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Vogelzang, Bill Oral History Interview: Sesquicentennial of Holland, "150 Stories for 150 Years"

Duane Booii

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Oral History Interview with
Bill Vogelzang

Conducted October 27, 1997
by Duane Booi

Sesquicentennial Oral History Project
"150 Stories for 150 Years"

Sesquicentennial Oral History Project
Interview with Bill Vogelzang
October 27, 1997
Interviewer: Duane Booi

DB: Well, good morning, Bill.

BV: Good morning. Nice to see you, sir!

DB: This is going to be a fun half or three-quarters of an hour or an hour and a half - whatever it takes to talk about some of the history. Why don't we start with the year you were born, and tell us something about your childhood - toys you played with, pranks you played on Halloween as appropriate (laughs), the games you played, for instance. Did you make toys yourself? And whatever.

BV: Well I can start by telling you that my father and mother, John and Clara Vogelzang, were immigrants from the Netherlands and came to this country. It was two years after their marriage and they came to the United States when mother was eight months pregnant and father had five dollars in his pocket. That was the sum total of their earthly possessions. They came to Holland because Holland had a reputation for being user friendly to immigrant folk. They moved in with a cousin for a couple of months until they could scrape enough money together to rent a place. And during the course of the next fourteen years, they had eight children and they managed to get a house. Then my father contracted tuberculosis and had to lay on the porch, which seemed to be the standard procedure for tubercular patients. I remember him saying that Central Avenue Christian Reformed Church came to his aid and gave him help when he needed it, which he also said that he repaid it double in the years when he

could afford it. Of course, considering eight children in fourteen years - it was a very busy household. But in spite of how busy it was, we had a loving household. My mother was a good organizer, my father was a hard worker, and through hard work he got a job at a local piano factory. He told this story which is I think of great interest, at least to me. He'd always wanted to have a little hardware store. So the owner of the factory, Mr. Lane, of Bush and Lane Piano Factory came to him and said, "John, you'll either have to stop talking about it or you've got to quit your job and do it." (laughs) So he came home and said, "Ma, I quit my job!" (laughter). So he went out to borrow from his friends the necessary money. He went to three different friends and each loaned him five hundred dollars. So that was the money he was going to use to start it. Lo and behold, he lost the note from the one man that he had signed. My mother said, "Well, you better go back and get another note." And he lost that one! And finally, he came home and said, "Ma, that proves to me that the Lord doesn't want me to go into the hardware business." She said, "That's not true at all! That means to me that you're a lousy housekeeper." (laughs) Well, not "lousy," but "careless" housekeeper. So he did get the note signed again, and he started his business. It was successful in that it supplied the wherewithal for eight children who went to school. They all went through high school and some went to college. So it was a good thing. However, coming from a poor family does give you some psychological hazards. I remember the kids in my class who were children of bank presidents and mainline people who seemed to get better attention than I did as a son. But on the other hand, I think it was very good for the simple reason that it

gave me a certain amount of independence that I probably would not have had had I been so sheltered and so well taken care of. But we were always well clothed and well fed, and I had a lot of fun. I played basketball behind the store and so on. Well, that store on Washington between Eighteenth and Nineteenth burned down on May 20, 1944, I think it was. Because it was the day after I left for the Army. I was at Fort Custer and someone asked who I was and where I was from. I told him and he said, "Well, your father had a store but he doesn't have it any more." I said, "How is that?" And he said, "Well it burned down." Unfortunately two men lost their lives. But we had another store then downtown which enabled the family to keep going. I went to Holland Christian Schools, and I have lots of memories of things that happened there that you wouldn't have happening today such as the restrooms, the hand-operated bells, the one drinking fountain. Just all kinds of...the whole school. And went through Holland Christian grade school and high school and went to Michigan State College. And I remember going to Calvin, and my grades were not all that good there because I didn't study! So I went to Calvin College and the registrar looked at them and he said, "You're Christian Reformed. I guess we've got to take you!" (laughter) And I said, "'Sir, why don't you do us both a favor and don't take me!" (laughter) I said, "I'll go someplace else." So I went to Michigan State College in East Lansing and I talked to the registrar. He looked at my transcript and he said, "Why do you want to have an education?" I said, "I've finally come to my senses that if I don't have an education, I'm never going to amount to anything. So he says, "You're in!" Just like that! So that was my experience.

Then, from there I enlisted in the Army. Spent three years in the Army. Went to Germany probably two months after D-day. And saw action in the Belgium, Holland, France and Germany. And I was wounded in a little town of Simmerath, Germany, which is a small town near Aachen near the French border. Then was evacuated from there to Paris and Cherbourg and Manchester and Glasgow, New York and Indianapolis. So I was under the care of the Army doctors for about eight months and finally was discharged. It was a great experience! One of my earliest recollections is the fact that General Omar Bradley pushed all of the aid stations right up to the front lines. They formerly had to be five miles back. He had them right there where the action was, and I remember being picked up by a couple of corpsman and taken to the basement of a ruined house. That's where the surgeons were working. So that was a great advance over the first World War. And many other wars before that.

DB: They saved a lot of lives that way.

BV: Oh yeah! It really did. And I remember the chaplain was there and he stuck a cigarette in my mouth and said, "Want a cigarette, soldier?" And I said, "Yeah, yeah, yeah!" (Laughs)

DB: How times have changed.

BV: Yeah.

DB: How were you injured?

BV: I received some shell fragments in my upper right thigh and legs and so on, which I guess are all okay because everything is working fine.

DB: Great.

BV: So then from there I went into the hardware business with my brothers and did that for many years.

DB: This was on Eighth Street?

BV: Yeah. Because we destroyed the old building that had been burned by the fire. I don't know if I mentioned that or not, but two men lost their lives in that fire. I worked there for probably thirty years or even thirty-five. In the meantime I decided that I wanted to do a different kind of business, but I couldn't afford to do a different kind of business because I didn't have any income to speak of. So I started in my off hours to bring merchandise from Oriental manufacturers in the Pacific Rim countries and started selling it to major accounts throughout the United States, such as Sears, Wards, Ace Hardware, which is a conglomerate of seven thousand dealers, and Cotter and Company which is a conglomerate - even more than that. So it was a successful venture. I was one of the early ones to bring merchandise into the United States. It was kind of fun watching the quality go from absolute zero to some of the best I've ever seen. Really, really good! I have many fine friends in China who I know very well and to whose homes I have been. Now my son took that business over and what I'm doing now is just having my own investments. I have a few buildings. I have a portfolio. So I just spend my time, and on my door I have the legend, "Random Hours", so if I'm here, I'm here, and if I'm not, I'm not. (laughs)

DB: That's good. Now the import business, is that the one that is on Sixteen or Seventeenth Street?

BV: Seventeenth Street.

DB: Do you still have an interest in that or just through your son?

BV: No. My son bought me out of that business and he's doing quite well. I'm enjoying, helping and we have dinner once in a while and lunch. And we have meetings regularly. Anything I can do to help him, of course, I'm happy to do. But it's kind of nice not having to have the pressures of an ongoing business. It's kind of nice.

DB: Well, the president of China is coming to Washington this week, so it would be a good place for your son or you to be.

BV: (Laughs) Yeah. You know, I was in Tianenmen Square in Beijing, I think it was six weeks after....I was there and security was tremendously tight.

DB: I'll bet.

BV: Soldiers with ready arms patrolling all over. And I did get to see Mao Tse Tung's body under glass. Saw the place where all these tanks had rumbled through and squashed the rebellion against the Chinese system. But here's a little interesting thing leading back...I remember my mother and father talked predominately Dutch, and I learned Dutch as my only language until I went to school. And then I learned English. So just to give you the flavor of what Holland was like seventy-six years ago. Now I'm almost bilingual. I've forgotten a bunch of the Dutch, but nonetheless I was in the Netherlands a couple of months ago and it seemed like I never left. It comes back very quickly. But I just wanted to throw that in. You talked about playing - we used to go to Nies' hill, where now the Michigan Medical facility is across the street from the hospital. There used to be quite a large hill and the whole

city would go down there with their sleds and sleighs and so on. We'd slide down there. And then about the geography of Holland. I remember when the W. E. Dunn Company building at Twenty-fourth and Ottawa was in the midst of a big sandpile. It had no connection with Holland. I think Sixteen Street was the south limits of Holland. And now, of course, it's Forty-eighth Street. So it's grown all that much in those years. The east limit was Lincoln Avenue and the south limit was somewhere on South Shore Drive, I think near Montello Park. So the city has grown tremendously. It has become much more diverse. We have a large element of Spanish population who were invited to come here by H. J. Heinz Company, the pickle people, and asked if they could give seasonal help to the pickle farmers. Then since they were in the midst of the fruit belt, why the fruit farmers also asked them to stay. So now they've become permanent residents, and I understand are a part of about twenty-five percent of the population. These people...I have known many personally. They're fine people. They're credit-worthy. Their word is as good...They're good householders. And so we're integrating a little Dutch and a little Spanish and now we're getting a few African-American families, and they seem to be following the same pattern of integration. So Holland is a nice town for immigrants as well. Holland is a religious town. It has thirty-eight Christian Reformed and thirty-eight Reformed Churches, plus all the other denominations that probably may make up another twelve. So you can see we have probably a hundred churches. One on each corner!

DB: I've never heard the count before. I knew there were a lot. It's interesting.

BV: And you see the great change took place primarily in Holland when the Reformed and Christian Reformed elements decided to go on their own. And as far as the cause is concerned, I don't want to refight that because I wasn't there. But I understand though that the two major reasons for disagreement - one was the fact that Reformed Churches and church people allowed lodge membership amongst their parishioners. And the second one which was not really spoken of very much was that the Reformed people and the Christian Reformed people had a difference on the importance of Christian education. And even today, the Christian schools have about a seventy-five percent student ratio of Christian Reformed people with about twenty-five percent of Reformed. I think that the Reformed Church people were not against Christian education because Hope College, you know, is very stalwart. I just think that they probably should have taken a long view of it. Because today the difference between Christian education and public education is much different than it was then. But in a town like Holland where you have such diversity of background and religious beliefs, it's remarkable how well the town works. Normally I wouldn't mention the difference in denomination, but inasmuch as someone may read this fifty years from now (laughs)...

DB: It would be of interest to them.

DB: It might be of interest. The other thing I think that caused some division in the churches was the going to the English language in services. You commented that you grew up in a family that spoke only Dutch and therefore that church was the central (tell me again what church it was?)

BV: It was Providence Christian Reformed Church. It was Sixteenth Street at that time.

DB: Okay. And that was an all Dutch service church then.

BV: Yes. I remember very early on it was all Dutch, and then they put one service in English. And then they had a Dutch service in the afternoon, and then later on they added an evening service which was also English. So finally the afternoon service was dropped and then it was an all English speaking church. But I remember as a boy going to Dutch church and learning Dutch catechism. Actually, it's been a great training as far as I'm concerned in being bilingual. You can speak two languages quite fluently. I think probably that was a big thing. We had a man working with us by the name of Dick Vander Meer. Dick was a prominent Reformed Church man, just a big man, a bigger than life man. He didn't aspire to greatness, he didn't aspire to having lots of money. But he was an elder in Fourth Reformed Church, I think uninterruptibly, from the time he was nineteen to sixty-five. So I asked him one time, "Dick, what's the difference between the Christian Reformed and Reformed Churches?" He said, "Bill, about twenty-five years!" (laughs)

DB: Good answer!

BV: I think he was very probably right. But...

DB: You mentioned your son who is running the other business now. Do you have other children?

BV: Oh yeah. Betty and I, we had fifty-one years together and she passed away in 1996. We had five children, all fine Christians who are exceptionally good in their field. My oldest son, Bill, has his own law firm in Grand Rapids, and my son, Jim, is a

money manager in Denver. My third son, Steven, has taken over the business in which he was involved earlier on. He has taken it over now. He has total ownership. I have a daughter, Shirley, who is an attorney in Connecticut and I have a daughter, Elizabeth, who's an attorney in Chicago. They're all married and have families. I want to pay tribute to the blessings of the Lord in my life and in the life of my children, because all the things that have occurred, with or without my ingenuity, have only come there because the Lord has saw fit to bless me. I think, too, that for generations to come, that is something that is easily forgotten and you can easily take credit for things that you've had something to do with but certainly not everything to do with.

DB: Very well put.

BV: So, yes, Holland has changed. A question was how it has changed. We talked about the diversity of the population. We've also talked about coming together. I know that we have many more activities with other denominations. We're not nearly as cloistered, and I think that other denominations are not nearly as cloistered as they were. You know, all these little enclaves of what we...So I think that's a move in the right direction. We have a great city government. I have been active in every appointed board in the city. I have found that there's never been a hint of impropriety in the city affairs. And I'm so pleased about that. In fact, I talked to one of my friends from Chicago when I was chairman of the zoning board and he said, "You must make a lot of money in that." I said (laughing), "Not a dime!" Absolutely. There is no one that I would even suspect of having his hand out for a

political appeal.

DB: In Chicago that was a given!

BV: Oh, that's right! (laughs) Like in Chicago...You know, our ward man goes to our church and said, "Would you like to have your parking lot plowed out? We'll have the city do that." They did that for every church. So anyway, we don't have that here. We've had a good series of aldermen, councilmen and mayors. My father was an alderman for I think eight years many years ago. It was called an "alderman" then instead of a "councilman." And the mayor was the man who owned Western Machine Tool Works. His name was Nicodemus Bosch, a very autocratic man who ran the city like he ran his factory. "My way or the highway!" (laughs). Now, touching on such things as World War participation - we had a great contingent of people who left Holland and went to war. I think one of the first Medal of Honor winners, if not the first one, was Dwight Yntema's son. He was a ranger in somewhere...I think it was Vietnam. Well, we've had them before. We had Matt Urban who was a Medal of Honor winner. We have had no hints of unwillingness to serve. I guess I must sound like I'm part of the Chamber of Commerce, but I am! (laughs). We really have a lot to be proud of. A nice town, beautiful buildings, well kept up. Everyone takes pride in their property, paint the fences and mow the lawns and willing to step up and pay the tax assessments. I think we have such a great school system here. We have Hope College, which is higher education, and they are such a large resource of educational and interesting areas that you wouldn't normally come in contact with. I have been to many of their lectures and I find them real

stimulating. In fact, my wife took some courses at Hope at an advanced age, just for the fun of it. She just enjoyed working with the kids and with the professors and so on. Holland High School, I think, is really a great institution. Holland's school system have great people. I've known many of the superintendents. And, of course, Holland Christian is my favorite school. It takes care of about a third of the total population of school children age in the city. All done without tax money and all with new schools that have been paid for by the parents. So I think Holland is really blessed by having a good school system. Good government. Just well organized from the city manager down to the lowest sweeper of the streets. It's a legacy that I hope we can leave to future generations. It's a good thing.

DB: Were you able to attend either of the ceremonies when Princess Margriet was here?

BV: Well, I had (well, this is strange)...I went to the Netherlands last year. I have some second cousins there. I invited them to my home and I said, "Just come. I have an empty house with four bedrooms in it." Well, the first one said, "Well, can I come?" And I said, "Of course!" He says, "May I take my wife?" "Yes, of course!" And the next brother said, "Can I come too?" And I said, "Yes!" He said, "My wife?" "Yes!" So, anyway, that is the prelude to the story of the Van Raalte statue. The Van Raalte statue was going to be unveiled and there was a dignitary there, I don't recall who it was. But it wasn't royalty.

DB: From Drenthe.

BV: Oh, is that right?

DB: Yeah, I think so. The mayor or somebody was there.

BV: Okay. Well my cousins come from Ommen, the town from which Van Raalte came originally. And he built his first school in Ommen, which I think gave him the idea of building Hope College here. And so they came over here, and I called the mayor and asked if he would like to have someone just bring the greetings from Ommen and he said, "Well, I've got seven speakers now. I don't need anymore." And that's okay. (laughs) But they were there. So he recognized them and they thought that was...He said to us, "The world's best diplomacy." (laughs) He recognized them as visitors from the Netherlands. So that worked out very well.

DB: What I was thinking about when you mentioned the diversity now in Holland. I was pleased so see that there were some Mexican-Americans there, African-Americans were there. It wasn't just a total Dutch community observance!

BV: Well, it is now I understand about fifty percent Dutch and fifty percent others. And I failed to mention that we have a Cambodian contingency and other people from southeast Asia who have come to Holland who have been well integrated. They start little businesses, and we're just glad to have them because they're good citizens. As much as I like the Dutch, this is America! And that's why we're here.

DB: That's right! You mentioned Bush and Lane, a factory sometime ago. At one time, probably at that period of time, there were many furniture manufacturing companies and a couple or three piano companies, I guess, in Holland. What caused the break up of that?

BV: Well, I remember there was Holland Furniture Company and there was Bay View Furniture Company. And then there was West Michigan Furniture Company. The

Bush and Lane Piano factory was in Holland and then in Grand Haven I think there were two or three piano factories. The problem was, I believe, was that lower labor in the south just kind of got the business away from Michigan. I remember my brother-in-law, who was a furniture maker in Grand Rapids - he owned the Imperial Furniture Company - after working diligently for several years, could not make a sizeable profit. Because he had a tremendous investment. So he went down to Johnson City, Tennessee, and built another building. That's just symptomatic of how the thing kind of slipped away from Holland. We had great workmen. Wonderful products. It's just that business has a way of doing that!

DB: Baker has been able to continue to make a go of it apparently.

BV: Yeah. Well, they have such high end merchandise that either you want Baker and pay for it or...They don't try to be Van Hill or anybody like that. And the Bush and Lane Piano Company is now operated by Baker Furniture Company in the big white building on the corner of Twenty-fourth and Columbia, I think it is. You know where the little park is? Well, right across from the park on the east side of the street is a long building probably two or three hundred feet long, and that's Baker Furniture Company. That used to be the Bush and Lane Piano Company. Gorgeous furniture! I don't know if you remember this or not, but at one time Mr. Lane, the owner of Bush and Lane, owned a house where now stands the First Presbyterian Church. Great big beautiful all brick home. My father told me that when they were finishing that home (he was working there), they would put the wood in place around the door casings, then they would remove it, take it to the furniture factory and put all

furniture finish on it, and then put it back in the house. (Laughs). Mr. E. C.

Brooks, the corrections director among other things, lived in that house for many years. Then when he died they could not find a buyer for it because I presume the taxes and the upkeep were too high. So they took it down.

DB: We've been doing a lot of thinking and talking in the city about a new facility - a new civic center, skating rink, a place for shows and so forth. Do you have some strong convictions about where you think that should be built? Or whether it should be?

BV: Well, yes. I'm strongly in favor of the city going forward at all fronts. And I think that we ought to have a new building because this one has worn out its usefulness. It was good twenty-five years ago when Hope was smaller, the schools were smaller, we had fewer people. Now it can't accommodate any kind of major activity. And I think there are other activities that could make use of that facility, but we should have somewhere a large facility that will take care of more activities than we have now. And I'm willing to pay my share of taxes. And I sense that other people in the city...(telephone interruption) My own preference would be the General Electric property. I think there's enough space. It has arterial entrances and exits so we could dissipate a crowd very quickly. It's level land. It's sandy land. I think it would be a good place. But not having access to all the other information - there's the downtown location and so on, I'd be happy wherever they put it. But I think we ought to do it. I think it ought to be close enough so that all of our schools as well could take advantage of it. You know, it shouldn't only be for Holland as a city, it should be for Holland and whoever needs it, you know? Of course, that's not

strange. I guess we all think that way.

DB: Well, let's see. What else can we talk about here? We talked about most everything that I have on my list. We talked about the influx of industry here. I guess we really haven't talked about how that has changed. We talked about the piano companies and furniture companies moving out. But with high tech coming in, do you think all of this has been to Holland's advantage? The change from what there was to what we have?

BV: Sometimes in my mind it's difficult to make that judgment. However, taking a long view, I think it is. I think we have to be capitalists to the point where we're going to say, "It may hurt for a little while, but in the long run it's going to be better for the city, or better for what's to come." The fact that much furniture isn't made here is because furniture is labor intensive and so terribly expensive to buy. And none of it is done with labor saving devices, so consequently you have a dwindling market. Now you take something like building S-2 Yachts or other boats, they have gotten that down to such a point where they can build a yacht at a reasonable price so more people can have them. Then like Prince Corporation moved into this town with a better idea. And they deserve success. You have a better idea and you're willing to work hard and you're willing to gamble your money, I don't think nobody should...and I've never heard anyone saying, "Well, this man or that man got his money in ill-gotten ways." I think when you lose an industry, it's probably too bad for the immediate employees, but probably in the long run it's a good... I'd like to mention this, however. There was a little factory called Bay View Furniture

Company on Ottawa Avenue where Ottawa curves along the periphery of the lake between Thirteenth and Fourteenth. There was a little factory, a little two-story. They had problems paying their bills and so finally they just decided to close. It was right next to the H. J. Heinz Company. H. J. Heinz bought the factory, took it down and added it to their campus. However, all the years as I drive by there, I see that what I think is happening is that H. J. Heinz is encroaching on the lake. They keep pouring more junk into the lake and so expanding their property (laughs). Well, it's possible that someone is doing that. And I look at Kollen Park and there used to be a place called King's Dock in which we used to swim and boat and so on as kids and jump in the water. And there used to be quite a large body of water between the east bank and the west bank which was then on Kollen Park. Well, I notice that also is being filled in. So people are stealing the land and stealing the water from Holland. (laughs).

DB: Yeah. Little by little. Yeah.

BV: And here's another thing. When we were kids, we used to go down Sixteenth Street to a place called Big Creek. I don't know what the name of it was, undoubtedly it had another name. We would take off all our clothes and go swimming in the old swimming hole. Well, that's something we'll never recover. (laughs). Because nobody cared if the little boys would go in there and swim around.

DB: No municipal pool at that time, huh?

BV: Oh no!

DB: Holland does have such a nice system of parks for the kids now. You've probably

seen all of that change then too from the time you were a child.

BV: Well, I think that the city fathers have become more aware of the need. Beauty is not only beauty. Beauty is efficiency and beauty is places to play. I remember when Van Bragt Park, next to the north entrance, was a swamp. And they just kept filling it in, and now it's a nice little park. Van Bragt, I knew him, he was superintendent of parks. Then (Dick) Smalenberg Park on Lincoln Avenue. That was too a waste land. And so there's those that I can think of immediately. But they're functional, they're fun, they can take a lot of punishment as far as kids, play ball, everything else (telephone interruption) So, yeah, I think Holland is very well managed and it's kind of fun. I don't think we have one Dutchman on the city council. (laughs) (telephone interruption)

DB: I didn't realize that!

BV: I'd like to add a little part to the story of my growing up. My father came to this country after having attended grade schools in the Netherlands. While he was raising his family, he went to the independent correspondence schools and did a four year college course and was at the head of his class when he graduated. They asked him to come and be an instructor over there. So I think that's a singular achievement for a person who doesn't know the language very well, who hadn't had a lot of previous schooling - a big void let's say between the eighth grade and the college. So he did that. Then he also did this - while he was retired and not very well, he wrote the history of his life on twenty-eight rolls of twenty foot shelf paper. In English! So he's got all kinds of things. So my brother, Nick, took several of the scrolls and had

someone type it out for him. And then edited it and retyped it. Well, he just said, "I can't afford to do that anymore." So I think he gave twenty-six of the scrolls or twenty-five of the scrolls to Calvin College and they're lying there. I want to see if I can get them and I'll have my secretary do it. That would be a great microcosm of history for a hundred year history.

DB: Oh, goodness yes! Before it fades on the scrolls or whatever.

BV: That's right! So I'm going to have to...And he called his book (and there are three chapters in it) "Two Worlds of Mercy." I think it's an apt name and what I've read of it so far it's very interesting. He started telling about his life from the time he is a little boy and could just stand inside of the fireplace in his house. And he said, "I'll never grow beyond that." (laughs) And so anyway, I hope to...well, who knows, I've got other fish to fry at the moment. But that was an interesting thing that he took all that time and on unbelievably large scrolls like the Torah and just kept writing in English. So I don't think it will be too big of a job and my secretary has volunteered to do it at home. We'll just keep track of her hours.

DB: What was the first year that your family came...?

BV: My father and mother came here on March 20, 1907. They landed on Ellis Island and came to Holland and stayed in West Olive, which is I think north of Holland, with a farmer relative, a second cousin. Just to give you a little glimpse of the time then - my father said that when he came here his cousin was not very friendly. He said to him, "Are you resenting me, or what's the problem?" He says, "Well, if you have to know, my father bought a horse from your father and he sold him a defective

horse." (laughs). My dad said, "First of all, I don't think my father would do that. He's a real fine man," he said. "He wouldn't deliberately sell you a horse that was a..." And then, "Secondly, I'm really not involved with the horse trade at this point." Well, anyway..."

DB: The sins of the fathers...

BV: (Laughs) Yeah. And diving into the thing did clear up the whole situation. I sometimes think we have gotten ourselves so sophisticated that we don't address the problems that could be solved. We just play with them all of the time. And so, anyway, that's kind of interesting.

DB: Just talk a little bit more seriously and you'll get a lot of them solved.

BV: Like I was talking to one of our minister friends, and he was complaining that he had a problem with keeping help. I said, "Pastor, you've got to talk to them. Find out what's wrong with them. Maybe you're doing something wrong. Don't be too big to say, 'Hey, is it I?'" I think our being willing to talk things out is not as much as it was then. Of course, I think they've probably done it with fist fights every once in a while too. Although my dad did not tell me that. Where is Holland going? Well, I think Holland has a bright future. It's got a good work ethic. It's got lots of industry and diversified places. We have school systems second to none. We have religious emphasis for those who want religion. We have Jewish, Catholic, Protestant. I presume we may even have some Buddhists in our midst, and they're all free to practice. I just think we have all kinds of good stuff coming down the road for Holland. So I don't know of anything else. I've jotted down a few notes, but I guess

I've covered all those. You talk about toys and so on of our youth. We didn't have any sophisticated toys. Certainly no electronics. We were happy with an express cart that we could go down the hill with or a sled with steel runners. We had some homemade toboggans and homemade skis, and that was about it. We didn't have any nicely manufactured, highly efficient toys. And we got along. We even made our little tractors out of spools of thread and so on.

DB: It all sounds familiar! Maybe you appreciated it more because you made it yourselves. You enjoyed it more.

BV: Sure. We had a good time. Well, I don't have any more...

DB: Well, why don't we just...For the moment I'll cut it off and we'll see, and as I said, if you don't think of anything else right now when the transcript comes to you and in the meantime you think of something you wish you had commented about, you can just add it on.

BV: Okay. (Tape ends).

Added by Bill Vogelzang during the editing process:

In the years of my childhood, 1924-1940, the immigrant population in western Michigan, and my father in particular, had a window of opportunity to view history in the re-making regarding the European continent after World War I.

My earliest international recollection of these years is one of "good times" economically in the U.S., although success came in small amounts and required sustained efforts for the immigrants who came before and after 1919 (end of WWI).

Europe, especially Germany, was prostrate from the efforts of WWI. England, France, Italy and others participating in the victorious Allied cause had used up their credit, lost many thousands of combatants, and almost the will to survive. Germany, after suffering total defeat, was severely penalized for their "beginning the War" as well as being bispoiled by the treaty of Versailles. This land was devastated, industry was in tatters, population because of "casualties" was unbalanced (more women than men). Export markets were all but closed; raw materials had been used up by the war; a new form of government called democracy was forced upon Germany. During the period 1919-1930, riots were commonplace, the government of president Paul Von Hindenberg (a German popular WWI general) was ineffective. Inflation was rampant; moral values were gone; business was non-existent. The economy and all the facets of civil government were in chaos.

I remember 1929 when the stock market crashed. Twenty-five percent of the work force was without jobs. Jobs were not available anywhere. This was a worldwide depression! Food was scarce, men would do anything to get by. Again, as a boy of 8 and the youngest of eight children from ages 8 to 22, I recalled my father getting our family together for his instructions. He wanted each child to have 1 pint of milk and 1 egg per day - minimum. Milk was delivered in glass quart and pint bottles. Each child identified his/her pint of milk with an appropriate colored piece of yarn. My mother cooked vast quantities of potatoes mixed with endive or other available vegetable for our low-cost dinner meal of the day.

At this time, my father owned a small neighborhood hardware store. I remember one day, during the depression, the total volume for a day was \$1.47. All the family worked together; all receipts, pay, tips, etc. were put in a common pot from which we all subsisted. My father hired out to do small carpentry jobs to augment the meager income we had.

At this time of chaos appeared Herr Hitler. We weren't very interested in what happened in Europe (Germany and Russia). Our main concern was keeping our bellies filled.

Adolph Hitler, who was elected as a minor person to the reichstag, went about speaking in Germany. Only it seemed he had a program that would save the German republic. "If you elect me to be the premier of Germany, I will lead you out of this morass. I will restore morality, I will restore fiscal responsibility, I will make you again a proud German nation." His it seemed was the only program offering hope to the German nation. He appealed to

Von Hindenberg to appoint him premier. Because Von Hindenberg was feeble (over 80 years old), and because no one else had a clue as to what to do, Von Hindenberg did appoint Adolph Hitler to authority. Politically, Germany was about equally divided between communism and fascism. Hitler could not trust the general staff or the army, so he set up a quasi military army called the "Brown Shirts" whose only allegiance was previously to Adolph Hitler. This group later became the S.S. National Socialism (NAZI) became the new political doctrine of Germany. Under Hitler, new roads were built (autobahn), each person could get an auto (Volkswagen Beetle), and each person was given a radio. All segments of German society thronged to the (hooked cross) Swastika banner with support. Religious groups, educated who wanted law and order, the economically depressed who wanted a better standard of living. All was euphoria, promises were made, promises kept. The autobahns were built (later we learned these were built to transport armies across Germany). Autos were available to all citizens at reasonable prices. Later we learned that factories were tooled for armaments. Radios were given with only one receiving wavelength - the Nazi propaganda ministry. Unemployed were taken off the streets and employed in the army, new industries, communism was outlawed, peace in the streets was restored, pride became a part of German life. Morality rules and business conduct laws were all strictly enforced. All seemed utopian. With all the good things that were happening, little did the German public or the world sense that a noose was tightening about each throat.

I remember as a boy of 12, we had a visit from a German family in our home. My father asked him, "What do you think about this man, Hitler?" I remember the words spoken in reply in Dutch, "Hij is een goede Kail (He is a good guy)." Then began a litany of Hitler accomplishments. This then was the popular belief in Adolph Hitler.

Before the German people and the world could realize, Hitler with his half truths, the results of the Versailles treaty, which sliced off big parts of German territory with majority of Germans in the population, had a ready made course to reunite the Germans to the fatherland. The Saar basin was the first of his conquests from France to the Sudetenland of Czechoslovakia was next with its predominantly German population, the annexation of Austria (the last remnants of the Austro Hungarian empire) and predominately of German origin.

All this happened because 1) We did agree in principal that Versailles was a bad treaty; 2) The German speaking people all belonged together; 3) We were afraid of Bolshevism (communism) and Hitler was our bunker between Russian and Western Europe; 4) We really didn't think this little maniac could really threaten the world; 5) We really were too busy coping with the depression which devastated the world from 1929 to 1938.

Only after 1938, the invasion of Poland, did we, the Germans and the rest of the world, awaken to find the monster we had allowed to flourish. Only Winston Churchill called the world's attention to what was happening. No one listened, no one cared!

The world war was upon us. The balance of the world was unprepared. We really didn't

believe that any civilized nation would kill all the Jews (6 million), the gypsies, the mentally and physically impaired, and anyone who was not productive, or in agreement with National Socialism.

The rest is the history of the 2nd World War.