbreak of polio that erupted in the United States, and there were literally thousands and thousands of children that were affected by the polio virus and were partially crippled. Many of them died; many of them had to live in iron lungs, which were in those days, big, huge, metal contraptions that literally did breathe for you. It provided a vacuum. At that time, the whole country was trying to find ways to support this, and President Roosevelt, I've got a great story for you about him too, came up with something called the March of Dimes. The school children all over America all contributed dimes. In Holland, the dimes were collected, and we went down one day--it was a big, civic activity, and I can't remember the year now, but it was in the late thirties--and we all went down, and each class from each school came down, and delivered their dimes, sometimes more

than one, I don't remember how many I delivered. But, I, probably had, well I know I had one. Everybody had one, and maybe I had two or three, but I didn't have many. Del Van Tongeren, I think, brought about five dollars worth of dimes, but of course, his father was rich. His father owned the Dutch Novelty Company. We all went down by class and school, and laid our dimes down along the curb down Eighth Street in Holland, from River Avenue all the way down to almost where Vogelzang's Hardware store is now. Along the edge of the curb. I kept thinking after that, and put them all down and you lined up, and I'm sure somebody took pictures, and I'll bet you there are pictures in the Archives or in the photo files of that now. I kept thinking, "Boy, I wonder how some of these people can be persuaded to turn their backs and I can scoop up a handful." (chuckles) I didn't have great desire, I guess, to save lives in those days. I was much more interested in collecting dimes, but we did kind of realize we had done something good and that was nice. It made us feel better. I have no idea how much money that amounted to. It couldn't have been very much, just probably a few hundreds of dollars. But, it was a very impressive event, and it's something that's stuck with a lot of us, in our consciousness in that era. It was something that Roosevelt talked about frequently, and the March of Dimes, he may not of thought of it himself, but he certainly was the instigator of promoting it around the country. It was a big event and a big activity for several years, and then of course Jonas Salk developed the salk vaccine in Ann Arbor, and it all went away. Oh, I was going to tell you about Roosevelt. Fascinating. Politics were pretty important to a town this size in that era because they didn't have much

else to do. You got to remember, no television, and radio was Tuesday and Sunday nights mostly, because that's when all of the good family programs were. Kids listened from roughly four thirty until dinner time to the kids' programs, like the Lone Ranger, and all Little Orphan Annie, Jack Armstrong, the all-American boy, but kids all over America listened to those programs. Holland wasn't peculiar. But politics were important because we had little else to do. Holland, of course, was a very staunch Republican town. I am sure it was not true, but a common rumor among Republicans in town, at least the Republican sect that my parents lived with, was that there was only one Democratic vote cast in the 1940 election in the whole town of Holland. I don't believe that's true, but it was a great story, and everybody claimed they knew who it was. A fellow named Bill Elferdink who lived up on Twenty-Second Street, off Columbia Avenue. Interestingly enough, his brother, Ted Elferdink, was a fairly prominent Grand Rapids attorney also my father's lawyer. But Bill had not gone in that direction. He was, he was a Democrat, I do know that. I doubt that he was the only one in town, but probably a lot of the others were closet ones. In any case, around here, Franklin Delano Roosevelt was not greeted with cries of joy as he was in other parts of the country. Many of his programs irritated people. Although, in retrospect, they probably were one of the salvations of the country. When Roosevelt died in 1945, my dad and I were out in our front yard. We were paving our driveway. It had been gravel for a long time, but now we had enough money after the war and almost the end of the war and everything, so we could afford to put it in concrete. We had laid the forms, and the concrete trucks

would come and dump the concrete, and we were very busy doing all the things you do to finish off concrete. Floating it to bring the water to the top, and beginning the process of smoothing it out and surfacing it and finishing it. This is a lot of work, and the two of us had been doing it together and by ourselves. We were pretty busy. It was a long driveway. We certainly had not been listening to the radio. We had no idea that anything exciting had happened in the world until we heard a horn honking way out in the distance. Way over on Thirty Second Street, my goodness, we lived on Twenty-Eighth. There were no streets in between then, but it was a long way away. It was still gravel, and we could see way over on Thirty Second Street, a cloud of dust coming up from the road. Somebody was driving very fast and honking the horn. We kept looking and watching and wondering what was going on, and the dust cloud slowed down as it got to Central Avenue and turned down Central Avenue. We realized it was coming right down our street, and then my dad looked up and he said, "I think that's Nan Engle." Now, Nan Engle was a Holland summer resident who actually lived in Chicago. She was, even by today's standards, she would have been a wealthy woman, and by those standards, she was extremely wealthy. Her husband had founded a company called Andy's Candies, in Chicago, and she was a millionairess; he had died and left all of his stuff to her, and she had managed to keep going. So, she was kind of one of the rich summer people, and for some reason, I don't know why, she had taken a liking to our family. I guess my dad had done some building work for her in earlier years and one thing or another, and maybe introduced her to a few people around town. But, anyway, we had a relationship with

her that I called her Aunt Nan. She was not. She was just a proxy aunt kind of thing. But here she came boiling down the street. She was partially crippled, so she had a car that had hand controls instead of brakes. Even back then, and those were custom built, but she could easily afford it. She was driving this Oldsmobile, a cloud of dust boiling up, and she got to where we were working and pulled on her brake handles, and the car squealed in a stop, and we went over. We thought something had happened to her, or someone in her family, you know, this was the kind of stuff that obviously something big and monumental had occurred, and it was probably bad. So, we went over to see what was going on, and she was pounding on the edge of the door like this (pound, pound, pound), on the window ledge, and she's yelling to my father, "Andy! Andy! The son of a bitch is dead! The son of a bitch is dead!" She was absolutely delighted Roosevelt had died. She had heard it on the radio, and she couldn't wait to tell somebody, and so she thought of us. She ran to her car, and drove all the way from, she was living I think in Saugatuck at the time, and drove all the way out from Saugatuck to tell us. Couldn't wait, that's how seriously people took politics in those days.

EB: I can't believe that!

DP: It happened. Honest, it happened. And I'll never forget it. She was just absolutely beside herself. She left finally, we went back to finishing the driveway (laughs). It had to be done. What other great, exciting things? You talked about religion. One more story and then we'll quit, I get loquacious. Indicative of how seriously people took religion in this era, and how relatively unseriously my family took it, or I did...

when I was in my teens, probably from the time I was fourteen or fifteen, about right up until today, but anyway, I began playing golf at an early age, and I had a couple of friends around town that also played golf. Now, obviously, we could not play golf in Holland on Sunday, but you could in Saugatuck. We went down to what now is Clearbrook, and then was the old Saugatuck golf course to play, and that was something we did quite frequently in the spring and summer months. I was waiting for my two buddies to come over and pick me up to play golf one Sunday. I was out in the front yard of our home practicing chip shots in the yard, and I wasn't paying much attention to what was going on out in the street. There were no sidewalks then, of course, and the road was not paved. Central Avenue didn't get paved from Twenty-Fourth Street out for a long time, until probably the late forties--and this was before that. Anyway, there I was practicing chip shots, and all of a sudden, I became aware of a man walking up the street. He had walked right up across our yard and then walked up to me and began yelling at me in Dutch. I didn't know quite what he was saying, but I knew that he was upset and mad, and I looked up at him and the next thing I know, he's grabbed my golf club and he's starting to pull it out of my hands. He was obviously telling me I couldn't do that. Well, I didn't know what to do. I was hanging on to one end of the golf club, and he was pulling at the other and continuing to yell at me. I remember thinking at the time that that's one of my best irons, I can't let him have that. And I didn't know what to do. Fortunately, at that very moment, my two buddies drove up in their car, and the guy looked around, I don't know if he thought he was outnumbered or he decided he was maybe

overstepping himself. He gave it up, dropped the club, let me have it back, and stalked away across the yard and out to the road again, still swearing. We were just dumbfounded. The three of us, the other two guys, Tommy Malawitz and Phil Luth, were just dumbfounded, and we just sort of stared at him. We had no idea what to do, didn't really quite understand exactly what had happened except that he was upset about the idea that we were playing golf, or even practicing golf in the yard on Sunday. Lord knows what would have happened if he had actually seen us out there playing it. But, people took religion quite seriously in those days, and were quite restrictive. Have we emoted enough?

EB: Why don't we talk about the role Hope College plays in the community and the way the community plays in Hope College life.

DP: Now or then?

EB: Then and now. How it's changed, how it's the same.

DP: Well, I think that Hope College has always been a part of Holland, as long as I can remember as a youngster, it was down there, it was the college, it was where an awful lot of people went to school. Holland had a pretty high percentage of high school graduates that went on to college, simply because Hope was convenient and handy to them. At that time, it seems to me, again, they were, as a Reformed Church School, much more separated. The rivalry between Hope and Calvin College was deep enough so they really never even discussed it or talked about it much. They went their two separate ways, and there wasn't enough in common for them to even talk about. With the community itself, I think Hope has assumed a slightly more

important role in the community now than it did then, but that may be as a function of my age and reflection looking back on it, possibly it's a function also of the, just the thirties and the Depression era because, in that era, people were scrambling so hard to just make a living, and to put bread on the table that they didn't have much time to fool around with what was going on at that college down there, and it was kind of left by itself to survive as best it could. It wasn't large enough to make a big impact on the community. I think that was probably about it. It was there, the educated portion of the community obviously was aware of it and interacted with it, but the rest of the community didn't nearly as much as they do today. Today, I think Hope is large enough and has enough influence so it stretches into a lot of other activities around the city and has various kinds of events and activities and educational programs that are available to other people. In those days, there was relatively little of that. So, it's become more involved in the community and taken on a broader role. I think that's valid. How much broader, I really don't know. I don't think we've lived here long enough in our new time to find out. But that was certainly part of it. Hope was, and I know there's all kinds of junk about this, I've heard John Hollenbach talk about how the college changed at the end of the war, and that was undeniably true. That was certainly a fascinating time. He was here as a young instructor and has talked about that from time to time. It's fascinating to hear him talk about it. I began at Hope the year after the great veteran onslaught on the college campuses across America, and let me tell you, it was certainly a big change in that respect from high school. Although, from an academic standpoint, Hope didn't

seem like much of a change from high school to college. From the social aspects, it was a mammoth leap because there were about twelve hundred students on campus in 1947 when I began school there as a freshman. They were almost equally divided, six hundred men, six hundred women. There were only seventeen boys in that class of '47 that had not been in service. Only seventeen. All the rest were veterans. I was one of those seventeen. Let me tell you, that was a strange kind of a place to be and a strange situation to be living in under those circumstances. You couldn't get a date with a girl, obviously. No college woman wanted to go out with a kid who hadn't been in service when she could date these mature men, why, some of them were twenty-one, twenty-two years old. I mean, they were mature, adult men. Who in the world wanted to go with some callow kid who just got out of high school, let alone the normal difference in ages then between the sexes, the chronological, the biological differences. And so, you couldn't get a date. These guys who were coming back were all on the GI Bill, which was a wonderful thing. It really helped and enabled literally thousands and thousands of fellows who never would have had a chance of going to school--it gave them an opportunity for education. It was just one of the greatest pieces of legislation the country ever passed, I think. But they were there on the GI Bill, and it was very loosely administered, so when it came time to get books, even as a non-veteran I benefitted, because when you went into what was then called the Blue Key Bookstore, which was in the basement of the gymnasium, which has now disappeared, there'd be all these lines of people around. I suppose they still do things like that today, and picking out textbooks. Some of those

textbooks cost as much as six and seven dollars, which was pretty expensive then.

EB: Pretty cheap now.

DP: Well, never mind. (laughs) So they were going through, and these guys would get their books, and when I'd get up to get my place in line, inevitably, one of these guys would say, "What do you want kid? Here, just put it on my tab." Because that's all they were doing. They'd just pick out their books, they'd add them up behind the counter, write the guy's name down on a piece of paper, and how much it was, and pretty soon, Uncle Sam would send them a check, cover all those costs. And these guys would say, "Come on, what do you want?" "Well, I need that, and I need this, and I need..." "Ok, give me those will you? I'll take those too." So, I got all my books and everything else on the GI Bill even though I'd never been in service.

EB: Oh that's nice.

DP: It was neat. And I presume, the other sixteen guys that were there did the same thing. I suspect they did. So, that was good, and it kind of made up for some of the other things. The other thing that happened, of course, these guys, and so many of them that came back here to Hope had come from the Holland area, had been in the National Guard Unit that had been called up early, and they had seen heavy combat, many of them in the Pacific, and they weren't about to fool around with all these little ricky-tick rules that Hope was still... (end of tape one)

DP: Anyway, here would come the school authorities with their little rules and regulations and say, "You must go to Chapel at eight o'clock every day, and you must wear your beanie when you are a freshman." These little, funny, felt, green hats. Well, of

course, I put on a beanie because I didn't know any better, and I was certainly impressed enough by all this, and I certainly was going to go to Chapel, but not the rest of these guys. A few of them did, but I don't think any of them wore beanies. I think the beanies died out in about two weeks, maybe less. They're just, "Forget it. You're not going to tell me what I'm gonna put on my head, Buster." Words to that effect. Of course, Holland's other general rules and regulations suffered a little bit. A lot of these guys had cars, and they didn't see any reason why they couldn't drive them anywhere they wanted to, so they did. You don't like that, fella? Tough. You know, totally different attitude. "Drinking? Why not? I drank in the service, why can't I drink here?" (gasps) "Goodness gracious, you can't do that!" Well, they, of course, all joined the VFW instantly, and it was probably the wealthiest organization in town just like that. So, almost overnight, all of those old, little, wonderful traditions were dead and gone. The college didn't seem to suffer much, nor did the students. By the time I got to Ann Arbor, while the percentage of veterans was still very, very high, there had been a attrition along the way. The ones that were riding what was called the 52-20, they got twenty bucks a week for fifty-two weeks, and all you had to do was show your discharge papers, had spent that time going to college, or at least living somewhere near campus, and they were pretty well weeded out. The ones that were left were serious students who wanted to get their education over with and get on to earning a living and making some money. We were not, in that era, particularly interested in doing good works. We were very interested in security, again, the remmant of the Depression. So, all of these veterans at Hope and Ann

Arbor, and campuses all over America really, were settling down and working and studying, and I think in some ways it was good for those of us that had not been in service because we had to work like hell to keep up with them. The ones that were left were good and smart and tough students, and they were working. They wanted to succeed, and we might have been quite willing to have hung around and played a little more, but we couldn't because if we did, we would have flunked out too, and we didn't want to do that, didn't dare do that. So, they kind of dragged us up along with them, and that was helpful from that standpoint. So, higher standards, free books thanks to many generous GIs, made up for the relative lack of dates. But, those were interesting years, good years to see. I read about them now, I see them on television occasionally, and we say, "Yeah, I was there, I remember that." Some of that's right, and some of it isn't. But, that's the way it is with stories. Enough? Absolutely.

EB: Let me check. You'd be willing to talk more, would you not? Tell some more good stories?

DP: I made a living talking, you know, most of my life. You know, so it's no big deal.

EB: A generation gap question. Do you notice one in Holland?

DP: Here? You mean between kids and adults, or what?

EB: I guess what they're trying to get, is there a change in what children and teenagers did when you were a kid until now?

DP: I suppose there is. I'm not sure I know what particularly. We had no dances in Holland. There were no movies on Sundays, of course. Christian Reformed girls

didn't wear lipstick, but of course, most of us didn't date Christian Reformed girls anyway because they belonged to the other persuasion, and somebody would frown about that. I think that, well, this hasn't got much to do with Holland. It has a lot to do with our society. I see this in the youngsters that I teach now in school. They are more casual. They are much more open, which I think is good. You can establish more effective dialogue with young people today than you could back in that era. In the era of the thirties and the forties, probably into the fifties, our society was still closely enough grouped as family units so people were brought up to respect the family organization and to do what you're told by your parents without question. There was very little arguing back, relatively speaking, there are always going to be some rebels, but proportionately, generally, I think most people in that era did what they were told to do. And, they might have argued about it and whined about it, but they did it. As I said, I never questioned what I was going to be or do or become, and I was given opportunities. I could have done other things if I had really wanted to, my parents were prepared to sacrifice whatever they had to to see that I got a better education and did more, and all that kind of stuff. But it never occurred to me that I had any other options. I'd always been told that that's what I was going to do, so I accepted it. And I think most of us did in that era. There were just a handful of people that rebelled. Today, I think that percentage is a lot higher. I don't know whether that's good or bad. I don't think we will know that for some time. I suspect it's going to be good because it is going to open up our society to more questioning of ourselves, more interest in trying to change, more ability to understand you have to

change, and I think that's going to be useful. I think it's necessary. Yeah, there's a generation gap, but some things are always going to be true. Kids by and large, young people today, and I see this very clearly in the class I teach over here, these kids are good kids, they're good youngsters, they are interested in their education too. They're trying to do well. They seek approbation. They are willing to listen to you, not all the time, but they're willing to listen to you, and they are trying to learn. And, they want to succeed. I know we have elements of our population that are problems. I have asked this question of myself, I've asked it of other people, I've never been able to get an answer. I want to know what proportion of our population today is so sadly lacking in standards and ethics and morals compared with a generation ago or two generations ago, or maybe even three or four. I don't know, but I suspect that we don't have any more criminals, proportionately, than we had a hundred years ago. We have more in raw numbers, of course, but proportionately I bet you we don't have any more. I think that some of the same, basic, strong values that created this society are still here, and they're just about as strong as they ever were, and sometimes in some ways, they're probably getting better because people are able to look beyond into broader horizons than they had before. That's one of the things television has done for us, shown us much more of the world. That's one of the things the automobile did for us, it gave us access. Strangely enough, it's one of the things the war accomplished. It took people out of little towns like Holland and sent them all around the country and all over the world. They met and married other people, came back and put together whole new different kinds of family groups and

changed our society, and more fundamentally than it was ever changed before, really. If you think about this, up until that time, up until the time of the war, World War II, there was very little movement among the elements of our society. If you grew up in Holland, chances are you stayed right here. Maybe you moved to Borculo, or possibly to Grand Rapids. Wow! And, if you were intelligent and had enough money, you might have gone away to school, but then you came back. Look at the hundreds and hundreds of people that did that, and not just in Holland, all over the country. We were isolated. Now, families were much more important as a result, and family influences were more important. So even if you suffered a death of a member of the family, there was always someone else to help raise children and give them standards and set examples. Today, that's all changed. Our culture has changed completely, and it began with the war, but other things influenced it too. So, we have to see how this new society, how our changed society is going to endure, and of course, today's generation is going to be more open and more questioning, and maybe more skeptical. People your age are much more mature for your years than we ever were at our age, really. As I realize now, we were, most of us, quite naive. Some of us grew up pretty fast, but naivety lasted longer. That's not bad, it's just different.

EB: I guess that's the way it goes.

DP: Of course, and it'll be interesting to see how it changes beyond that. Well, I don't think we can talk anymore, can we? Gee, Roosevelt, March of Dimes,...

EB: Well, I've kind of got a question on what you had just said, you had mentioned about

the crime and the criminals and...

DP: Oh yeah.

EB: Fears that you had as a child, that maybe kids have now. What are the differences?

DP: Fears?

EB: Just in the every day, daily life.

DP: Well, I certainly didn't worry about being mugged. I was occasionally concerned if those Christian Reformed kids caught me, they might knock my glasses off. And those, I guess, could be pretty big fears. We didn't have that kind of fear. We had a gnawing, basic concern that we wouldn't have enough money to buy food or clothes, or very basic necessities. Again, this is the era of the Depression, and people were concerned about that. We were very worried about it, and even at an early age, I remembered how difficult it was for my folks. I didn't always realize how difficult it was for them, but they had to work very hard and scratch to just make sure we were fed and clothed and housed, very basic kinds of things. And that lead to an overall pervasive attitude of concern, I think fear might be too harsh a word, but concern about whether or not you could survive, in simple terms. You wondered what you'd have to do, and one of the all-encompassing concerns was, certainly in a town like this, you might have to go on relief, and this was abhorrent. The family across the street from us did that in about 1935 maybe, it's one of my earliest recollections as a child, I must have been four or five. They did have to go on relief, and they brought home a whole box of groceries. I will never forget my father standing on our front porch and his face was white, he was so livid. Swearing, cursing at them because

they had gotten food because they gave up, basically, they gave up, they went on relief. He didn't. He should have, you know in today's world, nobody'd give that a second thought. People are juggling food stamps around instead of finding work. Never even occurred to him, never would have done it. He and my grandfather, in retrospect I know, and they have admitted it, should have gone and declared bankruptcy in their business. They didn't do that, they struggled and they fiddled around, and they paid back every debt they could find. How dumb, really, in today's world. Those were fundamental differences, and those were the kinds of concerns and fears that drove us. I don't think we were worried about physical fears or drugs or alcohol, or things like that. There was a lot of drinking, but nobody realized that it was that bad for you. There was a lot of smoking, nobody realized that was bad for us then, so we did it, well, I didn't in those years, but the older people did. When I did do it, it was all sort of taken for granted. Gradually, we began to learn about those. Today, those are things, I think those are the kinds of things people are concerned about. Interesting to see. I don't know that it makes much difference. Not too responsive, but there's a generation gap, but not a serious one, just different.

EB: Last question. Holland was recognized as one of the ten greatest all-American cities. Why do you think it has that recognition?

DP: Well, I think that's because the mayor and the city fathers are very good promoters, and somebody down in the Chamber of Commerce thought it'd be real smart to try and go out and make a pitch to get that designation and award, and so they did. I don't know that it's one bit better or different or more decent than any other small

community I know of or have lived in or seen. I think that the worst thing it can do is get to begin to thinking that's more important than it really is. Holland is still a small town. It's a nice small town, we enjoy living here. It's got basically some pretty decent people in it, but we have also lived in Bay Village, Ohio, Aberdeen, Maryland, parts of Baltimore, Bloomfield Hills, Birmingham, and Detroit, and they're all nice communities, and they're all very similar. They happen to be closer to larger cities, but as communities, they are very nice. The people in them are nice and have the same kinds of interests and concerns. I'm sorry, I don't buy all that stuff. I think it's wonderful promotion, and I think it's great if they want to go do it, and I feel about the same way toward Tulip Time. I recognize that it is a wonderful way to make money, with people that have businesses downtown, and I have no problem with that. It brings in a little bit of publicity for the town, that's good too. But, let's not pretend this is bigger than God, and as a matter of fact, this is a negative way to conclude something, but coming back here after all these years and looking at this Tulip Time festival, it really looks kind of like Hicksville to me. It is, I think, kind of silly, and I look at that from quite a different standpoint than the local residents, I'm sure. But, why would they put so much concentration and effort on it, except for the obvious financial. If they want to do that, that's fine, but let's not get to thinking this is bigger than sliced bread, folks, it really isn't.

EB: If you don't have anything else to say about Holland?

DP: (laughs) That reminds me of an old story that we should talk about, we should conclude on. Remember the old story about the fella who had died and they had a

memorial for him, and this was a great big crowd of people together, he was a pretty well-known fella. They had brought his body up to Minneapolis or someplace like that. He was way, way out of where he had died. There were several hundred people there and they had kind of gone through, and the preacher had given a little sermon. It came time for eulogies, and the preacher said, "Now anybody out there who would like to say anything good about the deceased?" Nobody moved. Here is this guy, prominent citizen in life, well loved, respected, known about, and nobody wanted to stand up and say anything good about him. What in the world is going on? The preacher got kind of desperate, and he said, "Well, I'm sure somebody must be able to say something about the departed that will add distinction to his life." Nobody moved, they all sat on their hands. Finally a fella way in the back stood up, and the preacher's just so grateful. Here is somebody, finally. He said, "Sir, come right on up here." This guy clumps up, a pair of boots on, a big, fancy belt buckle, and he stands up there, and he looks over at the preacher. The preacher said, "What do you want to say? What do you want to say?" The guy says, "Well, if nobody wants to say nothing about the deceased, I'd like to say a few good words about Texas." And he proceeded to launch into a eulogy about Texas. (laughs)

EB: That's different story.

DP: That's an old story, and it's a different one, but it's one to end on. No, if, ...there's a lot of good things about Holland. We wouldn't live here if we didn't like it. The people are good, the area is good; it's a comfortable place to live, and it has a lot of things to do that are well-worth watching and following and doing. I just would hate

to see any place like this get pretentious. Let's not be like that.

EB: Well, I guess we'll conclude on that then.

DP: Why don't we conclude on that positive note.

EB: Okay, thanks.

DP: Thank you.