

Oral History Interview (via telephone)
Interviewee: Hermina Vander Veen
Interviewer: Geoffrey Reynolds
January 29, 2001

GR: Your sister, Katherine, drowned in July 1938?

HV: Right.

GR: Can you tell me what you remember about that day?

HV: She was working at a cottage there. It was a very rough lake, and the people called the children in. She and another girl didn't want to go in. They were having so much fun, so they stayed in the water and it got too much. It was a big undertow.

GR: Did anyone ever tell you what happened when they were out there? Did anyone see what happened?

HV: Yes, another girl came up to them, she was a Christian girl. She talked with them, but she could not save them—she had all she could do to save herself.

GR: Did anybody, for instance witnesses on the beach, say anything in particular to your family?

HV: No, not that I can remember.

GR: How did your family get notified?

HV: My sister, another sister, was working in Zeeland, and they contacted her. She came home and told us.

GR: That was Alice?

HV: No, that was Betty. That was my oldest sister.

GR: Is Betty still alive?

HV: No.

GR: What happened to the family at that point? What did you do?

HV: We had a wake because they didn't find her body.

GR: I guess your mother and your father had some questions...

HV: My father was not living anymore.

GR: Did your Mom have any questions for the police or the Coast Guard that day?

HV: No, she just figured that was all in God's hands.

GR: Were there any other conversations around town after that about the undertow that day?

HV: No, not that I can remember. That's so many years ago! (laughs)

GR: Were there any other local people that were killed that you remember?

HV: There was another girl with her, you know that, don't you?

GR: Right.

HV: That's the only other one that I know of.

GR: But there weren't any conversations about how that was kind of a freak of nature?

HV: Yes, that right...a strong undertow and they just couldn't get into land again.

GR: Was there anything else about that day that you remember in particular?

HV: That's been so long ago. I've been racking my brain, and I can't think of a thing. I called my sister, too, but she wasn't home. But I talked to my brother-in-law, and they couldn't think of anything either.

GR: Was that something that the family talked about ever again, or was it just kind of put to rest?

HV: I guess so, we just figured it was the Lord's will. We just had to go on living.

GR: Some people have told me that they heard a loud roar that day when the wave came in. Never anything mentioned about that in town?

HV: They may have, but that's so long ago. So much has happened since then; I can't remember all those things.

GR: Were you living in Holland at that time?

HV: No, in Beaverdam.

GR: Well, thank you. If there is anything else that comes to mind...

HV: Okay, I've been trying to think, and I couldn't come up with anything.

GR: That's fine; I'll send you the story when I write it. I'll send you a copy of it, and you can maybe give me your insight on it.

HV: Okay, real good.

GR: Thank you, Mrs. Vander Veen.

[End of interview]