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De Boer, Paul Oral History Interview: History of Law Enforcement in Holland

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ABSTRACT: (Topics Appear in similar order of Transcript)
How he became an officer, Boat Patrol, Becoming a Dispatcher, Promotion, Position as Jailer, Community on the Force, “Special” Rank, Education, Russ Hopkins, Ernie Bear, Changes in Crime, People officers are exposed to, How Holland has Changed, What scares an officer, Story of escaped prisoner, Special Emergency Unit, Duties of a Jailer, Challenges, Diffusing situations, Rewards (Assistance, helping), Relate to the citizens, HPD trains to be helpful, Compassion of the HPD, Discussion of Interviewer, DeBoer’s Family.
How did you become a police officer in Holland?

Well, I always wanted to be a police officer and I didn’t think that I had the necessary abilities to pursue it. I think I was about 26 years old when I finally decided to, I was younger than that but it took three years before I was hired. A friend of mine became a police officer. I thought, well, if he can do it, then perhaps I can do it. So I started bugging, that was chief VanHoff at the time. In those days, you put your application in and you continued to get in his office whenever you could to tell him that you were still interested. It was a lot different than the days today of course. I was very fortunate to get the job, and I think there was one hired after me to get a degree. I think I was the last person to get on the police department without some sort of higher education. I had my high school diploma. I started out as a, what they called a special at that time. I worked part time for about three months before I got on full time. Before that I spent some time on the Ottawa County Reserves and boat patrol.

The boat patrol.

The water patrol, yes.

What were you duties there?
PD: The boat patrol, I was an assistant to whoever, I actually worked with the person that was heading the boat patrol, it was Roger Beekman. It was part time work of course. We both worked at Chris-Craft together and I got to know him and he took me on as a part time boat patrol person.

MN: What did you guys do?

PD: Basically, it was a very new concept. We simply were out there. We didn’t write many accidents, we didn’t write them any tickets. But we did assist in accidents if there were any. Boating was not nearly as busy then as it is today. That was back in 1963, ’64. I started on that water patrol, while I was working at Chris-Craft. At the same time I was trying to get onto the city police force. It took about three years of constant knocking on the chief’s door so to speak. Then I finally got in. Very lucky to stay in, because before I was even a regular, before I was hired as a regular police officer, as a special I got involved in things, and it is something that I shouldn’t have, I had no business getting involved in a high speed chase when I was on patrol. And that chase took us, and like I say, it was none of my business. I happened to be there, the guy went right past me and I got involved chasing, trying to chase him down. That chase took us all the way from the West side of town all the way to the East side of town. He bailed out and ran. I ran after him. I had heard so many war stories, I had not had much training yet, I actually pulled my revolver and I was going to shoot a hole in the air, not shoot at him. It was the wrong thing to do of course. The older officers where were present of course, never did like young people coming in. The new guys, it was hard to become accepted as a new officer in those days. The older ones just
didn't like you. It was pretty tough to become one of the guys so to speak, it took a while, and I was brand new. I wasn't even on yet. I am sure they wanted me out of there after that incident, but Chief VanHoff at the time, chose to keep me around. I got 28 and a half years in. Been able to stay long enough to collect my pension. [Laughter] I started out as a patrolman. I was six years on the road as a patrolman. I started right out working radar with another guy. We worked 30 days radar, and it was day shift, it was second shift. And then we'd switch to midnights. That would be eleven to seven, or twelve to eight... but we would work thirty days of night shift that was simply patrol, not radar. That was what I started and from there, I don't remember how it evolved but things changed, a new chief came in not too long after I was hired. I don't know the dates, it didn't seem that very long. And they were a lot of guys were getting promoted out of the dispatch. At that time of course we did out own dispatching and switchboard operating. I had relieved the dispatchers many times and had experience in there and an opening came up and in fact, the opening came up because the dispatcher was promoted to corporal, or sergeant. So I applied for the job. In fact I had filled in for three, four months before they filled that position. I was acting regular dispatcher for that long. Then I put in for the job and I did get it and at that time it did involve a raise in pay. Not necessarily a promotion, but it was a five percent increase in pay. I got stuck there. A because a new chief came along and then there were no more promotions out of dispatch. I could have taken a cut in pay, a demotion, and gone back to the patrol, but there was no guarantee that I ever would get a promotion, so I chose to stay in dispatch and keep my five
percent that I was getting at that time, which amounted to more every year because of increases. I ended up as a dispatcher for 18 years. I saw a lot of changes of course, in that aspect. And I saw the changes elsewhere too. When Chief Lindstrom came along, there were no more promotions out of dispatch. I tried a few times, but there was one point when he told me, and I quote, “There is a chance that you might get promoted without a degree, but it will be damn hard.” After that I didn’t take anymore tests. I had done it several times. My seniority and other factors weren’t important. It was, the college degree was a big item. Of course I didn’t articulate real well, as you can probably tell [Laughs].

MN: No, you articulate quite well.

PD: I found it difficult to say what I wanted to say at times. Sometimes I would just be blunt and it would offend people, and Lindstrom offended me too. I don’t think I was treated fairly. I am not bitter about it, but I don’t think I was treated fairly. From there, the last three years, I became a jailer. I worked in the jail, I booked prisoners, I maintained the jail, transported prisoners, and took offenders to court to see the judge. Interesting position, busy, very busy. But I had, when I got that job, I had the best supervisor of my entire career, and that was Blaine Koops who is now sheriff in Allegan County. I don’t know if Blaine was a captain or a lieutenant at the time, I honestly don’t know. He was the best supervisor I had in my career and he treated me the best. Not that I was treated badly by others. He’s also responsible, I am sure, for my getting the officer of the year award in 1993, and that was while I was working as a jailer, a booking officer.

MN: What made working for Blaine such a good experience?
PD: Well, number one, he was a real mild mannered individual. If there was any
discipline to be done, he had a way of doing it without making you feel bad.
Also, if you had a complaint, he would listen to it. Might not be able to anything
about it, but he would listen, and you would feel good about it, the way he dealt
with it. We just got along well.

MN: That helps a lot.

PD: He wasn’t ever critical of anything I did. And if he was, he didn’t approach it in
such a way that I felt like a worm or I had really done wrong. We just had some
chemistry I guess.

MN: Was there that kind of chemistry between officers in general? Do you think the
Holland Police Department and the community inside the force between the guys,
do you think that was strong in a lot of cases?

PD: Basically, we were family, yes. Especially in the early days. But like I said,
when a new guy comes along, it took a while for him to become part of the
family, that’s different today, that was different, a few years later already. New
guys come along and they are trained, they are already trained, they have got a
degree and it don’t take them long. You don’t call them rookie very long. They
are, I guess, one a new rookie comes along you don’t call the other guy rookie
long. Sometimes it was only a matter of a couple of months in between, but we
were a family. Relatively, oh there was always things you didn’t like about
someone, what they did or what they said, but you were always there for one
another when there was a problem. Between the troops and the supervision, there
might have been a few supervisors who let it go to their head. That was also in
the early days. Get on guys for not wearing their hat or something. And I mean, it would be a serious violation in their eyes, if they didn’t have their hat on a traffic stop of something like that. After a while, it was a few years, it didn’t matter anymore. I didn’t see a lot of really close supervision in the later years, as long as you kept your nose clean, did your job. There didn’t seem to be any really close supervision. People, that the sergeants were looking just to find something wrong, just to show their authority.

MN: As a special, what were the limits of your duties. What could you, what was your job I guess?

PD: Strictly worked basketball games and football games and stuff like that, I was not in a patrol car. That didn’t take long. When they hired me, I had to provide my own sidearm, they didn’t issue one, but they did allow me to carry one, and they simply gave you a badge and a gun so to speak and put you to work. An ill-fitting uniform that was somewhat beat up, and yeah, it was little or no training.

MN: What kind of training did you receive?

PD: I spent four weeks at Kellogg Center in Lansing, that was after I was on for six months, they sent four of us. In those days when people didn’t have the training before they started, they sent nearly everybody to some sort of school. I went four weeks, some went longer, many went to different places. There were also one-day seminars and week long classes, and they still do that today I am sure. Some sort of in-service training. They have monthly training, I understand now on the force and they send people to schools in areas. But that was the biggest part of my training was riding with another officer for a week or two before I was
turned loose after I became a regular. Before that as a special they just, like I said, they gave me a badge and a gun and sent me out. As a regular I had had some training. I worked with other officers for a few days. Gene Geib, Marty Hardenberg, Ken Gebben. I remember those guys, I worked for them. Russ Hopkins, he helped me a lot, he did a lot, he showed me, how to do the job.

MN: What kind of role or relationship did you have, or did any officer have with their training officer? How did that work, being assigned a training officer?

PD: You mean at the onset?

MN: Yeah, at they the onset, as opposed to the way it is now.

PD: In my case it was rather intimidating. I've figured these guys were really, they knew what they were doing and they were older officers, and I had a lot of respect for them, they guys who trained me. I don't know what you mean by relationship, other than that. We also socialized together, that was later on. So it was not strictly that the command, or the supervision was on one side of the room and we were on the other. We did socialize together on off-duty of course, and even at briefings and stuff. Not like you see on television sometimes, when the sergeant walks in, they are all sitting there, he does the briefing and they go to work and it seems like he is separate from the troops. Our briefings, the supervisor or even the command officer would sit down there right with us.

MN: When you got involved in the police force, did you have any mentor, or someone who really encouraged you to join the police or stay on the police. Maybe someone in particular who you might have looked up to?
PD: I think that Russ Hopkins probably was the guy that, we were friends for years before, before he got on. Then I followed him a little bit later, but I think I went to him in the early part of my career for guidance, more so than anybody else. I cannot think of anybody else, but there were a lot of people who helped me, there were others who were helpful in my getting started and staying there. Ernie Bear, one day, I don't remember the details, but I did get very angry, and I quit. He called me back. Ernie was real gruff, and rough individual. He was command officer at the time I believe. He was way up there, he had been there a long time. Yet Ernie, he was the guy who called me back and talked me into staying. I was very upset that day. That is one of the things that you will never forget, is your foolishness. It was a dumb thing to do, but I was young and he called me back and it was okay. That same thing happened to other officers too. They left, but they came back. They were allowed to come back so to speak. We are entitled to a bad day, or a bad moment. Some mistakes are more serious than others.

MN: What kind of crimes did you see, what kinds of violations were typical, perhaps earlier on than later, is there anything in particular that comes to mind?

PD: I don't think there was anything that is different. Today crime is more sophisticated I guess. There was not anything different than today but it was handled differently, we did things different. I wrote speeding tickets, stop sign offences and policed accidents. The ambulance, the medical people in those days, we didn't have them. The ambulance would load them up and take them to the hospital, they didn't get treated at the scene. Injuries were hardly treated at the scene. They were taken to hospitals as quickly as possible. That is where they
would get treated. I can’t honestly say, I am sure that the people who are working out there today as paramedics are saving lives, it cannot be any different than that because of all the training they have got and all the equipment they have at the scene. But there are more accidents and they are more severe. Many of them are more severe because of the traffic and because of the people. Although I was involved in some bad ones. Its, but you come up on it, and you take the first steps I guess. You do what you have to do until help arrives. Break-ins were commonplace, quite common. Discovered a few on foot patrol. And we were dispatched to a few in my early years as a patrolman. We didn’t have crime scene technicians, we called a detective to the scene. In the early days, when they took some pictures and dusted for fingerprints if they saw the need. A lot of the investigation was not nearly as thorough. I am sure you have heard that from others, as it is today. The courts and attorneys today demand it. You got to cover every base until, you know, they find something that you missed. Go into a room, investigate a crime today, you got to be sure to catch every thing. I have been out of there for nine years, I’ve been retired for nine years, and lots have changed, especially personnel there are very few people in the police department anymore today that I know. I know some of them, but a mean, not really. I never worked with them of course, and I don’t know them well, a lot of the young guys and gals who are on there now, I did work with as cadets. They worked as police cadets when I was in dispatch, and Jailer, booking officer. So some of them are still people I know. There were a lot of others who were hired form the outside when I left. As a dispatcher I messed up and not recording some of the calls I got from
people, some of our repeaters. People that would call all the time with ridiculous complaints. I am sorry I didn’t write a few notes about some of the stuff that I investigated in the early years of my career. They would be good stories today, but I can’t really think of them. There was one couple that we would go to family complaints frequently. She would always call, but she was a bit of a mental case, and the guy would sit there with a big smile on his face all the time we are there and she would just ramble on about how he was beating her up, be saw no evidence of it. Time after time when we were there. I can’t think of the name and I probably shouldn’t mention it anyway. If I could. A lot of interesting people out there that a police officer is exposed to, a lot of the interesting people. You have to deal with them. Of course we always had our repeat offenders too, especially for drunkenness, and they would come in every week. Every Monday you would see somebody you knew in jail, that had been there before. Some of them would be in jail, they would go to jail, get out on bond or were released on personal recognizance, and then we would have them in jail again next week, and the next week, and the next week, and the next week, until they finally, their case went to court, and if they didn’t get any jail time then, then we would probably see them again the next week. But then, eventually, they would disappear, or they would straighten out for a while, but sometimes they would come back again. Some would not stay straight.

MN:  Could you tell me a little bit about how you have seen Holland change? Maybe from the beginning of your career to the end of your career?
PD: When I started as a police officer, you wouldn't see two cars on the street all night. There were no people out and about in the middle of the night, especially not during the week. Sometimes on the weekend, but often times by two o'clock in the morning it was all quieted down, there was nothing around. Hardly a car on the street. When I worked as a patrolman on the nightshift. That was probably true for the first five years, pretty much. But the few people who were out late would frequently get into trouble. We had an all night restaurant that we would get called to every weekend for some sort of disturbance, and then in fact there were a couple of them that were, and after a while they closed up because, basically I think because of the problems that they were having or maybe there was not a demand for their service I don't really know. There were a couple of places that were open all night that we went to frequently. There were a few people who were up, but there would not be a car in the street, but there would be several cars parked there by that restaurant. Of course they would get done drinking and they would head to the restaurant to have breakfast so to speak. Then they would get into trouble there. Over the years, traffic, it did increase tremendously, but traffic has increased far more in the last 10 since I retired, there is a lot more activity out, all day long. Of course the department grew rapidly since I started, and so did the wages. I took a small cut in pay to go from Chris-Craft to the Police department and within six months I was making more. From then on, the salary increased nicely. So did the number of employees.

MN: About how big was it when you joined?
PD: I wish I knew. There was probably 15 people on the force at that time, maybe a few more than that. Not counting the specials and the reserves we had. I'd say maybe 15-20 people when I started. I don't know for sure. I really don't. But there are 60 or 70 now. I believe, something like that. If you count all of the community service people, detectives, supervisors, there area lot more working now, and the population is, not only in the city, but in the surrounding area, has really grown and the people from the surrounding area do come into the city and get into trouble and cause trouble. I see a tremendous amount of growth. The number of areas, the business that had to be covered. We used to be able to check, hand check all of our doors and businesses, our retail businesses, and sometimes we would get into industry too. We were able to do that at night with three people on the road. Today, you can't. You can't hand check every door out there.

MN: There is no way.

PD: I stop to think about what it was back then, and how it is today. We were able to, you could split it up with three people, four people, unless it was a busy night. That happened once in a while. Drunk drivers, fights, and accidents that we could get to check all doors. Of course the big changes was the demand for the higher education. That started immediately after I got there. They must of looked at me and said, boy have to hire people with better training [Laughs]. I don't know, they kept me. It did change, as soon as I, I was very fortunate to get the job. It was a good job for me, and it provides me with a good retirement. The city of
Holland was a good place to work. It was an excellent department to work for, and I have nothing to compare it to, except what I have heard or seen.

MN: What do you think made Holland such a good place to work in? All the other officers I hear, even ones who worked in other places still remark, this is a really good place to work.

PD: That is hard to say, and then I hesitate to say the first thought that comes to my mind but I will, I think it is the religious base. Especially years ago, it has changed a lot now, the people of Holland were believers, there were several churches in town. There still are of course. I think that is part of it. That is part of it. It is still a good place to work and I think a lot of that is because the department has sufficient personnel, they are well trained and ethical. The leadership is ethical. They won't put up with corruption of any kind. You take some of your big cities, for some reason they turn their back, and I saw evidence of that, not corruption, but the fact that it was so hard, especially once we go the union, it became so difficult to discipline someone, that the sergeants wouldn't bother to go through the process, and that is what is happening in some of the big cities I guess. And of course, in big cities, the corruption is all the way from the top down in some cases. It is really sad. You don't have that in Holland. Or in this area at all. There is no need to it. The people are treated well. Good leadership.

MN: Is there anything, while you were on the job that ever made your heart skip a beat or anything that made you a little bit nervous when you were out on job?
PD: Well, the adrenaline would really flow if you got into a chase, and also if you were sent to a personal injury accident. You didn’t know what you were going to find, when you got there. Or, but like I say, we didn’t have much of that, but when you go to a family disturbance and there is a weapon involved, that is very... very frightening, very scary situation, even any disturbance, or any family disturbance is, would make me nervous. Funny thing though, when I worked as a jailer, the same people that would be very difficult to deal with when they were under the influence, would be the nicest people when they sobered up when I had to work with them in the jail. The liquor made them different people, some of them, they drank very heavy, they drank a lot, and they had no idea what they were doing, in some cases. If you were on patrol and found a broken, a door broke in. That would be kind of scary too, at first. You didn’t know if they were still in the building and if they had weapons or not. I was never a real tough guy. I don’t think too many guys on the force can handle a real tough guy by themselves. So you learned to talk, I actually remember doing that a couple of times. You talk until help got there, or you simply talk the guy into getting in the police car and going with you.

MN: That sounds like it would be difficult.

PD: Yeah. You never knew when they were going to change attitude and want to fight. And then there’s, I can remember one incident where one fighter got the officer’s gun and the officer did get shot in the shoulder, serious enough but he didn’t get killed. I don’t know of any other time that happened in the city of Holland.
MN: Do you remember who that happened to?

PD: That was John VanEngen. He was on the patrol at that time. I think he was a patrol person, he retired out of the detective bureau quite recently, a couple years maybe. He is presently working in security at the hospital. He was dealing with one of our regulars at that time. I don’t know if this individual had to be drunk to be mean, but generally liquor was involved. I think. This was a nasty individual that we all hated to hear that we had to deal with him. He was one of the, but they all get older and fade out of the picture, some die, some move away, some just grow up. After a while you don’t need to deal with them anymore. There were others too that we hated to deal with. I can remember as a special, a big fight in the back of the old police building, I think it was when I was still a special, I might have been on full time then already. We managed to talk a guy into the, it was an assault, and we managed to get in the back of the police station without fighting, and a couple guys went to see the justice of the peace to get a warrant while we just talked with him at the police department. As soon as we got the warrant a couple of guys walked up to us and said, you are under arrest, and that was when the fight started, I think there were five or six of us who couldn’t hold the man down. It was quite, and it was interesting. I got hurt on that one, not seriously, but I did get knocked on my butt. When I was a jailer, I had a prisoner escape, and I will never forget that, I was taking him back from court, he had his handcuffs in front of him and I being the nice guy, I tried to treat him humanely. I wasn’t familiar enough with this individual to know that there was the potential. I didn’t take him through the security tunnel I took him to through the front door of
the police department, and coming back he decided to run, and fortunately I had a radio and I ran after him of course, but he was fast so I was not going to catch him, but I got on the radio and I think he bounced off two cars running across River Avenue and they caught him a little ways down 7th street. I fell in that chase, I busted my glasses, skinned up my head, my arm, my leg, ripped my whole uniform to pieces. Some guys that thought that was a joke, they sent me a bill for the uniform [Laughter]. From city hall, I got a bill for the uniform. I remember that one. I remember taking a call of a murder in Allegan County. The guys says, I just, I don’t remember what he said, it was like, “I killed uncle somebody” it was an Allegan county crime, but I got the call. This individual had bitten either the victim had bitten the assailant’s ear off or vice versa or something like that. It was rather gruesome when I was told about it, what they found out there. I remember the murder case at the Blue Mill Inn several years ago. A young gal was working the desk there, and I got that call that she was not there, and then we didn’t finder her. A couple days later the state police called and they had found the body south of town. I knew right away who that was, what that was. Maybe it was a day later, they found her body on the south side near South Haven. Didn’t get involved in much detective work. I was involved in a couple of surveillances. I spent several years on the special unit, at that time we called it the Special Emergency Unit, today they call it... something else, I don’t know what it is. I was, part of the time, a sharpshooter with a .308 high power rifle. [End Side A] Some were riot negotiators, others were in charge of teargas and the like. Different people were trained for different things. We really did impress
them one day during a truck struck. Those were some tense situations there, the Independent Truckers were on strike. We were called, there was a disturbance at one of the truck stops. They called for help so, there were eight of us who walk in formation with our riot gear on, and I think we made quite an impression. Even Chief Lindstrom didn't even expect us to walk in there like that. They called for help, they called for back up so be came in there with our batons and riot gear, it appeared as though, we impressed them. And there was no disturbance after that. That truck strike was an interesting affair. A lot of overtime there. Trying to help the regular, the organized truckers get in and out of town, because the independents were picketing all the industry. To keep other trucks from moving if they could. They were trying to stop everybody from running. It was a fight over fuel charges I think. How many years ago, I don't know.

MN: You talked about being a jailer for a little bit, could you talk more specifically what your work was like as a jailer? Maybe some specific duties?

PD: My duties were to make regular jail checks, make sure that the persons were okay, and log that in. Fingerprint prisoners and book them in. Do a, what we called an arrest report, we called them an arrest report, the officers also had to do an arrest report, The officers also had to do an arrest report but that was their activity report. We do an arrest report with information that we gather about the person’s name, address, date of birth, nationality, previous arrests. There were a lot of details on that arrest report but I don’t remember what that all was. Seemed like it was a, social security number, drivers license number, any information that we could gather about the individual. Fingerprinting, and photos, and feed them. Go
get meals. Often times somebody would help me that, if I was busy somebody else would go get the pans. Allow them to see their attorney, put them in interview rooms so detectives could talk to them. Take bond, release them, you had to do a bond slip, and release them if somebody brought bond money out. Take them to court to see the judge, which sometimes, to see their attorneys, maybe the attorneys want them brought over to the court building to talk to them. Most of the time that was in conjunction with their court appearance. Often times they would negotiate a plea bargain and then we wouldn’t have to stay there very long, take them right back and then I would transport them, sometimes I would have to transport them to county jail, I have gone to Allegan county jail, I have gone to Allegan county court, I have gone to Ionia Prison, Transporting prisoners to and from Ionia. I picked up prisoners that were picked up on warrants for the Holland Police Department, I would take care of the vehicle and we had a regular vehicle for transporting prisoners. I would go to different parts of the state and pick up prisoners and return them to our facility of course, and then they had to be processed, booked in, fingerprinted, picture taken. There is a joke sometimes, we would haul the prisoner all the way from the other side, a couple counties away, and then somebody would bring bond in for him, where is they could have posted bond at the other facility. That was a lot of wasted effort there, but it had to be done, that was the way it worked. I would bring a station wagon loads of prisoners back to county jail often times when they were done in court, and they were sentenced, or the bond was too high and they could not post it. Then I would take them to the county jail. I would have county officers pick them up
and transport them as often as I could. I think now they have a different arrangement at the local jail where the county officer is on site on the busy days when there are a lot of arraignments, a lot of court appearances, the county officer was working with our officer out of our jail because often times the county would bring in a whole load of people for court and I'd have to handle them too, the county prisoners, get them to court and back of course the necessary paperwork that was involved in it. And then I would do the best that I can during the day at least to maintain the jail, to keep it clean. A lot of paperwork. And there is more today I guess. I could understand why now, I didn't understand then, but you have to document every move you make. You'll have to be able to go back and say, what did I do at that sort of time.

MN: What did you find really challenging about your position? What challenged you being there?

PD: For me that's a tough question. There were a lot of challenges. But I really can't come up with anything that would be significant. Could you give me an example of a challenge, you have talked to a lot of people now?

MN: Were there duties or certain things? Budd Borr for example, because of several incidents he went through, he found it really challenging to take calls that involve children.

PD: I can't say that I was involved in too much like that. I guess, one of the biggest challenges is to diffuse a situation so it doesn't escalate into a disturbance or a fight. If you can talk to a person long enough to calm them down so there's no fight, and the at even held true in booking people who came in disturbed, upset.
And even over the phone when I was a dispatcher, try to calm people down that way, often times there wasn’t time, that was a busy place so you would have to send somebody else to go see them because you didn’t have time to talk to them on the phone. That was our policy anyway. If their person had a complaint, the officer had to go see them in person, and handle it that way. As far as challenges goes, that is one that’s to keep things from escalating into bigger problems. I must say I have impressed myself a few times. I don’t consider myself a good talker but I was able to talk people out of bigger problems. I was working dispatch and the booking officer at that time called for help, and one of the prisoners had gotten a razorblade from somewhere and was threatening to harm himself. I remember going back there and talking out of that. But if you don’t write your own attaboy, sometimes it is not recognized, and those things like that. It was not recognized, and I figured that that was one of the things I did that was really worthwhile.

Also we would get a lot of messages over teletype, or LEIN, we called it a LEIN machine. It was Law Enforcement Information Network. We would get a lot of messages that we were missing, it was a person missing from Holland. And a message came through, that would be easy to miss, but they found a body in a car in Allegan county again. I called the supervisor and pointed it out to him. This very likely is our missing person. He even hesitated to act on it, he finally did, and it was our missing person. If we had just tossed that message in a folder, it wouldn’t have been acted, it would have been missed and not gotten acted on till much later, I consider that something worthwhile too, that I did as an officer.
Minor thing, it was my job basically. Putting my skills and training to work so to speak.

MN: Were there any particular rewards, on the job what was rewarding, was there something that made your work so worthwhile?

PD: I wanted to be a police officer or a fireman so I could rescue babies from burning buildings, of course that is not reality. What is most rewarding, is being able to assist someone, no matter how small and assist it is. To help somebody that was in need of help. A stalled motorist is a small example, to give them assistance. A lost child, to help them find their parent. To administer aid to somebody that’s ill or hurt. To give them some temporary comfort. You never realize it yourself, but its until you are a recipient, but it is very comforting to have somebody who is supposedly in authority there to help you that you feel you can trust when you are having a problem. I have been in other cities where the police officers are absolutely no help. Bigger cities and that doesn’t sit well with me. When a person comes to a police officer and asks for assistance and a person needs assistance for what ever reason, they should be able to come to a police officer and get some compassion and some help. It is really sad to see what I know is going on in bigger cities. I had it happen to me myself in Chicago.

MN: What about learning experiences? On the job learning experiences, was there any particular events or things that maybe made you look at your job or your life in a different way, maybe put things in perspective. Is there any kind of even that stood out to you as something you learned from?
PD: Well, seeing, dealing and working in the jail at the end of my career I learned one thing for sure, I don’t ever want to be there myself. Even though we treated our people well. It was not comfortable, but we didn’t mistreat them, our residents, in anyway. In fact, they took advantage of me, I let them. I knew they were doing it. I knew they were, they would get more phone calls than they were supposed to have. I knew I was, I can’t think of the word, I was being taken advantage of, and I knew that, but I don’t know if they knew I knew that. I let that go, I let it go, whenever I had time, I would do whatever I can for them. What would you think, what have others told you?

MN: Some have talked about the importance of people. Ollie Wierenga stressed that, he noted how important it was to get involved in the people and the community whether it was your job or not. It seems similar to what you talked about with the jailing and that sort. Others have cited particular incidents.

PD: I always felt it was important to try and relate with the citizens. I have had, I have actually had individuals who were very upset with me at accident scenes and the process of taking the report and having me issue them the ticket. I actually had the person come to my door and apologize later, come to my home knowing that I was simply doing my job. But that is important to try and find out, get into peoples heads and find out what is really bothering them when they are upset. Most of the time they are not mad at me. But yet they are going to take their frustrations out on me as an officer. When their spouse calls the place where they are having the disturbance, they are probably mad at the spouse.
MN: What do you think characterized / characterizes the relationship between the Holland police department and the community, what kinds of things did you see that the community and the police, maybe even on a small scale, got involved with each other?

PD: The police department, our police department, the city of Holland, we were all trained to be helpful. Do what you can to help the citizen, on the small scale, whatever it might be. As things got more modern and we got bigger, there were certain things we couldn’t do anymore to help people, there were liability issues. We couldn’t get involved and we had to tell them that and some people didn’t understand that. [Pause] I don’t know, nothing specific comes to me. I’ve had, I have been taken advantage of. I was working as dispatcher and a young gal came in, and I might have been suckered on this one. She said that she was out of money and out of gas, and had to get to Grand Rapids, and that might have been a scam. I gave her five bucks anyway. Out of my own pocket. Earl Scholl is a good one, he just recently retired, he has done a lot of good, he has helped a lot of citizens, even out of towners who were stranded, car broke down, accidents, spouse became ill in the hospital and the husband or wife needed a place, he took them in. He has done it more than once, taken people in to be of help. I respect him greatly for that. That is something that I would not do very quickly, but he did.

MN: It seems to me that a lot of those things are kind of, a call above the duty. Like officers going beyond what they really have to do, you have talked about Doc Scholl.
PD: I think that is what it is all about though, it should be.

MN: You’d hope so wouldn’t you?

PD: Yes. But I know that is not true in the big city. There are good officers everywhere, don’t get me wrong, they are not bad. But, I have just seen and heard about too many. And I know you are dealing with a lot tougher element in the big city, that does not mean you have to treat the common citizen or a tourist or a visitor to your city like dirt. I know you deal with the scum and you deal with it the way you have to deal with it. I am very disappointed in how it works otherwise in some of the bigger departments. And I would like to talk to people. I wouldn’t mind talking to people about that, say, why is it this way? Can’t you train your officers to treat a decent citizen in a decent way. I guess I can’t dwell on it that much.

MN: Why do you think that Holland officers have been so willing to make that step, to step into that position to help people, to go beyond that?

PD: I don’t think it has anything to do with Holland officers more so than the background of the individuals that they are hiring here. Fortunately we have been able to get people who are, and the ones that weren’t willing, who had the wrong attitude didn’t stick around too long. One, they could not deal with what the Holland Police Department demanded, number two, they wanted to go out in the big city and kick butt. In my opinion that was never what police work was supposed to be about. Like I said, I wanted to rescue babies from burning buildings. I wanted to help people, more so than lock people up and bang heads. That was my goal and I think that’s what they are seeking, even today when they
hire people. I think that is probably why the people you have out there are what they are. It is not the same department as when I started there, but it is still a good place from what I can tell. Otherwise I would hear about it, I am sure I would too. You say you spoke to some younger people, the ones who are out there now.

MN: Well, they have talked a lot like what you said, that, you have to talk a lot. Getting out into, when you get called to a bar brawl or something like that, that you don’t just go in, you don’t crack skulls or anything, you go in there, you talk to them, you settle things down and work things out as a human, as a person. You treat people like people, you respect people like people, but when the situation calls, duty calls, then you have to step in. So officers have told me that a lot of it is even about starting with the younger folks too, children and young adults that aren’t getting involved in anything bad, but are not around with the right people either, and when a particular officer, and this a lot of the community policing, what I have heard of it. Officers say that when they see something that they don’t like, that doesn’t look right to them, they give a call to a parent to straighten things out. Helping keep parents aware when they might not be able to do so.

PD: The education program I am sure is good. There is an awful lot of money and time invested at the Holland Police Department and as the city grows it is harder and harder to touch all of the families and all the children. So there again the programs and the type of people that they are hiring is what’s making the department what it is.

MN: Makes a real big difference. Maybe that is why they liked having you on the force!
PD: That's why they kept me [Laughter] You know I had my days. I had my bad days, and I lost it on occasion, my temper could get the best of me once in a while. Yes, most of the time I wanted to deal calmly and compassionately with people. Once they cross me, like this prisoner who ran away from me. When he came back he was in irons when he went to court. He wasn't free to run, why give him another chance. He has got to realize, and he can tell his buddies out on the street, they don't mess around once you cross them.

MN: If there was something that you, if you could tell a bunch of people, this is what the Holland Police is, this is who we were, this is what made us good, this is what characterized the Holland Police (the Holland Police that you remember), what would you tell people?

PD: For the most part I think, I look back to my time on the force, the people at the police department are a compassionate group, they are there to help. For the most part. There are some of them, there are always a few that have their emphasis in the wrong place in my opinion. To see how many people you can arrest for drunk driving by sitting in the bar parking lot doesn't strike me as being the way to accomplish the necessary goals. I think that the Holland Police Department was, is a group of people that want to help people. Want to be of assistance to the citizens. And educate young people so that they don't grow up to be a deficit when they can grow up to be an asset to the community. And what more can I say, basically, than that? The police department has many programs and they involve both young people and adults. Most of those programs touch a few people anyway, there's always some, but I am going to say the majority of people,
but if you just touch a few, it is like the city mission, they take in people all the
time and they touch a few lives, that will change their attitude. And the same
thing with the programs through the police department. You touch a lot of people
and a few of them will change their attitude, about police, about crime, about
being a good citizen. So that makes those programs worthwhile if you can reduce
crime and change peoples’ attitudes.

MN: We have covered a lot of ground, I was wondering if there is anything else?

PD: Yes. If I should come up with something. I will need your number.

MN: Certainly.

[Tape Paused]

PD: Now I keep a journal of my days’ activities. I wish, wishing is worthless. It
would have been nice if I had kept all those years, some records of my activity,
especially the interesting things that happened to me. If I had only written those
down, I could tell the stories today.

MN: This is my number at the Joint Archives of Holland, and another person who you
can reach there if I am not available is Geoffrey Reynolds. He is my boss. I am a
student at Hope College.

PD: This project is yours right? And he supervises you?

MN: Right. I do the interviews.

PD: What is your goal, what are you studying for?

MN: I am studying English, an English Literature major, and a little creative writing on
the side.

PD: Do you want to teach, or are you going to write?
MN: That is a hard decision. I think I would like to start out writing, even a small writing job. Then someday, go back to teach.

PD: Like for a magazine or a newspaper?

MN: Yes.

PD: And then do some of your own stuff on the side.

MN: Yeah. Then later on, a little of both, eventually go back to teaching. I think one of my quirks about teaching is that, I am 22, and I can’t see myself, I have hard time believing that I would be truly qualified to go in and teach 16 years olds, 17 year olds, 20 years, teach them how to write, maybe I could but...

PD: Get into it and do some writing yourself first. Then someday down the road you will be able to.

MN: Thing I think about, even if they were short, those experiences would be, it would be wisdom to back me up and give me more confidence in teaching. I am a pretty confident writer. Standing in front of a classroom, telling them how to write, it seems hard to me to be telling them, even if I have been writing for years.

PD: What year are you in now?

MN: I will be a senior this year.

PD: So you have some papers out there already?

MN: Some, through the Joint Archives of Holland, I have been working on other ones. It is difficult.

PD: Did you have any visions of going out into the world, to the foreign lands to write, like war torn countries, or be involved in writing about the military activities.

MN: That would be incredible to experience, I would love to take.
PD: I guess you first need to get involved with a newspaper or somebody who wants to send you on those trips.

MN: Right. One of the things that always struck me, I studied in Vienna last summer for a while, and made some friends who were Austrian, and their culture is beautiful, and it is hard from to say that going someplace I'd ever truly understand their culture, but I might be able to experience how they live, and maybe put it into terms that someone like me from our culture would be able to understand.

PD: I wonder if there is stuff like that available like that today. If you take a country and if it is in writing what their culture truly is. Where does the president and his advisors get their information when they have to deal with people from other countries. Do we shake hands, do we bow, or are we allowed to touch. Are there certain words we cannot say. There are certain things that we should not say or cannot say because we would offend them. It would be interesting if that stuff is out there.

MN: I bet there is.

PD: Must be, somewhere. Are you talking about writing a book or a paper on other counties or cultures?

MN: I have no idea, I will find out when it comes. I know I would enjoy writing a book.

PD: Sometimes it is tough to get them published and then sell them. If they have got something they want you to write about, then they pay you ahead of time.

MN: That’s right.

PD: Where are you from? Holland?
MN: Actually, am from the East side of the state. I grew up on the East Side of Detroit in a city called Grosse Pointe.

PD: That is one of the high rent districts isn’t it? So to speak.

MN: Yes. My parents were attracted to it because of good schools, and it was a good place to grow up. Like anyplace, it has its perks and it has its difficulties. All in all, if I had kids and I had to pick a place to have them grow up, I would not hesitate to let them grow up there.

PD: How big is it? How many people?

MN: Well, it is about the size of Holland, maybe a little bigger. Are you a native Hollander?

PD: Yeah. I was born in Hamilton actually. We moved to Holland when I was Five or Six. Been her all my life. My wife and I have been married just about 43 years.

MN: Do you have kids?

PD: Three children, all married, I have about six grand children. My middle boy is divorced, wife went nuts and left him. Didn’t want the kids, didn’t want him.

MN: What is your wife’s name?

PD: Marilyn.

MN: And your Grandchildren?

PD: I have, the two girls of my son Rex are Kelly and Kari. My boy Evan has Phillip and Lindsey (Lindsey is the eldest of the two). My daughter April has Jordan and Kelsey. [Finish the interview by showing me two framed awards, one for retirement, the other for Officer of the Year in 1993]