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Bocks, Nathan Oral History Interview: Sesquicentennial of Holland, "150 Stories for 150 Years"

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Oral History Interview with
Nathan Bocks

Conducted June 17, 1997
by Ann Paeth

Sesquicentennial Oral History Project
"150 Stories for 150 Years"
AP: The first thing, could you state your name and when and where you were born and where you have lived and when you came to Holland?

NB: I am Nathan Samuel Bocks. I was born on [date removed], 1967. I was born in Muskegon, Michigan, lived there for two months, and then moved to Menominee, Michigan up in the upper peninsula. Lived in Menominee until I was three years old, then moved to Grand Haven in 1970. I lived in Grand Haven from 1970 to 1975, at which time my family moved to Port Colburne, Ontario. Lived in Port Colburne, Ontario for a year and a half, and then moved to Mount Pleasant, Michigan. I lived in Mount Pleasant until I graduated from high school. From high school, I started at the University of Michigan, I went there for a semester, and then transferred to Hope College, so I actually came to Holland, Michigan in January of 1986 and have lived here almost continuously ever since. There was a period when I was in law school where I actually had two places, an apartment in Milwaukee that I lived in four days out of the week, and I stayed in Holland, Michigan, at my future in-laws house, three days out of the week. I actually commuted back and forth between here and Milwaukee during that three year period. I was very interested in seeing my fiance as much as I possibly could, but I started out as a Hope College student.

AP: So you moved around a lot as a child. Did your parents' job...?

NB: I did move around a lot. Yes, my parents were both educators, both teachers, and
my dad was in administration. So he was a high school principal and superintendent of schools in Grand Haven, was a professor at a university in Canada, and then was in administration and Central Michigan University in Mount Pleasant until he retired. We moved around based on my dad’s job, and then my mother would always get a teaching job wherever he happened to be working.

AP: You started at U of M for a semester?

NB: Yes. I stayed there for a semester, did not have a very good experience at the University of Michigan at all. As a matter of fact, my parents had wanted me very much to go to Hope College, and I was the quintessential renegade 18 year old who said, "I am not going to go where my parents want me to go."

AP: How did they know about Hope?

NB: My parents are both Hope grads. My parents are Hope grads, my grand parents are Hope grads. I have a picture on my wall right behind me of my grandfather when he graduated from Hope prep. The family history goes way back at Hope College as well. But I started at U of M and was in a program there called the Residential College, and ended up with a roommate who had a drug abuse problem. The college was not very cooperative in splitting us up. We knew that we didn’t like each other. We knew that we had different philosophies on life and different lifestyles. When they decided that they were not going to let me move into another room, I decided to transfer. I actually was in class at U of M on a Monday morning and in class at Hope College on Tuesday afternoon. The switch happened that quickly. It was almost within 24 hours, I made the switch over to Hope College. Best decision I ever
made. Then I spent the next three and a half years at Hope, and loved every minute of it. I was a political science major and went on the Washington semester during my junior year, so I worked for the Congress and the Department of Health and Human Services while I was at Hope as well. Political science major and studio art minor. I got the great liberal arts education. I was a sculptor.

AP: Who ran those programs while you were there?

NB: I went on the Washington semester with Dr. Jack Holmes, who still does it with Dr. Zoeteway, but he was not the one that went that year. Dr. Elder was there as well at that time. Professor Kim was just starting, while I was there. Mike Englehardt was another associate professor that was there for a period of time while I was there. Then, in the art department, it was Bill Mayer who got me involved in art. Hope requires you to take a class in the arts. My roommates were taking music or dance or things like that, and I thought, "I'm going to take an art class, just for fun." I took Sculpture I, and loved it. Bill thought I had some talent and so he encouraged me to do more, so I took another sculpture class. He said, "You ought to minor in this." It was a nice break from the academic stuff that I was doing, it really was. I took as much as I could in the three dimensional arts. I'm not much of a painter.

AP: Did you do any ceramics or pottery?

NB: I could never get into the ceramics class, I couldn't fit it into my schedule with the other things that were going on. Plus, in order to minor, you had to take art history and you had to take the drawing and you had to take the painting as well. I wasn't nearly as good at those things as I was at the three dimensional stuff, but still had a
wonderful time in the art department. Since I started doing that, I think, my junior year, I had to complete the minor in the last two years I was at Hope, so my senior year I was actually taking mostly art classes and just the required political science ones. I was having a lot of fun my senior year.

AP: Are you involved in the campus much, or do you see it a lot? Has it changed?

NB: It’s changed quite a bit. As a matter of fact, the very first day I was on Hope’s campus was the day they started moving houses for the Van Wylen Library. The day that I started, there were still houses at the spot where the Van Wylen Library is. During my tenure in Holland, the Hope campus has changed completely. There’s not only the Van Wylen Library that went up, but then the connection to the old library which is now the computer center, Van Zoeren, which used to be the library when I started at Hope. Then, of course, the Haworth Conference and Visitor Center has gone up since that time. A lot of the houses where my friends lived, the cottages where they lived, were not there anymore. We always used to joke about trying to find your way around campus every time you came back in the fall.

AP: Yeah, we’ve been doing that for a while.

NB: Exactly. I used to spend most of the summers when I was here working on the paint crew at Hope. So we used to watch the houses moving down the street during the summertime. That was a lot of fun. The campus has changed dramatically since then. My sister works on campus. She was the chaplain’s assistant while Chaplain VanHiest was there. Now she works with Dale Austin in career planning and placement. I’m over to campus to see her a lot. But I don’t have any real official
connections to the college anymore. I like going. I’ve got a lot of great, fond memories. There’s a neat feeling you get when you walk across campus. But I’m not able to spend as much time there as I used to.

AP: Do you remember first impressions of Holland?

NB: My first impressions of Holland actually go way back, long before I ever came to Hope College, because my parents grew up here. They lived here, they met when they were three years old, and knew each other all the way until they graduated from high school, both went to Hope College, and got married right out of Hope College. But, all of my aunts and uncles have always lived here, my grandmother has always lived here, and my sister, who works on campus, now, is ten years older than I am, so she was graduating from Hope when I was in elementary school, and I used to come and visit her a lot as well. So my impressions of Holland were always going to visit the relatives. I remember down town, I remember Centennial Park. I always remembered different places in town, but was never able to connect all of the different locations with one another. When I got here at 18 years old, I didn’t know my way around, but I knew a lot about different places. I’d been to Ottawa Beach before, many times, I’d been to Point West before. But I just didn’t have the ability to find my way from one place to another. My sister only lived six or eight blocks from campus, but I didn’t know how to get from her house to campus, or to get from campus to her house, just because I didn’t know the geography and how Holland was laid out. I solved that problem, after my freshman year at Hope, I became a Domino’s Pizza driver, and lied my way into the job by saying I knew my way
around Holland. I thought, "The streets all one way are numbers, then the other way they’re all trees, I can figure it out, they’ll give me a map, I’ll be able to figure it out." Within about a week, I knew my way to everywhere that there was to know in Holland.

AP: The map is a good map. I use it a lot to get around to interview people.

NB: It’s a great map. The city’s laid out really pretty easily. Especially the area around the campus is very easy to find your way around.

AP: It’s a nice grid. What did you think of Holland?

NB: I always enjoyed coming, I always liked being here, I always thought of it as a neat little town. I always grew up in towns about the size of Holland, so this, for me, was just another little town, although there was always the Tulip Festival and there was always Russ’. We always would go to Russ’ for lunch. As far as I was concerned, there wasn’t any other place to eat in Holland. Russ’ was where you always had to go to eat. As a kid that was what my first impression was. When I came as a college student, it was a dramatically different place than the University of Michigan was. My last day at University of Michigan, I walked across the quad and did not see a single person that I knew. No one acknowledged my existence at all, walking through. No one said hello, no one really even looked up. It was a real impersonal kind of place. My very first day at Hope, I didn’t know anyone at Hope, but everybody that I saw on campus, said hi to me. That impression of Hope College has stuck with me since that day, that people were just much more naturally open and friendly there. The first week that I was at Hope, I thought, I know more people
here now than met at the University of Michigan in the first four months. And they’re all such nice people. I can’t believe that there is this concentration of really, really nice people all at one place. That impression of Hope, then, continued to grow into the Holland community, once I graduated from Hope and I started dealing with the community at large, I started realizing that’s pretty much true about Holland, as well. Holland is a real unique place that way. I saw the contrast when I moved to Milwaukee for law school. Milwaukee’s a wonderful place, it’s got a lot of nice people, but it is not like Holland, Michigan is.

AP: Do you think that’s due to size or...?

NB: There’s a different kind of feeling in this town. Partly a pride in the fact that you live in this town, I think there’s a real strong history in this town that people recognize, they know their roots. Even though we’ve become a more diverse community, there’s still a pride that, this is Holland and we’ve got kind of a reputation to live up to. I still think there are a lot of people in this community who want to make sure that reputation continues. That the friendliness of the town and the cleanliness of the town, and that feeling of warmth and community stays, so they work real hard at trying to keep that feeling there. I think that’s what it is. Where in other communities, I mean, I lived in Mount Pleasant, another nice place to live, I would never want to say anything bad about it, but it didn’t have that same feeling of community. It was more like, it’s a city where people come and they do their jobs, and they all live, but there wasn’t that same feeling that there is in Holland. The joke always is, the first question people always ask in Holland, Michigan is, what church
do you go to? There’s that and then, where do you work? Between those two things, you can find out a whole lot about people in this town. You can be classified, in a way, but also it identifies you with different parts of the community. Being recognized as being a member of a certain church, I think, is wonderful. It’s identifying you with that aspect of your life, rather than just, what do you do for a living? It’s more like, who are you? Rather than, what do you do?

AP: Even in other cities, it seems like when you go to the mall or something, there’s this whole rule that you don’t even make eye contact with strangers walking by. Here, it wasn’t just on campus or people that walk through campus and down town, you do make eye contact and you say hello and good morning.

NB: Exactly. As a young male, I always worried about, at U of M, making eye contact with women, because you think, are they then going to be worried about what are your motives.

AP: Right. Well, I spent a semester in New York and if a guy did say hello and made eye contact like you do at Hope, I would be worried about him. That would probably be the proper instinct there. But here...

NB: Sure. But here it’s a different feeling. People are just generally being friendly. You don’t necessarily have to worry about those ulterior motives here. It’s still a place where you can be out at night and not have to worry so much. If you leave the doors unlocked, that’s not too big of a problem to worry about. Where in other communities, I don’t think that that’s necessarily true. You still let your kids play in the yard and don’t have to worry too much about it. You worry probably more than
you did twenty, thirty years ago. But not as much as you do in different communities. You just don't. I still know people who leave their keys in their ignition when they park. They don’t worry about locking their car. It's nice to be able to live in a town like that.

AP: Let’s talk a little bit about Holland and it’s history, because you did mention that you were very interested in it. I’m just curious, for somebody coming into the town, what things you’ve learned about the history, what things most intrigue you and stood out to you, or fascinating tidbits?

NB: I’ll preface what I’m saying by explaining that most of what I’ve learned about Holland’s history has come either from my mother, or other family members. But the bulk of it really comes from the fact that I’m a tour guide at Tulip Time, and I get on the motor coaches, and I drive around with visitors that come in, and they’re only here from a couple of days, and so I’m trying to do exactly that type of thing, I’m trying to tell them, this is what’s kind of neat that’s happened in town in the past. Starting right from the beginning when they came in 1847, the fact that the people that came were middle class kind of people. They were the people that owned the stores, they were the people that ran the bakeries. They were the doctors, the lawyer type people. What I think of as the merchant type. They were not farmers. They were not lumber men. They didn’t know how to cut down a tree. That first year, a lot of people lost their lives just by being hit by trees that were falling down. They didn’t know that if you cut out one half of a tree, and then you cut from the back side, that it will fall in the direction that you want it to. They just kind of cut straight
through, and then it would fall where ever it would go. The fact that the disease was so bad, they were losing people for small pox and dysentery. During that first year, the first public building that they built was an orphanage for all of the children who lost their parents during that first season. By the time that orphanage was finished, all of those orphan children had been absorbed into the community, had been adopted by other families, so they didn’t need the orphanage anymore. So what did they do with the orphanage? They turned it into a school. That became, then, the basis for public schools and Holland Christian Schools, and Hope College. Looking at education, the fact that the community was settled in 1847, Hope College was founded in 1866. Within 19 years, they went from nothing to a four year college. That’s an amazing thing.

AP: The first children born there, by the time they were old enough to go to school, it was there.

NB: Exactly, it was such a priority for those early settlers. When you start looking at just little things like that. We always talk on the tours about the fire of 1871 and how that almost destroyed the community. I always get a laugh from the people on the coach when we talk about Isaac Capon and the fact that he had sixteen children. I always say, he had eleven children by his first wife and then she died. As if it was because she died out of bearing eleven children... But then five years later he married his house keeper. She was quite a bit younger than he was, I can’t remember exactly how much younger, and then he was thrown out of the church because of it, but it was such a frowned upon thing. There’s a story that goes along with it, and this is
what the tourists really like, they like the stories rather than the numbers. They don’t care about the dates, they don’t care about the facts and figures. But one of the first things that the new wife did when she moved into the house was to make him get rid of the big glass chandelier in the foyer because she was so tired of dusting that thing all those years that she was the housekeeper. Now that she was the lady of the house, she wanted that thing gone, she had been so tired of dusting all those years. The fact that Isaac Capon was the mayor and was very wealthy because he owned the tannery, and that the tannery was one of the big reasons that the city burned down in 1871, because the fires hit all of the bark at the tannery, and it sent embers all over the city, and started little fires all over the place. The fact that we didn’t lose any life, there was no loss of life in the fire of 1871. Even though on the same day in Peshtego, Wisconsin and in Chicago, there was incredible loss of life. The fact that the first channel that they dug out to Lake Michigan, between Lake Mac and Lake Michigan, was blown shut by the wind and they had to get a grant to dig it back out again. All of those little mistakes that were made in those early years. I also try to include little tidbits of my family’s history in that as well. I mentioned that that first year they were having so much trouble with people dying from disease and from accidents, Van Raalte was worried about the colony surviving because they were losing people and they needed more and more people to come. While all of those bad things were happening here, the stories are that he was writing letters back to the Netherlands saying how good things were. I always joke, my family was not on that first boat that came through. My family was one of those groups of settlers that came later that
were tricked into coming that were told things were great when they really were not that great. But if those later settlers had not come, maybe the colony wouldn’t have survived. I think it’s my great, great, great grandfather was the first choir director of the church. He asked for forty guilders a year to be choir director, and they only paid him twenty. I don’t know if that says anything about how good of a singer he was or not, but he was not only the choir director, but was always… you know, some of the barrel makers in the town, they were the coopers. If you ever look at the pillars on Pillar Church, they’re individual slats of wood. They made those pillars. So I can trace something my family has done, I can look at those pillars. My office used to be on 8th Street and the back windows faced 9th Street and faced the Pillar Church. Any day I wanted to, I could look out the back windows and see something my family had done over a hundred years ago. It’s still standing there here in Holland, Michigan. All of those things, I think, are just fascinating. In this community. There was so much adversity and people didn’t really know what they were doing, but yet they made it work because they worked real hard at it. They wanted to make it work. I think that kind of thing still goes on. We talk about more modern history, we talk about Edgar Prince and all of the things he did starting out. A lot of people don’t know, his mother used to have to take in washing, because his father had died when Edgar was very young, and in order to support the family, his mother had to take in other people’s laundry. Now, at the time he died, he was a multi-billionaire. All of those little things. I get those little tidbits from my parents, who grew up in town, who went to high school with Edgar Prince. They knew him...
when he was just another kid. They knew Guy Vander Jagt, the Michigan Congressman, from years and years ago, because they went from Hope College with him. Those big figures in Holland’s modern history seem like they have all come during that last fifty years or so, and have grew up with my parents or grew up with my father-in-law in town. There are a lot of those connections there. This town is interlaced with people who are related with one another, either very, very closely or distantly, or anywhere in between. I always joke, my wife may be my third cousin, I just don’t want to even check. There just seems to be too many connections. She knew most of the people in my family before I ever knew her.

AP: It’s interesting with that recent history that there has been that willingness again to make things work, but there’s also been a lot of planning and forethought that’s gone into making Holland what it is today. How has the city changed in the past ten years?

NB: The biggest example, I think, is going to be in the commercial development and in residential development. When I came into town, there was no mall, there was no Sam’s Club, there was no Walmart. James Street was considered to be way out in the middle of nowhere, and now that’s kind of the hub of the commercial activity in Holland. When I came to town, down town was really the only place that you could go to shop, if you wanted to, or, if you wanted to make a big trip to Hope College, you went down 8th Street to where Big Lots is now, which used to be K-mart, right on the corner of 31 there. That was still way out in the middle of nowhere, as far as Hope College students were concerned. There’s been that. All of the development
on the north side. I didn’t even know that the north side existed, really, when I was in college. My whole world, all of Holland, Michigan, was made up of the area immediately surrounding the college and then that strip of Southshore Drive and Ottawa Beach Road that went out to the two areas where you could get to the beach. Otherwise, there wasn’t really much else, in my mind, to Holland, Michigan. You either went to one of those places or you went to Grand Haven or you went to Grand Rapids. If you wanted to go shopping, you went to Grand Rapids. Now you stay in Holland, because we have almost everything here that they have in Grand Rapids. Even five years ago when I bought my first house. In order to get the building supplies that I needed to do the remodeling work that I wanted to do, I had to drive to Grand Rapids. We didn’t have Menard’s, we didn’t have Lowe’s. All of those big commercial retail developments have all come in within the last five or ten years. I’m not a commercial developer by any means. But it’s hard for me to believe that we’re able to support all of that, that we’re able to pump that much money into all of those businesses, but we do it. I’ve been told population is growing by leaps and bounds. At one point, I was told five families a week were moving into Holland. That number’s got to be higher than that now. One of the things I do in my practice is real estate work and real estate development, and I meet with people all the time who are buying up big 25, 50 acre parcels and saying, OK, we’re going to put a subdivision in here, and helping them through the process of figuring out how all of that’s going to be done. When you talked about planning, the city fathers, or the community fathers, depending upon what area you’re talking about, are starting to
look ahead a little bit more, and say, we need to do some more planning. We can not just let development go wherever it’s going to go. I just talked to somebody who’s talking about a development in Overisel Township. And Overisel Township has said, we are not going to convert anymore tillable farm land in to residential area. We want to keep our tillable farmland. I think that that’s incredible planning on the part of a township. They can actually increase their tax base, by turning it into residential property, so it’s more money for the community if they do that, but they’re realizing that there’s value to that farmland, that maybe all of this development isn’t good to just let it go and let it go. We’ve got to maintain some more green space. So they’re starting to do the planning that way as well. Maybe the change has come almost full circle in the also ten years. Maybe ten years ago we were thinking, let’s develop and develop and develop, let’s get this stuff built up as fast as we can. Now we’re starting to realize that’s not a good thing and turning around and saying, maybe we need to plan more on that development, and maintain more of that small community. We always joke, Holland has gotten too big for its britches. We don’t necessarily have the infrastructure we need. We’re starting to have traffic jams. 3:30 and 5:30 are the two traffic jams in Holland. We need to start thinking about, OK, what are we going to do to deal with all of these people that are coming in?

AP: A lot of people complain about the traffic. Of course, I don’t’ think about it because I’ve always had a car up for a year. So to me, I thought that was just the way it was. They say, no, it wasn’t.

NB: No. It wasn’t at all. It’s gotten a lot worse. It used to be you could drive up and
down US 31 and hardly have to slow down at all. There weren’t all of the lights all the way along where you had to stop all the way along, and there are what we call, suicide corners.

AP: It seems they’re not timed very well, too. It seems there are some glitches where you have to go either really slow or really fast to make lights.

NB: We, as tour guides during Tulip Time, always joke about how the reason Holland has gotten so big is the fault of people in Holland, Michigan, because we brag so much about how nice it is here. If we kept our mouths shut and didn’t say what a great place it was to live, people wouldn’t want to come and live here. Maybe we ought to be more quiet about it so we’re able to maintain our small community. But I think it’s too late for that. I think it’s going to continue to keep growing and keep getting better, as long as we plan well for it. I don’t ever plan on going anywhere else.

This is where I’m going to be for the rest of my life, because I think this is the greatest place in the world to live. I’ve travelled a lot, I’ve lived in other places, I’ve lived on the east coast, I’ve lived in Wisconsin, I’ve lived in a lot of different areas in Michigan. I don’t think there’s any place that compares to Holland, I just don’t.

Western Michigan is the place to live. One of the nicest areas in the world.

AP: So you’re settled.

NB: I’m settled. I’ve got a wife, I’ve got two kids, I’ve got a house. I’m the nuclear family, I’m here. Great place, great schools. I’m looking forward to my boys going to the Holland Public Schools because I think that they do a great job. I think the surrounding schools do a great job. This is, I think, a wonderful place to bring your
kids up. I grew up in Mount Pleasant, and the joke with Mount Pleasant was, it’s a nice place to live, but you wouldn’t want to visit there. Holland, Michigan is a nice place to live and a place where you’d want to visit. There are those other things going on. We’ve got Lake Mac, we’ve got Lake Michigan. We’ve got the other small lakes in the area. We’ve got wonderful stuff to do in the summertime. If you can live through the snow in the winter, it’s fantastic. By the time fall roles around, I’m excited for the snow to come. It’s kind of nice to get out there with a shovel again and dig your way out and see all the beauty of the whiteness.

AP: It seems that as far as commercial growth, it maybe might be leveling off. It doesn’t seem there’s any demand for any other places to come in. Nobody’s saying, gee, we don’t even have a, fill in the blank. They don’t have many blanks left to fill in. The only thing people seem to think the development is lacking on is residential, because there isn’t enough housing, or the right kind of housing in the right spots.

NB: I keep thinking the same thing. I keep thinking we’ve got to hit a peak, we have to have peaked on that development. But then it seems like every time I hear a report on building starts or on building permits or the amount of money that’s being spent on building permits, because that’s a direct correlation to how much money is being spent on construction. It’s unbelievable how much is there. Even in residential, they’re still growing by leaps and bounds. The parade of homes is going on right now. There are sixty-five homes in the Parade of Homes. That is one of the largest Parade of Homes in the country for a community of Holland, Michigan size. Grand Rapids has one that’s much larger, but there aren’t many that get bigger than the one
from Grand Rapids, and Holland is getting very close to what Grand Rapids does. Those are just for the premiere, showcase homes for the builders. For every one of those, there’s got to be ten more or a hundred more that are all new construction going up, and they’re able to fill them.

AP: There are a lot of subdivisions. I keep driving into a lot of subdivisions. It seems people have thought that there isn’t enough affordable housing, though. A lot of people coming in to work in the industry that’s been booming... But it also seems to be a trend that for a lot of people who used to live in the core city and all of those houses, which are getting rather old now, to move into subdivisions and leave those houses and to let other people coming in to take over those houses. Then they complain because they say they’re not very well kept up. A lot of them are rented out now, and they’re thirty years old than the houses they just got. What do you expect? They’re old, they take a lot more maintenance.

NB: There is a movement, though, of people to buy houses in that core city area. There is a movement of younger people, of the twenty-something and thirty-something, that are starting to realize that there’s some value in those houses and that you can’t buy a house like that or you can’t build a house like that anymore. There’s been a great demand in the last five years for houses on the north side. The north side was the place to live. You could get a new house on a nice lot, and that was the trendy place to live. There’s kind of a shift taking place where people are thinking, no, let’s move back into the core city area or the south side, and start trying to revitalize those neighborhoods.
AP: We’re renting there right now. We were renting from someone else in Castle Park, and everybody would say, that must be so nice. But we were so isolated, and during the winter it’s just vacant out there. It’s spooky, I thought, when I was home alone. But now, for the summer, we’re renting on 15th Street and in a lot of ways, I like it a lot more. I can visit people much more easily. We have a very old house that a lot of college students have rented and it’s gone down hill. But we cleaned it all and the landlord was very happy. But if you didn’t have a lot of money to invest in a house, but if you wanted a house with a lot of space, and a little yard, if you could spend the time to fix it up, it would make such a difference. You would have a pretty nice house. It’s got hard wood floors all on the first floor.

NB: The theory of, "That’s a bad neighborhood," is a self fulfilling prophecy. If somebody labels a particular neighborhood as a bad neighborhood, as one where you don’t want to live in because there are going to be problems there, or there are problems there. What ends up happening then is people don’t buy in that neighborhood. The property values do go down. The people who are going to be buying those houses are the people who may not, then, be able to afford to keep them up. If you’re buying a $30,000 house because that’s all that you can afford, you may not be able then to have the money, then, to make the improvements that you need to, or keep up the maintenance that the house requires.

AP: Or simple things, that they’re not mowing your lawns. Well, if you just moved into a strange town, you’re trying to get a job and you’re just renting a house... I don’t own a lawn mower. Our landlord does it, but if I had bought a house, that’s not my
first priority, to buy a lawn mower.

NB: Exactly, it’s a big investment to make relative to the house you’ve got.

AP: It’s just a lack of understanding relative to both ends of it.

NB: It is. I do a lot of real estate work, and I talk to a lot of people who have that idea in their head, that you should not invest in the core city area, because it’s going to be a losing proposition. I try to explain to them that that mentality is going to make it a losing proposition. That if people thought the other way, if they thought, these are valuable properties. This is our city. They’re are wonderful, gorgeous houses, and the beautiful wood work. They need some help. They need some fixing up. Really, as a real estate attorney who does a lot of landlord/tenant work, it’s a landlord’s obligation to make sure that a house is taken care of. Now, granted, there are circumstances where a tenant will come in and just destroy the place, but if a landlord doesn’t keep it up, if the landlord does not keep paint on the exterior walls, does not have it looking like a nice place, that has an effect on the entire neighborhood. If those landlords would keep those properties up, then the entire neighborhood would benefit. The reason that they don’t, however, is that you can get almost as much money for a property that does not look good as you can for one that does look good. The rental value is not much of a difference.

AP: So a lot of people don’t know their rights as renters? What are some of those big things people don’t realize?

NB: Yes. Luckily I represent landlords who keep up their properties, thank goodness. Actually, that’s a choice on my part. I pick and choose who my clients are, and if
they’re not doing it, they get lectures from me that they better do it or they’re going to have more problems. Really, what people need to make sure of is that the properties that they’re living in are habitable. The problem is, that’s a very minimal standard. Fit for human habitation is not, necessarily, nice. What people need to do is, I think, shop around more, and be willing to pay an additional $50 a month to live in a nicer place, so those places that are not so nice don’t get rented, or the landlords realize they’re not going to get the return on these places that they could if they fixed them up. It’s a consumer oriented issue. It has to be demand driven. If it’s not demand driven, if people are still willing to pay $400 a month for a dump, when they could get a really nice place for $450 or $500 a month, than those dumps are going to stay there. More places are going to turn into dumps, because it’s cheaper and easier, and more profitable for everyone.

AP: It’s too bad because, the nicer a place is and clean when you move in, you keep it that way. But if it was a mess when you moved in and you had to do all that work just so you would be happy with it, when you leave, you don’t care and you do the same thing. It just makes it worse.

NB: That’s partly the fault of the tenant, but it’s also the fault of the landlord. What I’m finding in Holland, though, is that people are starting to buy up those properties in the core city and there is a concerted effort to improve that area. Really what needs to be done in that area is, rather than have it be a rental based area, there needs to be owner occupied houses there. There are a few people in particular, I’m trying to remember the name, but there’s a builder/remodeler who’s been buying up a lot of
places in the Hope College area and redoing them, and they are absolutely gorgeous. He goes through and he makes it wonderful. I think he’s taking a big risk by doing that. He’s investing a lot of money in something that may not show him a big return, but it should. In theory, or morally, it should give a big return because he’s doing something very, very nice. He’s taking a beautiful old house, restoring it, and making it, now, a good, functioning house. Meaning, it’s now got new plumbing. It’s now got new wiring. It looks very, very nice. But it’s sitting in a neighborhood that may not have as nice of houses around it. What’s nice is, that area of nicer houses is growing. It’s growing outside of the historic district. It’s starting to bleed over into the surrounding neighborhoods. As you drive through that area, you will see more and more, maybe one or two bad houses, and then a house that you think, boy, that house looks really nice. Somebody’s working really hard on that house. Maybe the next year you’ll see two nice houses on that block.

AP: It’s hard when all the houses on the block aren’t kept up, it’s hard to do all of that work on it. But if somebody does, then eventually the more houses that have work done on them, people kind of get embarrassed, and they look and think, gosh, everybody else can do this for their home, then I can do this for my home.

NB: Exactly. There are two things that I hope happen, and one that I know is happening. One is that I hope that the people that are living in Holland now have that same kind of perseverance that the first settlers did. There’s going to be a tough period, for the core city, especially. But the rest of Holland is blooming. We’ve got very low unemployment, people are making very good wages in town, so there is a lot of
money in the community. As we start putting that back in, and if we can kind of ride
ourselves through to improving some of those core city areas, we’re going to be
doing really well. The thing that I know is happening is, home improvement is now
the trendy in thing to do. To be "Tim the Tool Man" is kind of the cool thing,
especially for the twenty, thirty, forty-something generations. That is going to make
people improve the properties that they’re in, rather than live someplace for a while,
move someplace else. I think people are staring to settle more. Or, if they are
moving, they’re moving in a place that is not kept up that well, making it nice,
turning a profit on that place, buying another one, doing the same thing.

AP: It is kind of a trend to save all of that money and do it yourself. Because, that’s the
only asset a lot of us have, our ability to work.

NB: Sweat equity is what’s going to turn around the core city. I really think so. There
are people who are really trying to do that. It’s interesting. I don’t know all of the
people that are doing, but all of the people that I know that are doing it, it’s
interesting, they are somehow related to Hope College, and they are somehow
related to the ministry, which is really kind of interesting. There’s been a real effort
with people in the ministry to move into that core city area, and then try to develop it
and try to improve it, just from a physical standpoint, but then also the fact that
you’re living next door to a minister, I think, really helps people live a different kind
of lifestyle, too. I don’t think that you’re going to be standing in your driveway
speaking loud obscenities if you know that a minister is living in the house next door
to you. Whether the minister is there listening or not, is another thing that people
think, boy, Pastor so-and-so is right next door, I think I better be a little bit more careful about what I say. That’s how things can be improved, as well. Holland is a community of churches. There’s a church on every corner in this city, which I think is another very helpful thing. As those churches come together, which they’ve started to do as well, some of those barriers will be coming down. I think the fact that St. Francis suffered that fire may be a net positive for the church community in Holland, because Protestant churches opened their doors for those Catholic services, which you would not have seen twenty, thirty years ago. There was a big wall that was built between the Catholic and the Protestant churches. Now, those walls are coming down between the Hispanic Churches, and the white, anglo-saxon, Protestant churches. There’s starting to be a mixing there. Christ Memorial Church and Maple Avenue Church have joined forces for Maple Avenue Ministries, which is right in the core city. It’s interesting, Maple Avenue Church used to be a white church in the middle of this neighborhood, and it has now turned into this very ethnically diverse church that is being assisted by a big, suburban church, which is really what I would label Christ Memorial as. People are being drawn out of Christ Memorial into Maple Avenue Church. It’s not just money that’s flowing that way, it is people that are flowing that way, because they’re starting to see a different type of ministry there as well. That, I think, is going to break down some of those barriers.

AP: Do you think the trend of the churches getting bigger and consolidating, do you think that will continue, or do you think it’s getting to a breaking point where people will want small churches?
NB: I think that it’s going to get to a point where people are going to say it’s too big. The people are going to feel lost in that shuffle, because not only are there the Christ Memorials and the Central Wesleyans which are just huge, and they do whatever they can to then try and break those big groups down into smaller groups, but there are other small churches that are starting out, too, and non-denominational churches. When you look at Lakeland Community Church and there’s the Vineyard, that meets at one of the middle schools, and then there’s Ridgepoint that used to meet at the Knickerbocker. I had a cousin who went there who loved it, and died prematurely from cancer and was buried in a Ridgepoint sweatshirt. Those smaller, non-denominational churches are starting to have a big impact in the religious community of this town as well, because they’re meeting a need that people have who are not comfortable in the more formal service type church.

AP: A lot of people coming into this area haven’t really been exposed to the Reformed or Christian Reformed Church before. It’s not a very strong religion throughout the entire state or region. It is in this area, but as far as other parts of the states...

NB: This is the western Michigan Bible Belt. People are looking for something different. One of the problems I see, I used to live in a neighborhood where I was surrounded of people of retirement age, and they were going to churches that were dying. There were not young families in those churches. The congregation was getting older. (tape ends) Even those neighbors of mine that were of retirement age started to leave those churches because they were starting to feel stagnated in that older church because there was not new life coming in. One of the things that the Vineyard and Lakeland
and Ridgepoint are doing is starting to meet the needs of people that are in their twenties and their thirties, and that’s a relatively unchurched group. You know, you go to church with your parents until you go to college, and if you continue to go to church when you’re in college, you do that, but then a lot of a lot of people, once they get out of college, kind of lose touch with the church, until they get kids of their own. Then they start wanting to have the kids baptized in the church and have the kids go to Sunday School, and start teaching their children what they learned. Then they get back involved again. But there’s a ten year gap in there where people are not regularly attending church, and those are the people that those newer churches are trying to aim at. That’s really, demographically, and from a marketing standpoint, that’s a great thing for the church to do, because you’re hitting those people right when they’re going to start coming back again.

AP: I think everybody’s aware that that’s the demographic or when kids get to a certain age, they start to not be too interested. The church has always been aware of that, but then they just usually say, well, if those people aren’t interested, we’re not going got waste our time or money to try to get them involved. It seems if you were really following the doctrine of your church, those would be the first people that you’d want to focus on.

NB: From a ministry standpoint, that is a crucial time. I can’t imagine an age group that needs the church more than college students. I just can’t. Knowing what I know is going on at Hope College now, with their chapel program, is absolutely fantastic. That’s another example of something that’s changed significantly since I’ve been here.
When I went to Hope, chapel was Monday, Wednesday, Friday. It probably still is now. Like 11-11:30 there was a time frame when nobody has class, but that was also a time when a lot of people ate lunch, because they had a class that ended at 11 and another one that started at 11:30, so you'd quick go grab lunch and not go to chapel. I didn't go to chapel regularly when I was a freshman, sophomore, junior, but I started going when I was a senior. Most of the times, there were maybe thirty or forty people in a chapel service, and it was the same thirty or forty people, every time. You'd have your special chapel service for the Pull, or for this event or that event, and that would draw some more people in there, but what's going on now with the hundreds and thousands of people and the mobs of people coming in for the chapel services and for the Gathering on Sunday nights, is absolutely wonderful. Part of that is because they have decided that they need to aim those services at the age group that's coming to them. The chapel service, and I love Chaplain VanHeest dearly, he married my wife and I, he's a great friend, he's a great pastor, but there was need there that wasn't being met, I think. When Ben Patterson came in and when he brought in Dwight Beal, who also has been a friend since Hope College... You bring Dwight Beal into a roomful of kids and have him start doing things, and you have a wonderful, wonderful response. That's been a phenomenal thing to have happen, and I think it's a unique thing for this Hope College community to all of a sudden see that. I was just talking to Tim Brown, who was the former pastor at Christ Memorial, who is now at Western Seminary, he's the professor of preaching there. Western Theological Seminary used to be considered to be the place where
older people went to seminary. If you went to college and then you went off and did your career for a while and then if you decided to go back into the ministry, then you were at Western Sem. There weren't that many people that went right from college right into seminary, and then out into the ministry. When I was in college, there were a few people that did.

AP: That's interesting, because I talked to somebody who was a long time minister in this area. He went to Hope and straight to seminary. He's been retired for several years, but he said that was the big trend then. Then it went to a trend where people would go away and then come back, that he noticed about the time he retired about a decade and a half ago.

NB: Yes, and what's happening now, and just talking to Tim Brown the other night, he said that there are now a wild new group of young people in the seminary, and it's really shaking the seminary up. It's coming full circle again. He loves it, he's real in touch with young people. He said, what's wonderful about it is it's a whole group of people that love the Lord, and they know what they want, and they know what they want to do, and they want to make some changes. He said, it's shaking up the seminary now, and it's going to shake up the churches in the coming years when they get out. That's going to be a real interesting thing to see. It's going to be a whole generational change in the church as well.

AP: There are quite a few people graduating that it's often their plans to go to seminary. When you get your forms and you graduate and they ask you what you're doing and you check boxes, and it always either you go into the service, you go into a certain
occupation, you go to grad school, or you go to seminary. That’s one of your choices because that’s how common it is for a Hope grad to do that.

NB: Much more common for a Hope grad than it would be, say, for a University of Michigan grad. I don’t think I knew anybody at the University of Michigan who was even remotely considering going into the ministry. That was such a foreign thing to do there. When I was at Hope, I did know a lot of people that were going to be doing that, and I know a lot of people who are ministers who I went to school with, as much as I know people who are doctors, I know people who are lawyers, and I know people who are teachers. It is a real common thing to do at Hope College, but that’s the kind of person, I think, Hope College attracts as well. I’m amazed at how many people that go to Hope College decide to settle in Holland, Michigan, and how many Hope grads there are in this town. People come here and they say, this is really nice, and there’s no point in leaving here at all. Almost to the point where you’d think the place would get flooded with Hope College people, that there wouldn’t be enough room for all of them here. But we’re able to absorb all of them.

AP: Did we talk about the diversification in Holland? A little bit in the churches.

NB: A little bit in the churches… The community has changed a ton. It has. When I was growing up, we always knew it as a Dutch community. But I also recognized that there was a large population of Hispanics in town as well. I grew up in a household where ethnic diversity was considered to be an absolutely wonderful thing. That’s been my mind set all the while growing up. My feeling has always been, the more people who are different, intermingle with one another, they realize they are not
as different as they think they are. Just because you look different doesn’t mean that you are different. But I always recognized and I always knew that, yes, there are all these Dutch people in Holland, but there are all these Hispanic people in Holland as well. I didn’t understand growing up why that was. I came to realize later that it was because of all the migrant farm workers that came into the area who also realized, boy this is a nice place to live.

AP: Yes, I just talked to a woman whose family, in the 50s, settled. They came to work for Heinz for the summer, and then it came to the off-season, and they thought, well, let’s see if we can find some other jobs here because they had nothing better to go back to.

NB: There is still a large migrant population in this town. My wife, in the summer, used to teach at what they called the Migrant Program, which was a government sponsored education program for the kids of migrant workers. She did that all the while she was in high school and college. My sister did it ten years previously, all while she was in high school and college. So there’s still a large group that comes through every year. It’s amazing how many come through. But there’s now a large influx of Asian Americans and African Americans as well, and it’s because there are jobs here. The African American population, I think, is really still very small, in comparison to the Hispanic, of course, and even in the Asian American population. If somebody would have said to me, without my knowing at all, are there more African Americans than Asian Americans in the average town, and I would have said, there’s got to be more African Americans. Holland, there’s not. I know they’re coming because of
the jobs, and I'm hoping that more and more come.

AP: I think there has been concerted effort from some of the churches to bring in people from Asian countries, a while back, a ministry effort, because of some situations... I think that's one of the reasons why the Asian population is larger than you might think normal.

NB: It's a more, I think, closely knit community than Holland. I have Asian American clients, and it was interesting that once I got one, all of a sudden I had five, and then I had ten. It's almost as if word spread through the community that this is somebody you can go to. It's community in Holland, but I don't know necessarily whether there's a lot of mixing or not going on yet. But I hope that there's more of that.

AP: Do you have any perception of the Asian American population? Talking with others, it's been a common observation that maybe culturally they're more private, so they haven't really taken a voice in the community yet.

NB: No, I don't think they have. I always struggle when I'm saying things like this, because I don't want to come across like I'm categorizing people or generalizing, but my impression has been almost that exact same thing. That's kind of what I'm leading to: I think they haven't really mixed yet, I think that they're kind of turned inward toward themselves. When I've been dealing with them on an attorney client basis—wonderful relationships, long term relationships where you're dealing with people over a long period of time and get to know them and you get to know what their business is like and you get to know what the attitudes are like, but I don't think that there's a lot of cross-cultural mixing going on between the Asian American
population.

AP: I think there's quite a difference between standard American ways of life. A lot of Asian Americans have come from overseas to here, whereas the Hispanic population and the African American population are coming from other places within the states.

NB: Yes. They're not first generation.

AP: So I think there's just a very different way of life and way of approaching things.

NB: Yes, and there's a language barrier as well, which you don't see as much in the Hispanic population, and you're not seeing as much in the African American population, but you are in the Asian population. I know I have trouble sometimes understanding my Asian American clients. But then I always remind myself that they speak much better English than I speak Vietnamese. So I shouldn't complain at all about that.

AP: It's difficult because the nature of our languages, we don't even make the same sounds. So we can't make certain sounds they make, and they can't make certain sounds we make.

NB: Exactly. Yes, I wish there was more mixing there, and I think that as those little connections are made, more and more will be made. We are going to have to interact with each other on a business level, at least. So maybe more and more, we'll be able to mix with that. I know that I've heard, anyway, that there's been conflict between the Asian American population and the African American population in town. That for some reason, those two communities have not been getting along that well. But it can't be that big of an issue, because you don't see it on a daily basis, you don't hear
about a lot of those things happening. I've just heard of undercurrents of things like that going on.

AP: That might be a remnant of the gang situation.

NB: Which is a word I hate to use.

AP: The only way I've had it explained to me is that there was a group of Asian American kids coming in from California and they had a leftover allegiance to the Crips, so they pronounced that. Somehow an Asian American group bound together to combat another gang/group that came in. But that's the only time that I heard that people have really put ethnic tags on: that group, they have a gang. I come from another community where we've had...

NB: An actual gang problem?

AP: The Bay City-Saginaw area. That's gang violence in Saginaw. When I came here and people were like, we have a gang problem, I kind of just would laugh. I didn't understand.

NB: That's one of the things, too. That's why I say I hesitate to use the word gang, because after learning more about what was actually going on and talking to people who really know about gangs and gang situations, the situations that we had in Holland shouldn't be categorized as that.

AP: A couple years before I started college there was an outbreak in the mall between two gangs in Saginaw. Literally, it was in a shoe store, and they started fighting, and a woman was in there and she took her baby out of a stroller quick, and ran out of with him. The second after she took it, somebody took the baby stroller and used it as a
club. Of course, they weren't even looking to see if there's a baby in there or not. I think of gangs, I think of that incident. For half a year, my mother was like, we're not going to that mall, we couldn't go into Saginaw. Then when people would tell me, walking through campus, be safe, and my girlfriends would say, do you want to take my mace. I thought, I'm walking through the heart of campus. Maybe something would happen, I just want to say, compared to what I've seen...

NB: You still need to be safe. As a female on Hope's campus, though, you still need to be careful. I don't know how much has gone on now, but I know of two instances that I was personally involved with at Hope, of rapes on campus. We always liked to think about Hope as being a completely safe place to be, but it wasn't. We thought that it was, and when we started out we thought that it was. That's one of the changes that happened at Hope from the time I started to the time I ended. You never used to lock your dorm room door. Never. As a matter of fact, when I transferred from the University of Michigan, the first time I left the room, I locked the door because I was used to doing that at U of M, and my roommate came back and was locked out because he didn't have his key. He never brought his key with him. He got mad. He said, what'd you do? Why'd you lock the door. I said, I always lock the door. No, nobody looks their door here. I remember my sophomore year, I used to come back from class and there would be people in my room who were not my roommates who were just in listening to the stereo. They're buddies of mine always know that nobody's room was ever locked. If you needed something, you just went in and got it. You didn't worry about it. By the time senior year
rolled around, there had been a couple of rapes on campus, one of a girl in my class who I knew very well, who was actually protecting somebody else who was being attacked. One girl got snatched and this other girl went after the person and got cut up quite badly. There was another instance of a rape that they caught the guy and he was convicted. Because I worked on campus in the summer, they needed people to be extras in the line up and I got called over with a bunch of people that I worked with to be extras in the line up with this person. He was eventually convicted of doing it. He confessed to doing it, but they needed the line up as well. After that, there started to be the combination locks on the doors and there started to be much tighter security and the emergency phones started going up.

AP: There’s emergency phones and they added a lot more lighting in dark areas. A lot more areas on campus are lit, and there are campus phones, and after a certain time at night, you have to have your card to get into the building. Most everybody locks their doors. Some people don’t.

NB: You never had to deal with any of that before all of that happened. They never had the van that drives around campus now, that will drive you, that was never there before. I don’t know if they still do it now, the fraternities said, we’ll walk you to wherever you need to go. Most of the guys on campus even took it a step farther and said to the women that we knew on campus, you will not walk alone anywhere. Regardless of where you are, regardless of what time of night it is. At daytime we didn’t worry about it too much, but at night, we don’t care, you will call us, 24 hours a day, and we will drop whatever it is that we are doing, and we will walk you where
you need to go, because it's just not safe anymore. Once you have somebody that you know get attacked, you start realizing, hey, wait a minute, this could happen to anybody at anytime. The one attack happened right outside the house where all the football players lived, so when the screaming started, all these football players come roaring out of the house. But somebody felt safe enough to attack a girl that close to campus. I hate to talk about those things happening, but it happens in Holland, Michigan.

AP: It seems the result is that there is a campus that is much more aware of the need to be safe. People are very aware of it now.

NB: We were probably just careless.

AP: There haven't been a big instance like that in a while, which is good. But people are a lot safer. You're kind of sad to see this happen, but there's a lot less trust and a lot less openness as to leaving your room unlocked. There are some bad things about that, but it's been necessary.

NB: One attack occurred because the person was able to get into the dorm, and just walked down the hall looking for an unlocked door. If the door had been locked, that would have prevented the attack. But we were of the mind that we didn't have to have our doors locked.

AP: Yes, I think I have heard of that incident. Something happened in Gilmore?

NB: Yes, it was in Gilmore. It's probably the most famous incident that's ever happened on campus.

AP: Well, there's a Take Back The Night march every year, and they walk to every spot
on campus where an incident has occurred and there’s a marker that stays up.

NB: Yes, that was first floor Gilmore, I remember when that happened. Sad story, because the guy who did it was not completely there mentally.

AP: I’ve been in residential life, and we’ve had some incidents, not of any assaults but just of finding strange guys wondering through Dykstra Hall like at 3 am using the bathroom. Things like that. Or finding a guy in the parking lot trying to look in the bathroom windows.

NB: Oh, yes, all of those. But you get a large concentration of college age women and it’s going to draw that type of a...

AP: Which is why all of the doors that face off campus lock even earlier now than the ones that are in the heart of campus.

NB: It’s amazing how all of that has changed. But you’re right, I think we were probably just not aware that the problem was there and if we’d taken a little bit more precaution, we would have been safer with it. Once the problem was realized, or, came to a head, big steps were taken. I think the college has taken dramatic steps to protect the students. I think that they’ve done a wonderful job with that, and it’s too bad that type of thing has to creep into a campus like Hope College, but it’s everywhere.

AP: They’ve had programs of self-defense and things like that.

NB: Those things just were not there.

AP: Some of it, you talk about just common sense things. The first session was all about talking about self-defense. The second session was about actual things like trying a
position and saying, well if somebody's got a hold of you like this, do you know where they're vulnerable and where you're vulnerable and where you need to protect? But the whole first session he talked about, would you be willing to hurt someone that's hurting you? You need to think about that before that happens and know, are you going to struggle to get free? How much? Would you go for their eyes? Would you kick them or bite them? What would you be willing to do for yourself, and have you ever thought about that? If you're too afraid or embarrassed to think about that, you're going to have a problem. Then just other common sense things you don't think about, like analyzing your situation in the common places you go. How many entrances and exits are there to your laundry room, where are all the fire exits, where do you go for a fire alarm, where do you go for a tornado in your dorm? Have you thought about any of these things? How many ways can someone get into your room? Or, if you're walking down an empty street in the middle of the night, the safest place to walk is in the middle. Because if somebody’s going to come up to you, on a sidewalk, you always want to forgive, or you always want to think, they’re just walking where I am, or you’re embarrassed to ever assume. But if you walk down the middle of the street it’s a lot more obvious if someone’s coming up to you that shouldn’t be. A lot of women, things happen because maybe a man’s following them or bothering them, and they’re embarrassed about implying that he’s harassing them or assaulting them, so they just let an incident occur. So, a lot of talk about how not to let that happen.

NB: One of my first impressions of Hope, you’re just making me think of all of this, was
parietals. I’m sure that system is still there, and that’s the system where it’s 11:00 on a week night, men can’t be on the women’s side of the dorm and women can’t be on the men’s side of the dorm, and it carries over later on the weekends. It carries through to 10 or 11 in the morning?

AP: It used to 11, they just changed it to 10 am, because people were coming to pick up friends for chapel, and getting written up, because everybody forgets about morning parietals.

NB: That’s interesting: I’m picking her up to go to chapel and I get written up for parietals. That was an interesting thing from the standpoint of coming from a public university. I guess it kind of shows the philosophy of Hope, that there still needs to be a separation between the sexes. When I was told that I was going to be living in Kollen Hall, which is a co-ed dorm, I assumed co-ed dorm was like co-ed at U of M, meant girl’s room, then a guy’s room, then a girl’s room, then a guy’s room. There was not really a separation in terms of halls or different sides of halls. The huge gap in between, that was interesting.

AP: So what did you think of parietals?

NB: I thought of them as being really silly. I was your typical college age student thinking, how do we get around this rule? The other thing that really struck me at the time was, when I first showed up, somebody showed me where to hide your beer in your room. They said if you take out the bottom drawer of your desk, you can put it underneath the bottom drawer and they won’t find it. I looked at him and I said, they won’t find it? What are you talking about? I had no idea that Hope College was a
dry campus, which is a difficult thing for a college student when you come from and area like Ann Arbor, where not only was alcohol not a big deal at all in the dorms, but neither was marijuana. I lived with a guy who was smoking marijuana in the room, and the resident assistants knew it. Everybody in the dorm knew it. The reason I wanted to leave that room was because this was going on, he was admitting this was going on, and nobody cared. Then I moved to a place where all of the rules are completely different. That was just such an incredible change. For me, coming to Hope, everybody said to me, you’re crazy, we’re all trying to leave Hope to go to a big state school. That’s what the progression was in their minds. I said, no, you guys don’t realize what you have here. You can go to a big state school, the education’s not any better, there are more people at the football games, but there’s so much more going on at Hope that I don’t think I would have appreciated it, had I gone to Hope directly.

AP: I think the quality of the facilities, too, are another thing. People don’t realize how nice the campus is. The maintenance of the buildings, the landscaping, the size of the rooms.

NB: Oh yeah. There’s a real pride with the students, with the administration, with the faculty, with the grounds keepers, that this is Hope College, and everybody really cares about it. Working on the paint crews, spending the summers, I painted Kollen Hall three years in a row. I painted every dorm room in Kollen Hall. One year after another. They all need to be painted every year. You start working with the same people who have worked there twenty or thirty years on the cleaning crew, or the
guys who are doing the lawns, or the guys who are doing the maintenance. That’s not the job that most students think of. Those people love their jobs, they love the students. There’s usually quite a bit of interaction, I don’t know if there’s always been, between the cleaning staff and the students at Hope. In Kollen Hall, especially, we all knew the cleaning ladies, we all liked them, and they all knew who we were. You didn’t see that, necessarily, in other institutions. I don’t know whether that’s just a Holland, Michigan thing, or whether that’s a specific thing for Hope, but it’s just another one of those things that makes is kind of a special thing.

AP: What do you think of parietals now? They say that the biggest reason they’re in place, this is what friends in student congress have told me that have tried to get them eliminated, the biggest problem they run into is that the administration feels that the alumni will pull out funding if we don’t have parietals.

NB: I’m sure I’m not the alumni group that they’re referring to, but as I get older I probably will be. I know in reality that you can get around parietals if you want to get around parietals. I did it. I don’t think I knew anybody on campus who didn’t do it. As a matter of fact, my roommate and I had thirty nights in a row, we did it just to do it. We lived in a room, if you’re familiar with Kollen Hall, third floor, there’s the girls’ side and the guys’ side, and there’s that study room right in the middle. That didn’t use to be a study room, that used to be a dorm room. That was the room that I was in. We were in it the last year that it was actually a dorm room. But we were living in an area that was not on the girls’ side and not on the guys’ side. So it was very easy to break parietals if you wanted to. In fact, what we used to do, after
11:00 at night, we would call somebody up and say, just come walk through the room, just so we can keep the record going with how many nights in a row we’ve broken parietals. We had a very nice RA who knew that we had girlfriends and would say, I’m coming down to check, make sure you don’t have anybody in your room when I get down there. Nothing was ever going on. It was just, it was an easy room to congregate in, easy room to study in, and since you’re in between the two, we had girls that we knew who lived just on the other side of the door, they’d come over and we’d study together, and it wouldn’t be any big deal. But they decided to close that room off as a dorm room after that year. But getting back to the question, what do I think about parietals now? I don’t know. It may be the same philosophy that people use for hazing, which is I had to live through it so you ought to have to live through it too. I think parietals might be a good thing, just as a philosophy. It may be along the same lines as, this is a dry campus, even though drinking goes on on-campus, everybody knows drinking goes on on-campus, but they don’t like it that it goes on on-campus. So we’re going to have a policy. We’re not going to condone something that we don’t like. So let’s have a rule that says, no, you cannot do it, and if we catch you doing it, there’s going to be a consequence for doing that. There is no really good reason for college age students to be in each others rooms from 11:00 at night until--well, I think 10 or 11 in the morning is a little late. We ran into the same kind of problems. I’d go to three classes and I’d come back and I still couldn’t go on the girls’ side and I’d think, my goodness, I’ve been in class for three hours.

AP: A lot of people complain about: say, you’re parents are coming up for the weekend
and they come to pick you up for brunch after church...

NB: Dad can’t get you, or your little brother can’t come up.

AP: But the cleaning women can come in and clean the guys’ side. So the guys point that out every year. They’re like, my mom can’t even come in!

NB: Another aspect of it that I liked was, you knew that after a certain hour, you could go from your room to the bathroom without a very good chance of running into a girl. You could walk back from the bathroom in a towel, and that wasn’t a problem.

AP: If you did have a roommate who had a boyfriend, and you didn’t like him...

NB: You could say no.

AP: You didn’t see like such a prude, or it wasn’t obvious that you didn’t like him.

NB: There are all of those good reasons, which, I’m sure, are also reasons that the administration has for leaving those rules in place. I’m never one for having rules in place that I don’t think have a good place behind them. But I think that one does, and I think the no alcohol on campus does, as well. They’re two things that, really, no good can come out of, encouraging students to drink, or allowing students to drink. No good can come out of, I think, allowing students to be in each others room 24 hours a day, when there are study rooms available.

AP: If that’s all you give them to rebel against and they need to rebel against something, if you took all that away, what would they rebel against?

NB: Well, what you do is just move it up a notch higher and just try to go for something else. That’s probably true. Probably the administration thinks, this comes up every year, and it’s going to come up every year. We’ll just let it come up because if
they're fighting about parietals, they're not fighting about alcohol. That would be the next thing, I'm sure, that would come along, that the 21 year old students on campus would say, we should be able to have alcohol here, because legally we're allowed to do that. I don't know if they allow smoking in the dorms or not now. My guess is they probably wouldn't, would they?

AP: They actually just banned it.

NB: Almost nobody smoked, that was another thing.

AP: A lot more people have been smoking. Last year, the only place you could smoke on campus was in part of the Kletz, and they took it out. Which was not student congress's decision. It was an administration's decision. Just this past year, for next year, they will ban smoking in all the dorms. You could smoke in your dorm room if, on your card when you sent it in at the beginning of the year, you said you were a smoker, or your roommate agreed. If the smoke was drifting, you had to take every measure to prevent that: put a damp towel under your door, open your window, put a fan on. If it still bothered somebody else, you couldn't smoke in your room anymore. But there have been a couple incidents with fire. Which is something I never understood. You couldn't have an open flame, but you could smoke. A guy, his mattress caught on fire in one of the halls. They put it out right away. But the guy was lucky his RA found him and woke him up and pulled him out of bed and put the fire out.

NB: Boy, that guy's a sound sleeper.

AP: Crispell burned down because of a candle. It's unfortunate. That's another rule
people complain about, that we can't have candles. The way I put it, though, especially after the incident was, not only did that girl burn down a house and all of her stuff, but all five other people living there, all of their stuff is gone, too. When you're living in a dorm room with a hundred people, you're taking into account not just their stuff, but all of their lives, and I don't think a little atmosphere or a scented potpourri candle is really worth it when you put it in that perspective. When it's your house...

NB: Then go ahead and do it. One of the things that I noticed when I first came to Hope that I was really amazed by was that everybody had nicknames. I don't know if they still do now. I always remembered my parents always talking about all of their friends by their nicknames. But almost everybody I hung around with was not known by their real name. And, all of the off campus houses had names. I don't know if you still do that, or not either.

AP: Well, I think it stays pretty much with the frat houses and the sorority. There are off campus frat and sorority houses that are rented and somebody in the fraternity and sorority rent it, and they just keep it.

NB: Is Cooper Street still there? That was an Arcy house that was right across campus.

AP: There was one that used to be called Mellow Yellow and it's a Sib house. The guy redid it, really nice job redoing it, and it's a white house, so it's now called Sprite.

NB: See, when I was at Hope, every off campus house had a name. Anywhere students lived off campus, you never knew the address of anybody's house, you only knew the names. You ought to go back sometime and look at yearbooks from the late 80s,
because if you lived off campus in a house, you could get your picture taken with all of the people in your house, and they had the names of all of the houses. It was amazing all of the different houses that were there.

AP: A lot more people live in Hope housing, and it might be that Hope has purchased a lot of those houses.

NB: Oh yes, a lot of the houses that were off campus are now Hope houses.

AP: I don’t know if they had cottages, or did they have a lot of them?

NB: There were a ton of cottages, but there are a lot more. A lot of houses were off-campus

AP: Do you know about how many? Now there are about 60 or 70.

NB: I don’t know. See, there may have been only 30 to 40. there are probably twice as many. Hope probably tried to eliminate the problem of off campus houses by just purchasing a lot of those houses. But, gol, there was Cooper Street, which was the big Arcy house. There’s another house right next door to it, I can’t remember what that one was called. The Delta Phi’s lived in a house called Tasty Freeze. I lived in a house called Happy Days. There was another house where the football players lived in called the Ghetto. The Ghetto’s gone now. That was torn down when they moved the houses for the Haworth Center. Mellow Yellow was there, but it was an Arcy house and a Sigma house during different years. The soccer players lived in a house called Exit 69. Another house called the Library, which was a big party house my freshman and sophomore year. The joke was, you were at a party at this house called the Library, so if your parents called, your roommate could just say, he’s at
the Library. The Outhouse, Petticoat Junction... There were just so many houses, and if you look back at those yearbooks, it list all of them out, and it's amazing. The creativity was really neat. There was one that was called Matilda Bay. There was a wine cooler out at the time called Matilda Bay. Then the Fish Bowl. Private Idaho. I got a kick out of, too, I always get a kick now when I go to Hope about the parking lots.

AP: The parking lots have nicknames.

NB: Yes, they do. The parking lot behind the DePree Art Center, used to be called Siberia. That was as far away as you can park. That was it. Now I know there are some that are a lot farther away than that.

AP: There's another one now, too. I think they call it the Yukon.

NB: They probably do, they're getting farther and farther away. There's all of those quaint, cute little things that were part of Hope College. We were talking about nicknames. I lived with Beak and Digger and Trixie and Spike. Those were my roommates. Everybody had a nickname. Nobody went by their real name, which was just something that I was not familiar with anywhere else. I have to laugh with my parents when they talk about all of the people that they used to hang out with by their nicknames. Again, maybe that's something that's fallen by the wayside.

AP: I think in athletics it's still really popular.

NB: There were a lot of people. It's funny now to see those people and to have to call them by their real names, because they've gone years and years without anybody calling them that, because nobody outside of the Hope College community does. You
go back for a reunion, and you see Tigger and Frosty and MK and She-rah and all of
the people that we used to hang out with, and then you have to pinch yourself and call
them by their real name. Some of my roommates from college, I still can not bring
myself to call them by their real name, because I never knew them as that. I only
knew them as their nicknames. My mom even says sometimes, we were talking
because one of my buddies just got engaged and I said, Dave Gibson just got
engaged. She said, he’s the one you called Beak, right. I said, yes. They only
know them by their nicknames. Some of these were outgrowths of last names. I
guess it was just one of those things that you did at a small school. There’s always a
feeling that everybody knew everybody else, which is not true, but it seems like it. I
knew almost everybody on campus by sight.

AP: I think it’s always funny, I’ll meet somebody and they’ll say, are you sure we haven’t
met, you just look really familiar? I’m thinking, I’m sure we’ve seen each other.
How long have we been going to school, we’ve probably seen each other.

NB: I can still go through the News from Hope, and when it says what people are doing
from your class, I know who just about everybody is. I know names and I know
faces. I can’t always put the name to the face, and sometimes I’ll see the name with
the face and I’ll say, oh, that’s who that person is. I always knew them in two
different ways, but wasn’t always able to put them together.

AP: What was the student body like at that time?

NB: Very conservative. I was one of the few liberal democrats on campus. To be in a
political science department that’s very conservative and republican was very
interesting.

AP: Have you met Annie Dandavati at all?

NB: That name does not ring a bell.

AP: She's a relatively new poly sci professor.

NB: Really? Female? Wow!

AP: She started about five years ago, she's a democrat, and she's from India.

NB: Wow! Alright. Way to go Dr. Elder, get another democrat in there.

AP: She's wonderful. She's done a lot of work on South American and Asian politics.

NB: Oh, wow. We needed some strength there.

AP: She's travelled to Japan and Mexico and she wrote a book on Chile.

NB: Oh great. I love to hear that. That department was so much fun. They were putting together their national government textbook. I can't remember if it was the first or second edition now. It was Dr. Elder and Dr. Holmes, who are on opposite ends of the political spectrum, and then Dr. Mike Englehardt was working with them, too.