Van Haitsma, Titus Oral History Interview: Sesquicentennial of Holland, "150 Stories for 150 Years"

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Oral History Interview with Titus Van Haitsma

Conducted November 15, 1997 by Louis De Giuseppe

Sesquicentennial Oral History Project
"150 Stories for 150 Years"
LDG: Hello, Ti!

TVH: Hello, Louie.

LDG: How are you doing?

TVH: I'm just fine.

LDG: Nice to see you again.

TVH: Good to see you. Always is, Louie.

LDG: Why don’t you give us your full name. I know you’re known as Ti.

TVH: Yes, well, unfortunately, my first name is Titus, T-I-T-U-S, which is a very common name in our family. As a matter of fact, there are two more Titus Van Haitsma’s living at the present time. My grandfather’s name was Titus, and since I was the first male child, I had no choice. Of course, I had no choice anyway, but my parents had no choice except to name me Titus. Over the years, I can tell by what people call me from what era they’re coming from, because my family finally settled in Tite. My close sisters and family still call me Tite, which I don’t care about especially. Then during my college days, it was Van. Whenever they addressed me it was Van. Well, later on, I think probably largely due to my own wishes, it came to be Ti. Which I prefer most of all, I like that. So, that’s how my name originated.

LDG: Were you born here, Ti?

TVH: I was born on Main Street of Zeeland, Michigan, March 3, 1911. My father worked
in a small grocery store. After living there three years, he had an opportunity to buy the store in Jamestown, Michigan. We moved there and that’s where I spent my childhood through the eighth grade. It was wonderful. I loved Jamestown. Out in the country, roaming that area out in the country, riding bicycles and peddling a little red wagon up and down the sidewalks that were rather bumpy. During that time, what I enjoyed most of all was visiting my grandparents in the summertime. As soon as school was out, I would go over to my grandparents’. They lived in Zutphen, one mile east of Jamestown. I spent the whole summer there until the school bells rang in September, and then I would go back to school.

LDG: Laura Van Plank told me that you’d say quite a bit about Jamestown since that’s where the country store was. I met her today.

TVH: Yes, that’s right. Well, this was a delightful time, and as a matter of fact, I liked it so much that I always said I was going to be a farmer. I’m glad now that I didn’t, but at that time this is really what interested me. It was such a delightful time.

LDG: Can you tell us a little bit more about your family, about your wife, about your children and where they’re at?

TVH: My wife is an artist, as you know. She started the art department at Hope College. After starting the art department, I met her in the year 1956, when I was encouraged to attend a class that she was giving, an evening class in jewelry making and silver smithing. Some of my friends suggested I do it and I said, "Oh, I don’t want to do that, go to school at night." They persisted and finally, I said, "OK, I’ll go up and check it at least." So, I walked up to the fourth floor of the what was the chemical
building at that time, and there was the studio. And, wow! That was it! And the most wonderful woman. She won many, many prizes, was in many, many shows in Holland, Grand Haven, Muskegon, Grand Rapids, Benton Harbor, St. Joe. And was always well received and as I say, won many honors. As you can see in our house, this is Ellie's house. Still is.

LDG: Brings back many wonderful memories.

TVH: Yes, that's right.

LDG: And how long has it been since she passed away?

TVH: Four years and two months.

LDG: I understand you have three lovely girls.

TVH: Three daughters all living in the San Francisco area. One is recently moved up to the wine country.

LDG: Is that Mary?

TVH: No, that's the youngest one. That is Becky.

LDG: You have Mary, Margaret and Rebecca?

TVH: That's right. Mary is the oldest, and Margaret is the middle one, and Becky is the youngest one. They moved primarily because of the school conditions in San Francisco which they did not like. They didn't feel that Alex, the son, was getting adequate teaching, and where they moved to seems to agree much better with him and also they feel he's getting a better education.

LDG: And the other two girls, where are they?

TVH: The other two, well, one lives in Oakland, one of the very poor districts. She works
in what they call a library, but it’s a far cry from a library. It has nothing but paperbacks and with a very, very minor amount of money to work with. So, it’s sad and deals with relatively very, very poor people. Not educated people. My other daughter is married to a broker, and she’s doing very well and has two wonderful kids very active in athletics and flag football, for instance, and soccer and basketball. Great kids.

LDG: I know you’ve just come back from visiting them a little while ago. Did you manage to see all three? And the grandchildren?

TVH: Oh, yes! And I let them do all of the arranging, of course. They have to fight over who’s going to see me.

LDG: That’s wonderful. I understand that you were married in 1957?

TVH: That’s right.

LDG: And what was your wife’s maiden name?

TVH: Eleanor De Pree.

LDG: And you were married in Zeeland, Michigan. Is that right?

TVH: Yes, that’s right. A very lovely wedding.

LDG: And she passed way in 1992.

TVH: Right, 1992 is right.

LDG: What are some of the organizations that you’ve been involved with?

TVH: Well, quite a few. I’m a member of Hope Church, which I have been since my college days. I’m still a member. At the present time one of the most attractive parts of belonging to Hope Church is our men’s group that meets every Wednesday
morning at 6:15. Wonderful group of men and we have wonderful discussions. We usually read a book. Right now, we’re reading a book by C. S. Lewis and reading a chapter at a time. However, what we read, at times, doesn’t have any relevance at all to the discussion we have. Somebody will take off on something and discuss maybe events of the day or some such thing as that.

LDG: Well, you’re all intellectually stimulated.

TVH: We’re all stimulated, that’s right. Just like we are in HASP.

LDG: Just like we are in HASP and the courses. And you were also in the Consistory.

Also in the choir and you’re also a member of a study group, I see. Tell us a little about that.

TVH: The study group at the church?

LDG: Well, the choir. I’ve never heard you sing, Ti. But you were in the choir. From ’80 to ’85!

TVH: Well, I wouldn’t want to give you a rendition of that! (laughter)

LDG: You may! You’re on tape.

TVH: I’m afraid that would do horrible things to the tape.

LDG: And you’ve also been on the Waukazoo school board?

TVH: Well, yes, that’s a long time ago also. That’s when they still had the little, old building, which isn’t even apparent anymore. It was just a really small building with two rooms. The same kind of room that I attended, a big room and a small room. The smaller room having the first four grades, and then the larger room, the second to eighth grades. But the most wonderful thing I did when I was on the schoolboard
was, we realized that sometime, we’d need more building area, and so we bought all of the property west of that original school, and that’s where the new school is today. So, I feel if we didn’t do anything else, we did a wonderful thing by buying all that property. That was back in the fifties.

LDG: I think the archives should know that you were a practicing dental surgeon in Holland. Will you tell the archives how you got started, starting from elementary school?

TVH: Well, if I had been asked earlier, I never would have said I was going to be a dentist. Because some of my memories of going to the dentist were not good. For instance, when we were in Jamestown, we didn’t have a dentist, but I remember going to the M.D. and having him extract a baby tooth and it was a horrendous experience as I remember. I attended Hope College, which incidentally, I started in the most horrible fashion you can imagine. When I was in high school, I’m diverting here now, I was interested in the three B’s: football, basketball, and baseball. I never looked at a book. When I went to Hope College, I thought I could do the same thing. Well, I was soon aware after my first semester that that wasn’t true. I flunked English, I had a condition in chemistry, which I hoped to concentrate on. I thought chemistry was something I’d like to go into. As it turned out, that first semester was the first year that Harvey Kleinheksel was there, probably one of the best chemistry teachers you could have. He approached me and he said, "You can do it. I’ll work with you." And he did, and believe it or not, I took it over and I got an A. From then on, I knew that I what I had to study, and I never had any trouble since. Either in Hope
College or in dental school. Because I realized that it wasn’t football, basketball and baseball anymore.

LDG: But you started with very meager circumstances. When you were in grade school, you were working seven to eight hours. You were making five cents. Can you take it from there, a little bit of your job experience?

TVH: I mentioned that to you because I remember that so vividly. I had an uncle who lived on a farm and we were about to haul some field stones, which I helped him with all day long. At the end of the day, he gave me five cents. I know what money was like at that time, but five cents, even then, I thought was an awful pittance for all the work I did that day. I mentioned that as a matter of humor, really. Also, during that time, I had an opportunity to work in a hatchery. I remember living out in the country, and the chicks were taken out of the incubator at twelve o’clock at night. It was always on a Monday morning, and being of Christian Reformed background, you never would want to work on Sunday. But twelve o’clock on Monday, it was alright. I remember taking the lantern and walking about a mile in the dark and going over to the hatchery. That was in the winter months, sloshing through the snow and reporting in and taking those chicks out of the big incubators.

LDG: They were giving you fifty cents an hour.

TVH: Yes, that’s about what I got. Then I would have to go back home and I can remember I never wanted any eggs! If you ever saw what results in those hatcheries with eggs, nobody would want another egg. I would have a little breakfast and then go to school.
LDG: I look around the house, and I’ve spoken with you, I know that you’ve done jewelry work and I wonder if it started back when you were repairing watches in Saugatuck. Tell us a little bit about that experience.

TVH: That was later on, of course. Most dentists do a lot of casting, lost wax procedure. My last twenty, twenty-five years, that’s about all I did, which I enjoyed tremendously. Since a lot of jewelry making is a similar procedure, lost wax procedure, why, I made quite a few charms. When Ellie and I were first married, we had an agreement that she would give me a painting at every anniversary and I would give her a charm. I ended up with about twenty-five charms, and I didn’t get that many paintings. But anyway, that’s how my jewelry started.

LDG: How did you get into stained glass which I see so beautifully done throughout your house?

TVH: Well, that is another result of having some friends that Ellie introduced me to. Franz Deck is a designer of stained glass windows and he worked for the Emol Frei Company, which is a large company in St. Louis that deals in stained glass. He worked for them and he made the designs, and they carried out his designs. There are many cathedrals all over this country that Franz designed windows for. There’s a wonderful one, for instance, in De Pere, Wisconsin, a little north of Milwaukee. This is a most elegant, wonderful display of what he did, and if you ever get near De Pere, you should stop and see it. They spent something like three million dollars just on their stained glass windows, and it’s a delight to see. He also did many of them in St. Louis and some other cities. He got me interested in stained glass, and that’s how
that hobby occurred.

LDG: You also had some experience in a clothing store back in Muskegon.

TVH: Believe it or not, I had a chance to get a summer job in Muskegon at a men's clothing store for one summer. That was the summer between my year just before my last year at the dental school at the University of Michigan.

LDG: Tell us a little bit about your dental practice. Your bio tells that back in 1953, you were also a lieutenant colonel in the army. Tell us about those experiences. I know that you graduated from the University of Michigan.

TVH: That's right, in 1935. I could never have ever picked a better thing for me to do. I love dentistry. I could hardly wait to go to work everyday. Well, anyway, the army thing may seem rather ridiculous, time wise. During 1940-45, they would not take me into the army, because they had what they called a procurement assignment board. They determined whether or not you were essential to the area you were in. At that point we had six dentists in Holland. Three of which were rather elderly. So, there was really not a great enough number of dentists. Along came the Korean War, and the authorities were afraid that they were not getting enough recruits from the dental school and the medical school both. So, they issued an order for everybody up to the age of 50 should go to Detroit and take an examination. We had a car of six dentists that went up there for physicals. I was the only one that passed the physical. So, in 1953 I was off to join the army. I was in for two and a half years and then came back to Holland and started my practice again.

LDG: When did you retire?
TVH: I retired after 43 years of practice, let’s see 1935 and 43, that’s 1978. Which means that I have been retired for 19 years, and it’s been a wonderful time. Actually, I must admit, the first six months after I retired I didn’t like it at all. I was so itchy to get back to work, but it didn’t take me long to get over that. I’m glad I had many hobbies to fill my time in.

LDG: Why don’t you tell the archives something about your hobbies? Besides the stained glass which is so evident in this beautiful home.

TVH: Well, stained glass and, of course, in the last many years, I was responsible for matting and framing all of Ellie’s paintings, which took a great deal of time. So, that was a hobby. I think probably my two or three main hobbies were skiing, fly-fishing, and grouse hunting. All of them I just loved.

LDG: Talking about hunting, you know today is November 15. It’s the first day of deer season with rifles.

TVH: But I don’t do that kind of hunting. I wouldn’t be out anywhere near those areas now. I’m not a deer hunter. I would never care to do that. But grouse hunting is a real sport. When you have an arrangement whereby you have a beautiful dog, and a relationship with a dog, and going grouse hunting is just marvelous. Fly-fishing, of course, is a real art.

LDG: Where did you do this?

TVH: Well, I’ve done it in so many places. Primarily in upper Michigan. We still have beautiful streams up there which the canoes enjoy today.

LDG: You did backpacking in Portage and all that?
TVH: I have, yes. I did that out in Wyoming on many occasions. Up in the Big Horn Mountains and that was tremendous. During the war in the Alps, I had marvelous fly-fishing there. I had wonderful trips into Canada. The last wonderful trip I had was in Alaska, where that fly-fishing was just the ultimate, catching salmon and rainbow trout. I'm not exaggerating, one day, I had two good days. One day I caught not less than forty salmon on flies, ranging all the way from ten to fifteen pounds. The other day, not less than forty very vigorous, lively rainbow trout and they all were five, six pounds. Which is more fun, actually, than the salmon. I've done a little trout fishing since. I was up on the Ausable a couple of weeks ago, or maybe three or four weeks ago. I was invited up there with the dean of dentistry at the University of Michigan and we spent about three nice days on the Ausable River, which is a nationally known river for fly-fishing.

LDG: And your skiing, where did that take place? The west?

TVH: Well, yes.

LDG: Downhill?

TVH: Oh, yes. Well, Boyne and Boyne Highlands we skied an awful lot. But for many years we were in Aspen. That's where I did most of my skiing. Up north and then in Aspen.

LDG: Since you've been mostly a Hollander and a Zeeland person, the archives is most interested in your experiences in Holland. What are some of the changes that you have perceived that have happened to Holland within the last fifty years? That you either approve of or disapprove of or at least like to venture an opinion about?
TVH: Well, as you have heard ever since you've lived here, I'm sure, how Holland has changed. And it has, tremendously. When I first practiced in Holland, I am just guessing, now, but I don't think our population in Holland was more than maybe twenty thousand. The outlying districts probably had another five or ten thousand at the most. Today I'm just guessing again, but maybe you know about what they are now, but I would guess they are somewhere around fifty thousand in the city. Do you think that might be relatively accurate?

LDG: The last I heard was thirty, but I don't think that's correct. I think it's way beyond that.

TVH: Of course, the outlying districts will be more numerous than those people living in the city. You can just look over here to the north side as what's happened. There are just dwellings all over in these little settlements nearly developed areas where people are living just are amazing. It's just unbelievable.

LDG: What do you think are the causes for these changes?

TVH: Well, number one, this is a wonderful place to live. The environment, with the beautiful lake, and the good people, honest people with a wonderful work ethic, and factories that are anxious to get people like that working for them. It shows, I think, with the great variation in the number of factories we have here, and not real huge factories. We have a few like Beechnut, of course, is a big company, and General Electric, which was the first company that came here in 1953. That started this whole situation here in Holland. Put up a big factory, and I think that was the beginning of people becoming more involved in factory work and being treated better
than they ever were before. The old furniture companies we used to have, with non-unions, the working class were not paid nearly as much as they should have been.

With the advent of General Electric coming in here. This is what changed the whole picture. From then on, and with the start of industrial park, which Holland and the Chamber of Commerce have done a wonderful job with, I don't know how many factories we have in that area now, but there's a vast number of them. I don't even know, fifty, sixty, maybe even more than that when you consider the industrial part in town and also on the north side. The influence of all this is good and it's bad.

LDG: What are some of the bad features?

TVH: I think we're losing some of the wonderful feeling that we had when we were a small town. It's good for financial resaons. I think it's good for Holland, Michigan. But I think we've lost something because of that. I think also it's affected our educational system. It's going to continue to affect that, because the tremendous number of children that are being born and raised here now is just so overwhelming that it's presented many problems for the schools. I can't enumerate because I'm not well enough acquainted, but as you know, we're struggling here right now. One of the other aspects to this that has been so influential is the large number of people coming that are Spanish, and expecting, in many cases, expecting education in the Spanish language along with the English language. Which could be good and it could not be, it could be bad. I wouldn't want to express myself on that.

LDG: You feel you had a good education when you were younger, that the quality of the schools was such that it gave you the impetus to continue and to become a
TVH: Yes, when I look back on my grade school, this was just primarily the three R’s.

No, I would not say that I had a good education. I never was exposed to any music, any art, all through the grade schools, or high schools, or even at Hope College. They had no art school. They had a chorus that sang, the Chapel Choir. That was the only music we had. I must say that now Hope College excels in all those departments. So when I compare, I would say no, I didn’t have a good education in comparison with what they’re having now.

LDG: I know you’re also familiar with a lot of Holland and Zeeland residents. I also know, from some experience of being with you in that, you had an interest in Marigold Lodge, which was situated in Waukazoo Woods.

TVH: Oh, Marigold Lodge! Oh, yes, that was so delightful!

LDG: I know that you were involved with some of the persons that lived there. Will you kind of describe that experience for the archives?

TVH: Well, when you go back far enough, I knew Mrs. Gold. I never knew her husband because he had died before I lived there. But I knew Mrs. Gold and their sons and daughter. I lived there when both the sons were killed in car accidents, both similar in the kind of accident it was. I knew the daughter real well, who no longer lives here, but I think she lives in New York. I don’t know whether she gets back here or not. I haven’t seen her in a long time. But, the period of time when I lived there, was so delightful was...

LDG: Where was this, Ti?
TVH: At Marigold Lodge.

LDG: You lived there in the Woods? In Waukazoo?

TVH: I lived on Waukazoo Drive. When we lived there, there was not a single home except maybe three or four little homes on the inside of Waukazoo Drive, when you drive from 152nd to 160th. That makes that loop, you know? That whole woods was untouched. We had nice trails to hike through there and riding horses. I had a couple of horses as a matter of fact. A Tennessee Walker and a Western. Those were delightful times in Waukazoo in that regard. One of the wonderful parts of Waukazoo was when Mrs. Gold was on a trip and was visiting France and she had occasion to meet the charming prince from Russia, called Misha Thoryevski. He was entertaining in a night club. He had a marvelous voice. They became quite enamored and she came back here and couldn’t forget about Misha. So, she went back the next year to see him again, and when she came back that time, he came back with her, and they were married. After that, they used to throw some wonderful parties in the home there. I can still remember so well, Misha standing next to the grand piano and singing love songs, and always dedicating them to his dear wife. Wonderful, wonderful time.

LDG: Did he speak English?

TVH: Oh, yes. With a brogue. But, yes, he spoke good English. As you know, he wrote a wonderful book about his history, dating back to the Russian Revolution and how he fought in the army and escaped and, luckily, came to this country. He loved it here and had many, many friends. He also enjoyed hunting and fishing and he loved golf.
I can still hear Misha say to one of his friends (Butch Tanis was a wonderful friend),
I can still remember him saying, "Bush, what I shoot here?" Well, he meant, "What
club do I use?" What a delightful man.

LDG: Didn't he write a book that he illustrated and gave to you?

TVH: That was the book I had reference to. This was a biography.

LDG: And you did something with that book recently?

TVH: Yes, well, as you know, they have rejuvenated that whole home, and it is so lovely
now. They have done it in the same fashion that it was when it was originally built.
It’s owned now by Herman Miller. After being there a couple of times and meeting
the superintendent, I guess you’d call him the superintendent... the manager. It
seemed to me that maybe that home should have that book, so I presented it to him.
He was very happy to have it.

LDG: I remember that day when the HASP organization was privileged to have a tour and
you presented it to him that day.

TVH: Yes, that’s right, I do remember that. We had a nice dinner that day.

LDG: You’ve been involved in so many clubs and organizations and you’ve been so
instrumental in pursuing so many activities in the church. What role has your church
played in Holland history? And how has the church changed in the last fifty years?
Has the interaction of Holland, the city and the church changed? Tell us a little bit
about your experience in the church. You were in the choir, you were in the study
groups, you were in the consistory.

TVH: I don’t think that the church has changed much. The personnel in the church has
changed. I would say that the earlier days, we had people that belonged to Hope Church for instance, were largely people associated with the college and the seminary. Not many people, for instance, coming from the factories and that sort of thing. Today, we have a very small percentage of professors, and the membership is largely younger people, and coming from different walks of life, and coming from different occupations. A lot of people who do manual work, which back then there were few if any of those. So, I don't think it's affected the way the church is conducted or the beliefs in the church. That has been constant. Hope Church is a Reformed church, and supports Hope College, which is commonly known as church affiliated with the Reformed Church. That has not changed. Other than that, no, I don't think it's changed much, except the things that I've just mentioned.

LDG: And ______, the concept that you were aware of when you first joined, I understand that you were a charter member of that church? In Holland?

TVH: No. The thing that I was a charter member of was a thing called a professional club. That's entirely different. It has nothing to do with the church.

LDG: That was part of your dentistry.

TVH: Well, no, this started out in a most unusual fashion also. There was a doctor Huizinga that had a practice in the People's State Bank where I had my office. He invited me one time to attend a Torch Club meeting in Muskegon, Michigan. The Torch Club is a national organization. It met once a month and the members all gave papers in turns, and presented the paper, and then they had discussions afterwards. We attended that and it really appealed to us. So, Dr. Huizinga and I invited about
fifteen people in Holland, and submitted our suggestion of joining Torch or forming a
group like that. Since we had to pay dues if we joined the Torch club, we decided
just to do it on our own. We patterned it after the Torch club. We had the first
group in 1939 and we had our first meeting in 1940.

LDG: What was the aim of this club?

TVH: Just a group of people that got together and had discussions.

LDG: But they weren't dentists?

TVH: NO, no, no. There were only a couple of dentists. They called it a professional
club, but it does include professional people, doctors and dentists and that sort of
thing.

LDG: Almost like HASP.

TVH: That's right. But there are many people that come from our industrial group now,
and so it's called Holland Professional Club, but they aren't all in a profession.

LDG: That's the one that you were a charter member of, and the only one living.

TVH: That's right.

LDG: And your professional organizations, one was the Holland Dental Society and the
other was the West Michigan Dental Society. And you were president of the last one
and you were very active in your professional organizations.

TVH: Yes, I was.

LDG: Also, because of your unique talents, you were also involved in the Holland Area
Arts Council. Tell the archives a little bit about that.

TVH: Well, this was a wonderful period of time. In fact, I'm studying it right now. I want
to know more about it. About the earlier part of it. The first president was Don
Ihrman, who was the superintendent of schools back in 1946.

LDG: Is he a member of HASP?

TVH: Yes, he’s a member of HASP, sure.

LDG: I recognized the name.

TVH: Yes, that’s right. What has happened over the years, it’s really remarkable what a
wonderful talent we have in this area as far as the arts are concerned. Ellie was just
one of them. Marvelous artists in this area and Grand Haven, Muskegon, Grand
Rapids. But we never had any museum, per se. This was a group that thought we
should have a museum, so they started it. Back when it really took off was in the
1960’s.

(tape ends)

LDG: We were talking about the beginning of the Holland Arts Council and subsequently
the museums. I just had to change the tape.

TVH: Yes, well, there was a group that got together, and Ellie was the chairman of the
education department. What that consisted of was having classes, teaching adults,
and especially teaching children. When she formed her committee, she chose the
artists that she knew who were very prominent in this area at that time. They
included Molly Baker, Maxine MacLeod, Jan Propst, Mary Porter, she’s a member of
HASP, and Ellie, of course.

LDG: Was Helen Van Mell one of them, too?

TVH: No, she comes a little later. I can talk about her. But anyway, that group were
responsible for the teaching project, the teaching of art. We held, I say we because I
used attend those things and took photos of all those classes. We met, primarily, in
the post office, which had been vacated. In terrible condition, just awful condition.
But we held classes there, upstairs primarily. We met at the Methodist Church, we
met in the parks, we met at the park here on the North side, in the summertime,
giving classes. After they started that, they started looking for someplace to have a
building. One of the buildings they considered was the old school on 16th and
Country Club Rd. They were all excited about that, because the man that was
responsible for replacing the ships between here and Wisconsin owned that, Chuck
Conrad. He offered them that building, but it would have taken so much money to
refurbish it, it had flooded in the basement, it was in terrible shape. So they decided
not to do that. Plus the fact that it would have been out of town. They really felt
they should be in town. About that time, along came Mr. Prince. He, and I think
maybe he was influenced a little bit by his wife, who was very interested in the arts,
he agreed to rejuvenate that one whole store that used to be at one time where the
Army office was located. For instance, during the second World War, the Army
office was there and that’s where you got all your food tickets and gas tickets, and
sugar ration tickets and that sort of thing. He offered to refurbish that and redo that
whole facility. Three floors. He did that with the understanding and agreement that,
after three years, they should be self-sufficient and taking care of themselves. Well,
after three years, they weren’t able to do that. The cost was just too high. So, they
still continue to be there, as you know. At the present time, they have been starting
to work on the furniture store on East 8th St. That’s where the new Area Arts Council is going to be.

LDG: It’s not going to be where it is now on 8th St?

TVH: No, not any more.

LDG: That’s not the beginning of the Holland Museum?

TVH: No, this is something that’s going on right now. The Holland Museum is in the old post office. That’s in good condition, as you know. But the Holland Area Arts Council was very necessary. I wonder, now that I can see the history of it, whether or not they should have agreed to be able to do that at the end of three years.

Because I don’t think that was being very practical. Ed Prince was good after that. I don’t know what the arrangement was, but they stayed in there up till this time, beyond the three years, and have paid rent. I don’t know what the arrangement was, but they’ve continued to operate that. Now, it’s going to be changed. In the years that I’m talking about, about three years when Ellie and her committee worked on that, and there were many other committees, they did wonderful things for this community. After that length of time, that whole committee didn’t have much to do with the Arts Council anymore. But they continued to meet as a group, right up until the time that Ellie died. They would meet every Wednesday, in the morning, and paint, and have a critique in the afternoon. They did that all that time. They just inspired each other and it was just a marvelous group of people.

LDG: Was it to give exposure to the people who were members or would they also show what they’re doing now where they have exhibits on the first floor?
TVH: Oh, yes. They had shows. They had many shows.

LDG: Now they occupy, I think, the first and second floors?

TVH: At the Arts Council?

LDG: Yes.

TVH: Well, yes, they're still giving classes. They give quite a few classes, not only in art, but in dance and drama and many things. That's on the second and third floors.

LDG: My grandchildren are in the dance class.

TVH: Yes, they're still doing that. And they're doing a good job. One other wonderful thing they're doing is, every Monday night, May VanArk teaches people painting, people that are handicapped. She's done that for years, and they've just done a marvelous job. Those people just love it. Some of them come from Kandu, that I'm also interested in. She gives these lessons every week.

LDG: What is this Kandu, Ti?

TVH: Kandu? Kandu is another organization that has been in existence since the sixties. It started all because a couple of families in this county had children that were handicapped. Mentally or physically, or both. They were looking for help. There was a woman by the name of Mrs. Van Zoeren, who was on the county board of health, and she worked with them, and that was a start of Kandu. Which started operating on a county basis. At the present time, we have a marvelous facility in Grand Haven and a marvelous one here. Our objective is to take these people, and rehabilitate them to the point where they can go out and compete in the general market by working in stores and factories and that sort of thing. Very few of them
make it. When we take them in, first of all, we analyze them to see how efficient they are. We put them through tests. The far majority of them are less than fifty percent efficient. They just can’t do much, they just can’t do anything. In Kandu, they are put in a separate group where all that group works, and that’s the biggest group by far. We have many, many companies in town that sublet things to us. About fifty or sixty or seventy different corporations. They send tiny, little works over, folding papers, for instance, and cardboard, and putting nuts and bolts together. That sort of thing. Then we have more efficient people that will run machinery. The biggest thing we’ve done in the last several years is make picture frames, which at one time we did so many of them for the army, that’s the only work we needed. Until about four years ago and then they started cutting back and so we have branched out into other things, making brooms, for instance, brooms that they sell at the Meijer store. And mops, and also picture frames, different kinds of frames for other people like them. That’s what Kandu is.

LDG: I know the archives would be interested in parameters of time in Holland. Specifically during the war years. Tell the archives what it was like living here during World War II, or the Korean war, or the Vietnam War. What kind of industries, what you were doing during that time? What were some of the typical problems that affected people during these times?

TVH: I’m not sure if I’m authority enough to know. I think like most any town, starting with the second World War, so many young people were called in, and this affected many, many lives. You can’t help it. I think it would be like most any town:
people saying goodbye to loved ones and sons and daughters and husbands and some
wives, of course. Which would affect Holland just the way they would any other
place. Industrial, of course, it was a boon in Holland because the manufacturing
necessities that went on and the urgency by way of time that it had to be done. Many
of these factories started making small things for the bigger manufacturers, and this
was true in Holland. Holland Ladder Company got involved in a lot of things.

LDG: Holland Hitch?

TVH: Holland Hitch was very important with their hitches. That’s right. They were very
prominent in the war.

LDG: I understand some shells were made here, too. Artillery shells?

TVH: I’m not sure of that. That could be. I don’t remember that.

LDG: Holland has produced four medal of honor winners. I remember seeing that in the
    Holland museum. Did you know any of them, or did you know any of the youngsters
    that had expired during the war? Or were there any of your personal friends that had
died during the war?

TVH: No. I can’t remember any of them. No, I can’t. I knew some, but they weren’t
    special friends of mine. But, yes, I knew several young people that were just names.
    They were not friends of mine.

LDG: This morning, we talked about women, as you recall, as a course that Dr. Hollenback
    had described some of the experiences of Mark Twain. If we could get back to
    Holland, if we concentrate on Holland, do you think the role of women has changed
over in the last 50 years here?
TVH: Oh, yeah, I don’t think there’s any question about that. I think it’s quite obvious. We did have some women that were very prominent back in those days. There was Mrs. Diekema, for instance, the wife of Mr. Diekema, who was the ambassador to the Netherlands, who lived here. A remarkable man. There was a Mrs. Telling, who lived out on South Shore Drive. She was very prominent in the church and in the choir, I remember. It’s hard to come up with names, it was that long ago. There were some prominent women in this town. Percentage wise, I know that there are a lot more prominent women now than there were then. We’ve got a lot of prominent women now, as you know. Many of them right in HASP, who are terrific. You know them as well as I do.

LDG: There are people like Elton Bruins and VanderWater, lots of people in Holland that are interested in their own genealogy and have sought to find out more about their own lives and about life in Holland. Was that ever something that you were interested in?

TVH: No, not especially. Elton Bruins, of course, is a real historian, and has done a wonderful job about many people, including the one he did about William Wichers’ son.

LDG: I understand he’s a scholar on Albertus Van Raalte, and now he’s head of that organization.

TVH: Oh yes. He was associated with the religious department at Hope College, as you know. Elton has done a terrific job. My friend, Bill Wichers, he had a tremendous influence on Holland. You could go on hours about Bill Wichers, about what he did.
That's why I was so interested in writing about him. You know what happened? I read the account that Elton did and I figured that I couldn't do anything as wonderful as he did, so I dropped that.

LDG: Why don't you explain that? I'm not aware of that at all. Tell us a little bit about that.

TVH: Well, I spent many days at the Archives, going through the Archives that Larry Wagenaar gave to me. One day I was in...

LDG: What are the Archives?

TVH: The Archives are simply an area where you can take anything you wish, and they will include it in their records. It's noted to be one of the best archives offices in the whole country. Now, the most detailed and run most wonderfully of any anywhere.

LDG: Just think, you're going to be a part of that history now.

TVH: If I can get something done.

LDG: You are. This is part of it.

TVH: Well, maybe it is. Well then, I'm real honored Louis. I thank you for giving me the chance to talk to you.

LDG: I know that you have your three daughters that are out in California. How does your family feel about Holland? Have they come back? Have they ever thought of residing here?

TVH: They like Holland. But they want nothing to do with the winters.

LDG: They don't like the winters. Are you a snow bird? You go south, too, or to Arizona?
TVH: No, I love it here in the winter. I have. Well, last year I went down to New Orleans, for instance, with an Elder hostel. It was wonderful. I've been to some in Arizona and Florida. I wouldn't mind spending a little time there. But to be a snow bird, and go down there for four or five, six months... No way. I love it here too much.

LDG: Well, you've lived a long and wonderful life, and your talents and abilities are numerous. As a final question, Ty, can you explain a major turning point in your life?

TVH: I think I've had several. First of all in college, where I thought athletics were the only thing important in school, and then having my ears pinned back and brought to realization that school is more than just fun, it's work. Which was a wonderful, wonderful turning point for me. Of course one of the major turning points in my life was when I met Ellie. It just changed my whole life. I was introduced to things that I didn't know existed. Like the arts. Not only the arts in art itself, but in music and drama and all those things, which I have just become completely involved in and infatuated with. I can never get enough of them. Symphonies like we have, and opera... Something I never knew even existed. How could I, coming from Jamestown and Zeeland? Even at Hope College where those things just were... Those were two tremendous changes in my life.

LDG: And there's one more. You said two. What's the third?

TVH: Did I say three?

LDG: Yeah. Well, you said numerous.
TVH: Well, yeah. Those two pop out.

LDG: They had the greatest impact?

TVH: Yes, I think so. I don’t even think there’s any question about that. Particularly Ellie.

LDG: Is there anything in your past that you felt you would have liked to done over? What do you perceive as your future?

TVH: I don’t think I would ever change much. In the final analysis, even though I lived in that tiny little town, I think I learned a lot that maybe people in the big cities never learned. However, they learned things that I had never learned. But in the final analysis I think probably it all evens out. So, probably, I wouldn’t change that.

Gosh, it was wonderful. I do regret that they didn’t have things like that in the Jamestown school, but I just found out about it later, that’s all. I guess I shouldn’t regret about that. As far as the future is concerned, I think probably the thing that I’m most concerned about is what’s happened in education, and also the things that have gone on in the government. I think those are the two things that I’m most concerned about, and, I just wonder, sometimes, if there’s even a solution to it. It just seems to be like such a tremendous, tremendous problem. To see all the poor people and the people that are hungry… There’s got to be a solution. It seems to me that the people in the schools and the government ought to be the ones that are solving it. I think those are the problems I would have for the future. Too many people, I think, is one of our problems.

LDG: Well, you’ve played so many roles in so many situations: professional, social, intellectual. I’m just amazed at how many organizations and how many philanthropic,
how many altruistic areas that you did. And to be involved in fly fishing, grouse hunting, golf, skiing... You didn’t tell us anything about your epicurian delights, like cooking or baking or gardening. Let’s conclude on that note.

TVH: Gardening is one of my best hobbies, and it continues to be now. Skiing I had to give up. That was a regret. Grouse hunting I still do, in a different fashion. I can't fight the brush all day, the way I used to. But gardening I can still do on a limited basis. Where I used to work for six, seven hours, now if I work a couple hours that’s about it. But it all gets done, because I have enough time to do it. I just love that. That’s all part of my life.

LDG: That’s real growth. You’re watching things grow. There’s life. Where there’s life, there’s hope. What a wonderful way of observing. Is there anything you’d like to conclude with this afternoon, Ty. This is for the Archives. People are going to be listening to this, and they’re going to be amazed at what a great tradition you’ve been, and what an asset to Holland and its environment.

TVH: That’s nice of you to say and I appreciate that. But, I don’t feel as if I’ve been important at all, really.

LDG: That’s because you’re so humble.

TVH: I’m so appreciative of all the things that I’ve been interested in, and the wonderful people I’ve had the pleasure of meeting and being with. You’re right at the top.

LDG: Well my understanding is that the word here, and this is the word I keep hearing over and over again, that marks Holland, its unique quality, and that word is fellowship. Would you agree?
TVH: Well, that’s right. I feel as though I’ve been very lucky to live here. As a matter of fact, I have talked with many of my friends of my era, and we feel, and I strongly feel, that I have lived in absolutely the best era that anybody could ever live in. I have a feeling that it’s never going to be as good as that again as it’s been through my lifetime. I really feel that way, so I’m very lucky.

LDG: Thank you, Dr. Titus Van Haitsma. And this concludes our interview today. Thank you so much.

TVH: Thank you, Louis.