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Briones, Janie Oral History Interview: Sesquicentennial of Holland, "150 Stories for 150 Years"

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Oral History Interview with Janie Briones

(unedited)

Conducted November 12, 1997
by Larry Wagenaar

Sesquicentennial Oral History Project
"150 Stories for 150 Years"
LW: Could you state your full name and your date of birth?

JB: Janie Puebla Briones, [date removed], 1951.

LW: Where were you born?

JB: I was born in San Antonio, Texas.

LW: How long did you live in San Antonio?

JB: I lived there for 18 years. I was born and raised in San Antonio. Then we moved away, and never went back.

LW: Where did you move to? Did you move to West Michigan?

JB: We moved to Florida. It's very interesting. We were raised in a big city, right? There was a lot of gangs, violence—big city, big problems. So my dad said no way, we're not going to live like this. He said we are going to move. So we moved to Winter Garden, Florida, that area, and stayed there ever since until I met my husband. Then we moved to Michigan.

LW: Tell me about your husband. What's his name?

JB: His name is Jose Luis Briones.

LW: How did you meet in Florida?

JB: We just met through some friends. I think it was at a dance, some social event.

LW: How did you decide to come up from West Michigan from Florida where it's nice and warm in the winter?
JB: The economy brought us here. My husband used to work doing a lot of harvesting, a lot of--not so much, well, in the fields, in the kind of like canneries. They have a lot of canneries over there. We worked in the mushroom factory. We worked in an orange factory packing oranges and that kind of stuff. It was just getting to be sickening. So he wanted to work in a factory. We actually moved to Chicago because we had family there. We didn't move to Michigan; we moved to Chicago. There he started working in some big manufacturing company. I didn't work; I was home. That's when our first son was born, in Chicago. Because we both used to work at GE in Plymouth, Florida--so they told us about the GE plant in Holland and we ended up in Holland. He worked for General Electric for years until they closed the plant, and he has been working in manufacturing. He's now at Thermatron.

LW: What year did you come to Holland to work for GE? Roughly.

JB: I would say maybe '78 or '79. I want to say that. I'm not sure.

LW: How many children do you have?

JB: Two boys.

LW: And their names?

JB: Philipe, he's my oldest. He's 22 now. And my youngest one is Francisco. We call him Frank. He's 20.

LW: Tell me what your first impressions were of Holland when you came in '78/79. And be honest.

JB: I was raised in a big city. I was raised in a very diverse ethnic environment. I went to San Antonio Public Schools. When you go to high school, which is very
interesting--and I think I am what I am because the way I was raised and where I went to school. When I went to middle school, or junior high, in San Antonio, the high school was 90% Hispanic and maybe the rest 10% was caucasian or black. But then when you graduate from junior high, you had a choice to go to any high school you wanted to as long as you provided your own transportation. So we had public buses, public transportation. I went to Breckenridge High School, which was a very mixed school. It was spread even with, maybe I would say, 25% black, 25% Hispanic, 25% caucasian, and the rest were Asian and a mix of Indian or whatever. So it was very diverse. So I went there until my twelfth year. My neighborhood where I was raised was very Hispanic but also very diverse, caucasian and different. That's the way I was raised. When I came to Holland it was culture shock. First of all, I don't want to say I experienced a lot of prejudice; I didn't. I'm sure there was, but I really didn't experience it. But it was different because coming from a big city and then moving to a smaller city was very hard for us. At that time, we only had one car. And even in Florida there was public transportation. So it was kind of hard to get used to. It was more the conveniences that weren't around. That was hard for us. When I moved to Holland, I wasn't working for awhile. But when I went back to the job force, I found a job right away. I didn't have a problem. I never felt that there was until my boys starting growing up, then they started seeing more discrimination kind of stereotype. So then I started getting involved a lot with the schools, being more of an advocate—not only for my children but for other children, and trying to work with the principals and the teachers on how to break barriers and not so much going in with an attitude.
I could understand how some of these people weren't trained on how to deal with other cultures.

LW: So you think it was more strong in the schools? Was it accentuated there?

JB: I would say that, yes. For me, I didn't see it as much as in the public as far as employment or hospital or things like that, you know when you go for service. I didn't really see it that much or felt it. Of course, maybe a lot of it was me, the way I dealt with them. Because of the way I was raised and brought up and didn't look at them as being different. I just talked to them as person. I've had some encounters. Even nowadays when I talk with my job sometimes, when I talk to people, they'll say comments to me. But I don't take it too personal. I kind of feel bad for those people. When people make racial or derogatory remarks, I don't take it too personal. I try not to because my job involves dealing with all kinds of people, and I can't afford to sit back and dwell on the negative. So I just kind of try to brush it off. Mostly the people that I get, the comments like that, are the older people or maybe people that have had a really bad experience. I had a situation, I think it was last year, and this gentleman, because I work with residents with complaints or neighborhood issues, and this man had called. There was an issue. He was talking about a Mexican family. I said I will go over there and I will meet with you and I will meet with the family and we'll see if we can talk about the problem. When I got there, his face just dropped. He didn't know that I was Hispanic and he was really putting these people down. He says, "I don't want to talk to you. I don't want anything to do with you." But I went back insisting that we need to talk regardless of how you feel about me. Eventually,
it took me almost three months, and this man called me and apologized up and down. He told me why he felt that way and I could understand. I could understand why he had so much hate. He said, "I took it out on you and shouldn't have, and I shouldn't have treated you and talked to you the way I did." He apologized. The same with the family he had a problem with. Finally when they got to talk, now they are like the best of friends. They're both an older generation where they have too much pride, too stubborn, and they don't want to give in.

LW: So they were relying on the stereotypes they'd built up over the years?

JB: Right.

LW: And really the dialogue is what breaks through those barriers.

JB: Exactly. I was really surprised because this man that had so much hatred would never let me in his house. I mean it was cold. He would not let me in, which it was okay. I don't expect everyone to say come on in. Then when he finally called me on the phone and then I went and dropped off some papers for him, he says, "Come on in." I was very scared to go in because I didn't really trust him. I said, well he's probably going to do something. And he was alone. I said, "That's okay, I'll stand right here on the porch." And he says, "No, no, come on in." He offered me coffee, told me to sit down. Then he starts telling me all the history of his family. Now when he sees me, it makes it a point that I acknowledge him and I acknowledge him also. It was just getting to break that barrier and getting to understand the culture and the sensitivity. I gave him a lot. I gave him a lot of experiences also and I told him, "Well I understand how you feel." But I couldn't believe this man. He had so much
hate. I came back and I was so happy and so satisfied that I broke that. This man had so much anger built up for years. I'm sure he still is dealing with it. He said to me, and it's almost embarrassing the things he would tell me, but in some ways some of it is true and some of it isn't. I see, Larry, that there's good and bad in all of us. I don't care who you are or where you come from. I've been there and seen it.

That's why...my kids went to West Ottawa, so I got very involved with West Ottawa Public Schools. There was a lot of teachers that were hired that went to college in Holland, never been out of Holland, now they're teaching. So they were never trained on how to deal with cultural sensitivity, and the stereotyping. So we, through this advisory board, we created training for the teachers that eventually they started doing with all the newcomers. But even Dave Farraby who was at Human Resources says, "You know, Janie, it's the older people who are that way. But even some of the younger students that stay in Holland have never been out other than just in Holland, and have never experienced another life. They don't know what it's all about unless you've been out there. So I give West Ottawa a lot of credit because they've come along way in breaking barriers. I had that with some of the teachers when my sons were going to school because they would stereotype. My youngest son was a strong leader in school, very active, very proactive, very anti-crime, anti-drug. He would get involved in the PALS and just very active in school. But when he would dress with baggy pants or he had his real crewcut haircut, they would stereotype him. He would say how the teachers would look down on him or would make comments. I know one teacher, and she said it in front of me with my oldest son, made a comment
about my son chasing any person that had--how did she say it--well, Phil's always chasing anyone that has beautiful legs or something like that. He was embarrassed because he was a charmer in school and then when she said that Phil had a complex. She made him feel like he was kind of a little playboy in the school. Philipe says, "I talk to everybody but that doesn't mean...," and the way she just came on and the way she said it, just things like that. It was just "Philipe is this and Philipe is always staring at the girls, at their legs." It just made him feel really shameful. I went to the principal and we had a meeting and I said, "You shouldn't have said that in front of my son." I think things change because as parents we also need to take a leadership role in our kids' education, and be there and be outspoken.

LW: What other instances, since we are talking about the schools, did you run into? You were talking about a sort of lack of cultural sensitivity. Do you have a couple of examples of the kinds of things you ran into that were indicative of that?

JB: What I ran into was that one day my son and this girl got into a cat fight. My son, they called me to go pick him up and I said, "No I'm not going to go pick him up. He's stays here until I get out of work because I can't get out of work." She says, "Well, if they don't pick him up then we're going to send him home." I said, "You can't send him home. There's nobody home." I think he was like 12 or 13. So anyway, they told me that he got into this cat fight with this girl, and says, "We're suspending him because Philipe shouldn't fight with a girl." Which is right, Philipe shouldn't be fighting with a girl. I believe that they were both in the wrong; they were both guilty. She had as much blame as Philipe did, but she didn't get
suspended. Philipe got suspended. But I wouldn't take it. I said, "No, if you're going to suspend Philipe, then you have to suspend the girl." So we had to have a meeting. It went to like two or three meetings. To me it was a waste of time. Just common sense would say look suspend each one of them for a day. Each one is to learn a lesson. Philipe was wrong in fighting her back and she was wrong in fighting him. They were both wrong as far as I'm concerned. I kept telling them maybe I'm wrong, but I just felt that. Then another group a kids that were always getting suspended, and they were black or Hispanic, but their parents weren't very involved with their education or involved with the school at all. They were always getting suspended. One day I said to them, "Why are you guys are always getting suspended?" Then my son, my youngest one, came to me and he says, "Mom, this is so wrong." He was telling me that this happened and this happened at school, but they only suspended this group of kids. So I went to the school. I said, "Why are they always getting suspended?" Even the secretary told me, she said she was in favor of just being fair, not being in supportive of the kids that were being suspended. Regardless, they were all wrong in doing what they were doing. But they were always being suspended, but not the other kids. I finally looked into it. I said from now on, and I had to get their parents involved, I said, "You parents have to get involved." The parents were too busy working 12 hour shifts. They could care less. You know, they're out there trying to make money to pay their bills and everything. I can understand that, but yet you need to take a little time to look out into the best interest of your children. I think that now they are getting a culture shock because if
you see the influx of the different cultures that are moving not only in West Ottawa but in Holland, the growth. I think that all of us, we need to embrace ourself and prepare ourself for the year 2000. How are we going to deal with all of these different cultures that are coming to Holland? I think that in West Ottawa also with the sports, my kids were like always in the back of the line. If they got to play, they got lucky. Until I started saying something. You know, "Let my kids play." Then they would say how come Hispanic kids don't get involved in sports? Well shoot. I wouldn't want to be. Would you, Larry, like to be sitting on the bench all the time? No way. My kids played soccer, baseball, football, since they were in elementary, second or third grade. I got them very involved in sports, but I got very aggressive, maybe. Not aggressive, I mean assertive in being outspoken and asking the coach why doesn't my son play?

LW: What was the response that he would give you?

JB: They would just say, "Oh, he's going to get to play." And they would. They would like third inning or like in the fourth quarter. I would get so mad, and I would say, "You're not going to play any more." But I said, "No, you are guys are going to keep playing. And don't give up." But then when they realized that they were good runners, and they were good, oh they were playing all the time. And they were running all the time. It took them a long time. One time, they were playing Little League. All they were having them is run bases because they were fast runners. The other kids could hit, but they couldn't run. My kids were in track and they would always get first place. They were fast. It was just not the fairness that wasn't there,
but I think because I was very vocal and I was always there and I would always question the coach, or even, I went to the Athletic Director a couple times and I questioned a lot of the regulations and things like that. Maybe my kids didn't get to play a lot, but I think we got a lot of respect. They got a lot of respect from the school and the staff, and so did I. When my boys were in their senior year, they got a lot of respect and a lot of rewards because even though they weren't treated fair, they never lost their respect and their morals. That's one thing I've really instilled in them, keeping the respect. Even though I agree with some people were like jerks and all. I wouldn't say that, but, you know, and that they didn't deserve respect, but I would always tell my boys, you still respect that person. You don't talk back, just let it go.

LW: Do you think things are better in West Ottawa now because you opened some doors?

JB: Oh definitely. I served in a couple of committees and through that they have hired some minority staff teachers that are working now at West Ottawa because that's what I see is a need. Our kids also need role models. See, I grew up with role models, and this is where my kids weren't that fortunate. When I went to high school, my teachers, my English teacher, my geography teacher, my gym teacher, some of my math teachers, they were Hispanic or black or caucasian. They were a mixture. So I had role models. So I didn't have that problem. All the way from elementary, my piano teacher, was Hispanic and maybe a mix. They were into inter-racial marriages. They were unique people. So I was very fortunate that I had role models. I grew up to be what I am and I think that played a big part. I'm sure I had counselors. We
were in Pep Squad. We had the ROTC. There was a good mixture. Our drill instructor, our cheerleader instructor, they were either Hispanic or caucasian. We always had a good mixture. We had role models, but my kids didn't. I felt that we had to be the role models, as parents, because they weren't that fortunate. So that's why my husband and I really had to be supportive in their education, be supportive in any kind of programs that they were involved, in sports, et cetera. But, we had to be the role models because they weren't that fortunate.

LW: Was your husband really involved in the process too, as far as these issues with the school?

JB: Not as much. He did go to like a couple, like when they were very serious, you know, he would; but not as much because of the way the system is with his employer, they weren't as lenient as what mine was. Also, the time allotted to take time to go to parent-teacher conferences or things like that, and it was always very difficult. You know what I mean, you miss a day or you're late, I mean, right away you get written up.

LW: Not a lot of tolerance.

JB: Exactly, and so he was very conscientious about that. We couldn't afford it. He couldn't afford to be. So he would always say, "You go." Unless in the evening, he would go to parent-teacher conferences. But he was more of a disciplinarian than I was. I think I was more of the motivator than he was, but he did as much as he could.

LW: Where do you live on the north side? Is it the same place where you moved to? Or
have you moved a couple different places?

JB: Yes. Actually, when we moved here to Holland, we lived on West Tenth Street, and my kids went to Washington School. We lived there for, I don't know, maybe for like ten years. Because then, I took a leave of absence, and I went back to Florida for about a year because of my mom was ill, my dad. So I took a leave of absence for a year, and we went away for a year. When we came back, I went to work for the Board of Public Works and at that time you had to live within the boundaries of their services. So, we found this apartment on the north side. We couldn't find anything, and actually we got the apartment before we moved to Holland—a realtor found this apartment for us. So when we moved to Holland, I told him I don't care where it is, it's just got to be within the Board of Public Works' services because I was talking to the personnel officer at that time, was Bob Slenk, and I had sent in my resume and things like that. So that's how I ended up on the north side. We had an apartment, and then we were able to buy a house, but we had to stay within the BPW lines. The BPW lines at that time didn't go too far north, so we ended up right on Vander Veen. I don't know if you know where that is.

LW: It's right across from the bowling alley, isn't it?

JB: Yes, right across from the bowling alley. We ended up there, we have an older house. It's a Cape Cod, and ever since we moved here, we've loved it, and we stay there. And I guess it's where we're going to stay until... (laughs)

LW: Until you retire.

JB: Actually, my boys hated it because there are so many trees, so many leaves to rake.
But now they say, "Don't sell it, Mommy," because they love it.

LW:  It's home.

JB:  It's so quiet, and it's just a nice, quiet area.

LW:  Yes. When you moved to Tenth Street, did you feel that there was any channeling? Did you work with a realtor at that time? Or were friends your conduit to the place where you lived on Tenth Street?

JB:  No, we just found that through...

LW:  An ad?

JB:  Yes, we just found that. I liked it there as a matter of fact. That's why a lot of people when I got this job, they said, "Well, you don't live in the city," but I know a lot of the residents, I know a lot of the people, and I know the neighborhoods. I used to love living on Tenth Street because we could walk to Kollen's Park, we could walk to Washington Square, and a lot of the people that lived there when we moved there, they're still there. Of course, my boys were little, so we weren't really in touch. Usually when your kids are smaller, you don't really get involved until they get a little bit older or they start playing and get out and things like that. But, we used to be able to walk down to the park and take the boys, and I used to love it. Then when we had to move, it was really hard, but it's something that I had to do. So when we stayed also on the north side, because my kids were already involved, were already in West Ottawa Schools and I didn't want to take them out because they had already made so many friends, and they were so used to the schools and the system and everything, and so was I, so I thought, "Well, we're going to leave them here," and
that’s why we ended up on the north side. But, I always say that I always wanted to move back to Holland, buy one of these older houses, because that has always been my dream. Because that’s how I was raised, in a big house, older kind of historical house, and it just brings memories. And I would love to just..., but then, I don’t know, it’s just a dream.

LW: Yes, well, maybe you’ll do that. What was your first job in Holland? You went to the BPW when you came back from Florida. Did you work before you left?

JB: Actually I was working for the BPW.

LW: Before you went to Florida?

JB: Right. And, I quit basically. I quit, and they were willing to take me back, because at that time, they wouldn’t give me a leave of absence. Like nowadays, they have the Family Act, where you can care for a parent or a real close family person. So I had to quit my job. I couldn’t take a leave of absence, so that’s what I ended up doing, quitting, and then, fortunately they must have been impressed with me because they took me back. I was lucky.

LW: How long did you work for the BPW?

JB: I worked for them for about three years, maybe, three or four years.

LW: And where did you move to from there, work-wise?

JB: To the City. I’ve been with the City for about fifteen years. From the BPW then I was hired in the Treasurer’s Office, and I worked for the Treasurer’s Office for years and eventually moved to this position.

LW: When did you become...
JB: Neighborhood Liaison? Almost three and a half years ago.

LW: We'll talk a little bit later about what that work is about. Since you came to Holland in the late seventies, tell me what significant changes you've seen.

JB: Well, the significant changes is that because of my culture, I've seen that Hispanics are more accepted in the community. Mexican restaurants, Mexican stores are out there, and people use them. Not so much the Hispanics, but other ethnic groups. Just the fact that they acknowledge the celebrations, like the Cinco de Mayo and the Independence Day and then the other one that we celebrate on September sixteen, there's still celebrations. The Cinco de Mayo is celebrated at the Civic Center. Those kinds of things that the community has supported, those celebrations, and the other, like the restaurants and the stores and things like that. Because you kind of miss that, although, there was a time when we couldn't live without the certain spices and certain foods or certain flowers and certain rice and things like that. It was hard to find those products. You would go to Meijers or Family Fare, and they weren't there, so you just learned to live without. But, as other stores started businesses and things like that, and the people started bringing in their product. Even D & W, I am so impressed with D & W because they have a whole section of imported, not just Mexican products, but other products. I think that is a big change. I think that's great, and also giving Hispanics and other minorities the opportunities for different jobs. Opportunities, positions, like with the City, or Board of Public Works, or the police department. I'm very impressed with the police department because they have hired a lot of minorities, not just Hispanics, but other minorities, which is good for
our kids. They see them as role models. I think that’s the big change because when I moved to Holland, we didn’t have anybody in City Council, Commissioners, you wouldn’t even hear of that, you wouldn’t even hear of a Hispanic person being in a top position. You wouldn’t hear of that, and now you do, and I think that’s important, we need to blend that. But that’s what I really like, because I want instead of having to go to Chicago to take my kids to see a fiesta or a celebration, I was encouraged. Not only Hispanics--Tulip Time. We celebrate that, because Tulip Time, and the Asians have a New Year’s celebration, and we’d always get an invitation, and I always used to take my boys. Not just celebrating the Hispanic culture, but other cultures, which is very interesting and educational.

**LW:** Does the church play a significant role in your life? And could you describe that role?

**JB:** Oh definitely. I was raised Catholic, and we went to Catholic school. In elementary we went for a couple years to Catholic school and catechism, and the whole, you know, we were raised Catholic. But then, we couldn’t afford it anymore because there was twelve of us in our family. There’s twelve of us, can you imagine? Poor mom.

**LW:** That’s a big family.

**JB:** It is. It was kind of hard when we were little, but now when we all get together, it’s a joy. Anyway, we were raised Catholic, and went to Catholic school for a couple years, and then we went back to public schools. We used to go to a Catholic church, but when we moved to Florida, I don’t know what happened. My mom was the
strong faith person in our house, so my mom started going to a Pentecostal church, and we all started going to a Pentecostal. We had like a rude awakening.

LW: It's a significant change.

JB: Oh, definitely. We started going to Pentecostal, and then we started going to a Baptist church. I think it was a convenience also because my dad worked all the time, so the bus would pick us up in the morning for Sunday school and take us all to church and bring us home. With Baptist church too, they would pick us up, and the Catholic church wouldn't do that. So, they would pick us up, and we would go to the Baptist church. So we claim ourself as Baptist for maybe five years. When we moved to Holland, then we didn't go to the Catholic church. I think what happened was that we just went to the Pentecostal church, only because these people came knocking on our door and invited us, and we felt so good that they came and welcomed us, and we said, "Ok, we're going to go visit." We started going to this Spanish church, and we liked it. So we kept going to this church, Pentecostal, so we were Pentecostal.

LW: I should ask you the name of the church just for the sake of...

JB: Oh, Assembly of God, the Hispanic church on Tenth Street. Now we are members—we went through the membership classes, and we go to Crossroad Chapel, which is a Reformed Church, and that's where we worship now. I think the reason why we ended up at Crossroad is because it's a very mixture of people that go to the church, and that's the way I wanted my boys to get raised, with a very diverse church. It's a bilingual service, where in the Spanish church it was just Spanish, and my boys, although they speak Spanish, it was hard for them to understand it sometimes. Then
the Sunday classes were also. Everything was fluently Spanish, and though my
husband and I we were getting something out of it, my boys weren't, so then we
visited Crossroad Chapel one day, and we've been going there ever since.

LW: Was it a difficult transition from the church's perspective? Did they try to encourage
you not to move?

JB: No, not really. When we started going to Crossroads my boys were very impressed,
and they really liked the service, and they became members along with us.

LW: Are you enjoying the new building that you're in?

JB: You bet. It's nice, and it's being used. It's being used very well. I was raised in a
small church, so I like small church, and that's kind of like what I like. And actually,
one time, I was going to Faith Christian, but I felt like I was just a number there, and
I wasn't getting the...I really felt like all they wanted was my tithes, just your offering
and...

LW: It's a large church, isn't it?

JB: It is. It's a big church. You feel like you just get lost in the shuffle. We were just
church-hopping, and then finally we found a church that we were comfortable with.
We get a good diverse of Hope College students to professors to your lay people to
professionals that attend that church. And it's a bilingual service. We really like it.

LW: We talked a lot about the Hispanic dimension of the community. Obviously there's
been a lot of other ethnic diversification, especially in the time that you've been here
with the growth in the Asian community and now the African-American community is
starting to grow. What effect do you think that that increasing diversity has had on
the community?

JB: I think that, and I've seen this even where I work, is that the main problem is that people think that they need to treat these people different. We're all different in a way, but we all sleep and eat and drink the same way that everybody does. I've seen this where even my son when he has come to visit me at City Hall sometime. He says, "Mom, why do these people stare?" And I said, "Just ignore 'em." He says, "Yeah, but I think it is so rude." Because even, they notice if it was an African-American walking in for service or something, the stare down, or the resistance maybe a little bit, but I think it's just that people don't know how to deal with it, or think that they have to talk to them different or treat them different. But, you just got to be yourself and just treat them like you would anybody else. And I think that and understanding their needs and basically being sensitive. People can feel that, and people can see that, and that's where you start creating tensions and barriers. I've seen it, I've heard of it, and I think that that's been one of the biggest problems. But I think, and one of my hopes is that a lot of these companies are starting to do culture sensitivity training, and sending a lot of their employees through some cultural training, and I know we are going to start doing that, even though some of us might feel that we don't need it—we all need it. Even I feel that, and maybe I don't need it as much, but we all need to be reminded sometimes, kind of like a little spanking. But I think that's been the problem. And you hear that with the kids a lot, because when I'm out in the neighborhoods, people will say, "Noel, I went over there and they wouldn't help me, or this is the way they talked to me," and I've heard how
sometimes people will talk to other people, which is very unprofessional, very unethical, and they feel that they need to treat these people rudely—and they don't. But I think that they don't know how to handle people. They don't know how to talk to them. It's just common sense, you just talk to them like you would want to be treated.

LW: Do you think the role of women has changed in Holland over the past couple of decades, since you've been in Holland?

JB: Women, when you say women, are you just talking about...(end of side one)

Actually, I think so. I think that while I look like Jessie Dalman, being a leader in the community, even though sometimes we may not agree with her beliefs or what she's trying to pass through the State or the House of Representatives, but we need to respect her because it takes a lot of courage for a woman to take that role, and not just her, but other females that I've seen in strong leadership positions, such as Judy Javorek from the Holland Community Hospital. Others I've seen are like Lupita Reyes, I'm sure you know she's director of the Community Hospital, and not so much in minority women, but I've seen it in minority women, they're starting to be in leadership positions, as myself. But, other women that are in personnel directors, I know the Board of Public Works for the first time had their first female, Hispanic personnel director. Just other women that are in leadership positions, like Cora Visscher—I have a lot of respect for that woman. I have a lot of respect for her because when I first moved to Holland, my boys were little, and she helped me a lot with finding child care services, providers, and it was very hard to find something
affordable and something where you could leave your kids. And she's still doing that because her heart is with the needs of children. And didn't she get the Athena Award, or something?

LW: I think so.

JB: Yes, I think that women are starting to take more stronger leadership roles.

LW: This is a different kind of question, I suppose, but Holland was recognized as one of ten all-American cities recently, as you probably are aware. Realizing that you don't know the reasons, specifically, why that was done, could you tell me what qualities you think got Holland that honor?

JB: Well, actually, I do know because...

LW: Maybe you were involved in the process, but...

JB: Well, I think we all were in a sense, because we are the ones that make the community and we are the ones that live in the community and make up these neighborhoods. Part of the reason was because of the programs that we have, our community policing, our schools, and I think that even though I've gone to a lot of conferences in big cities and I come back and I say, "I am so thankful for living in Holland because I don't deal with a lot of the problems that bigger cities have, like a lot of dilapidated housing and abandoned buildings. We're talking about hundreds of buildings that are being abandoned. Drive-by shootings everyday, drugs on the corner everyday, and I come back and I'm so happy. But, I think we all played a big part because I'm out there trying to promote peaceful neighborhoods, Sue Harder's out there trying to help people renovate their houses, community policing officers are out
there trying to talk to the residents and trying to build the positive relationship with the officers. We have all these programs, and that's what made us the all-American city. We're very unique. You listen to other neighborhood community employees, and they don't have the support from city government, city council, or city police officers. I come back and I am so grateful because I have that support, and I know I have that support from the mayor, city council, and the staff. I know I have that support, and if I come and I say, "Look, this is what happened. This is what I found out is happening," they'll turn around and say, "Well, let's see what we can do." I have that, where you go to other they don't have that support, and so that's why they don't get anywhere. But, also, I think the different programs, I think Holland especially now when we got this Weed and Seed monies, all the many programs that were available, the parenting classes that we had for families, the housing programs and affordable housing, all those make Holland very unique. You go to other cities, they weren't very fortunate to get those funds, and I think that, also being an industrial community where we have a lot of big manufacturers where...I do a lot of community events, and I'm always begging for donations and support, and I just can't believe the support that I get from corporations. I get a lot of support because they see what we're doing out there in the community. They see it, and they see it advertised, and we draw thousands and thousands of people when we do community events. But, they're all pro-active, anti-crime, anti-drug. Now my son, he's in California, in San Diego. He says, "Mom, even though Holland is kind of boring, I miss it." I said, "Well, what do you miss the most?" He says, "Just the quiet,
sometimes." Because his goal is to be a police officer, and he says, "I just want you to know that I just came from a meeting." He talked to all recruiters that are recruiting for San Jose, San Diego, Los Angeles, and I said, "No, no, no, you want to come back to Holland. This is where we need you, in Holland." And you know what he said to me? He wrote to me, and he says, "You know what my dream is? My dream is to hopefully go back to Holland and be able to work with you. It's all I want, just to be able to work with you maybe a year, but just to have that dream to be able to work with you." Because I work very close with the community policing officers, and I thought that was so very touching, because I mean, who would want to work with their mother? (laughs)

LW: That's true, a lot of people would say that. (laughs) Since you work so closely with the community policing, tell me what type of impact they've had in Holland.

JB: When Sue Harder started this position, there wasn't community policing officers. So, what I handle is a lot of complaints, a lot of issues. When I first came on, Sue said there was a problem of people calling in all the time. Community policing officers came on, and they deal with the problem, but sometimes when I'm out there in the neighborhood, it's kind of like a team, we work as a team, where Sue didn't have that. She wasn't fortunate to have that because community policing wasn't around. But, we work as a team, and right now there's seven community policing officers and they're all in different areas, and we meet once a month. And, what's so unique about them is that they're building, and I support it because this is how I was raised, with a community policing officer in the neighborhood, and we knew who he was.
He would always come in the evenings, check up, check on the park, see where we were hanging out, and who's doing what, and we would give him information and things like that. We knew who our police officer was, and so I never had a negative impression of police because I grew up with, where, on the other hand, my kids didn't. They did have some bad experiences with the officers. But, with community policing officers, I think that people are starting to trust them because they're out there and they see that they're not just for crime, but they do more than report crime or arrest somebody. They refer people if it's housing if it's clothing, if it's food, if it's an abuse relationship, a lot of counselling. I know that because I'm out there in the neighborhoods, and people will say, "Have you seen officer Torres?" Or, "Can you have officer Torres call me?" Or, "Have you seen officer Bansick? Can you have her call me?" I'm so glad to hear that because it's, they've built that relationship where they can trust that person and more on a one-on-one and call and say, "Look, I'm having this problem." You hear that all the time. And people that don't have community policing officers, they say, "When are we gonna get our community policing officer?" Right now, they just expanded their target area, but unfortunately, you can't go to, you have to start with a little at a time and then eventually, hopefully expand it maybe further.

LW: How many officers are there currently?

JB: There's seven community policing officers right now.

LW: How large is the zone?

JB: The zone? Well, I know it starts from Eighth Street to Twentieth, I want to say
Onawa to Fairbanks. More of the central city. Our whole focus, and my job too, is more focused on the central city—not that the central city is bad, I believe that it’s the people that make the neighborhood. It’s not the neighborhood that’s bad, it’s the people that make up the neighborhood. So, if you were trying to get rid of those problems, or try to work with those people that are causing the problems, then you’ll improve the positive relationship, and that has helped a lot because we don’t believe in throwing people out or kicking people out, but I’ve had that where people say, "Well, I’m gonna move because..." and they mumble. "Oh, I’m gonna move," and all that. Once they start working on the problem and the solution, nobody moved. Everybody’s maybe not happily ever after, but they’re content with what took place. I think that the officers have played such a big role.

LW: Do they spend a lot of their time walking around the neighborhoods?

JB: In the summer they do, or riding their bikes. Right now, of course, with the weather... I also spend time, I ride with them. I’m thinking about spending this Friday. Not that I don’t have a life, but sometimes you really need to. If it’s really bad or if it’s raining, I don’t get out as much, and especially now with the bad weather coming up, and I’ll probably be riding more, and just kind of see what’s really happening out there and be in touch with what’s going on.

LW: What role does Hope College play in the community? What impact has there been, negative or good?

JB: Well, I’ll tell you—my little hero is gone. I don’t know if you knew Andy Van Eden?

LW: Not really.
JB: No? Wonderful kid. He went to Hope College, he graduated last year. Actually, I nominated him to get the Unsung Hero Award, and he did. He got the Unsung Hero at the national level, and I’ll tell you why. Andy, I don’t know how old he was at that time when he came. Well, he’s twenty-two, so maybe he was nineteen when we first... because I had just come up and taken his job, and then he came and introduced himself to me. Anyway, he wanted to get involved with the community. He wanted to get some people involved, some volunteers and help with some projects, et cetera. I took his name and called him, and he served on a couple of my advisory committees. He was on the Neighborhood Watch steering committee, and he played a big role, well, him and Hope College because the students got involved a lot, and they helped a lot with the projects, volunteered a lot. Like when we had these events, you see McGruff and the Crash Test Dummies. Well, the Hope College kids are the ones that always... I can’t say that on tape though. (laughs)

LW: Inside those things. (laughs) Little kids won’t be reading this.

JB: They played a big role, and I think that Hope College has been very supportive in that. I know the sorority groups have always... we just did a youth day, and oh my, we had maybe sixty college students there. I’m going to be meeting with another group of Hope College students to get involved, because I want to do like a graffiti wipe-out project in the spring, kind of set that up, and then also other events that I have planned for the future and get them involved. I believe, and some of them believe too, that while they go to here, they might as well get involved in the community. And, they do. They come to the Neighborhood Watch meetings, and I
think that they've played a big role in a positive way. Then Andy left, he graduated and went to South Dakota to teach in the Indian Reservation, but I still get some of the Hope College students. So, we stayed in touch. I always treated him as if he were one of my sons, and I always call him or write to him because we became real close. He would share some of his family, and I would share some of my family stories and things like that. He became a very respectable young man. I have a lot of respect for him because he did a lot.

LW: Are you familiar with the Walk to Work program that the college started, and what effect, if any, has that had?

JB: I'm familiar with the program, I believe in it, I support it because I know the city talked about doing that, and that's when I said, "Well, I want to be the first one," because I always thought of moving back since my kids aren't in school now, and I could be the first one in the Walk to Work program. I think with the few that I know, I think that it has promoted more positive neighborhood relations because it also has helped as far as the value of the property, that we make sure that it doesn't depreciate and that it gets run down, or just turns into a rental and that people are not going to take care of it. So, I see that it's been positive as far as increasing neighborhood revitalization.

LW: Do you think there's a perceivable generation gap in Holland at all?

JB: I don't know. Do you think so? (laughs)

LW: What I try to do with these interviews is sometimes we walk down paths that are very specific to you, and some questions I'm just trying to ask from everybody. Not
everyone has responses to every question, but it allows us to look at a lot of different people's responses to the same issues. That's where some of these questions come from, and that's just one that we developed.

JB: I think it all depends on...I don't see that because I'm very in touch with the young generation. I'm very in touch with what's new, what's going on, what's the latest, what are they using now for, as far as style, language style, clothing style, music. I'm very in touch with that, and I'm very...so, there is some, but for me it's not to an extent because...and, as far as the communication, I'm very in touch with that, so it's...

LW: Not an issue? What controversies have you witnessed in Holland, and what effect have they had on the community?

JB: You're asking that I have dealt with controversies?

LW: Or ones that you've witnessed and seen the effect.

JB: I think I've seen it more in the schools, with some of the, again, even now with Holland Public, with the racial issues, the discrimination issues. Working in the Human Relations office, I've heard a lot, I haven't seen it. I've heard a lot where minorities come and complain about their employers not treating them fair, or their employers telling them they can't speak Spanish, they can't congregate and speak Spanish, or they can't listen to the Spanish station. They come and they ask, "Can my employer...," and those to me have been very sensitive issues, or even that's controversial. But, I have never experienced it because I know what I...I think a lot of it is, we need to empower these people, we need to educate them, we need to let
them know what are their rights, and what are their rights as far as parents who have kids in the public schools? A lot of the parents don't know that they have a right to go to walk in to the school without having to make an appointment. They don't know that, that you have the right to go in and make a request, you don't have to make an appointment, you can walk in any time, but people have the impression, "I have to call and make an appointment." It's a convenience--for anybody it's a convenience--for me, if anybody can walk in and say, "I want to talk to you right now." I owe that to that person to stop what I'm doing, and...but if they make an appointment it's convenient for me, but they don't have to. I see myself as a public servant, and I feel that's what the public staff should be. That's why parents sometimes are afraid and they're not empowered or educated, and they don't know what is legal or what is right, and so they live with it or they ignore it. But some people do get frustrated and they have come and complained in the Human Relations office, and they'll say, "Can my employer do this? My employer threatened me." But, with the African-American, the complaints have been, "You can't wear that. You can't listen to that. You can't...," not so much the language, but it's the dress code or...one of them came and said that the employer said he didn't like his hair, or his hairstyle or something. I was like, "Whoa." But that's basically has what I would say would have been controversial.

LW: Tell me a little about the Our Street program.

JB: I'll tell you what I know about it. It's basically a program that helps residents increase or renovate their houses. It is a target area. They just expanded the target
area, and so I'm not very familiar with the target areas, but I know that what they do is they have a Paint Blitz, where they'll assist people with painting their houses, especially some of these older houses that need paint. People either don't have the resources or they don't have the money to do it and the manpower. I know that with Sue, she's done a lot with the older people, the senior citizens, where they're alone now, they don't have their kids or anybody to do it, so they do that. They provide assistance with the paint. One of our goals is to renovate, as you can see if you take a ride around Holland, some of the older driveways where they're not paved. That's one of our goals is to hopefully renovate all those driveways and also hopefully, we do a lot of neighborhood cleanups. We did one this past spring, and what we did is we took West Fourteenth Street, and we just went in and helped people clean their yards. We had a dumpster, and then we planted some trees. Somebody donated the trees, and we gave them back to the community, so they weren't given to us, I mean they were, but we gave them back to the community, and they planted trees. We had a landscape designer that came and he volunteered his time and he showed the people how to plant them and told them how to take care of it. I thought that was very unique. So those kinds of things is what the Our Street... That's why they merge our programs because Sue does more of the revitalization, and I do the social part.

LW: Tell me about what you do. What kinds of things that...

JB: I handle neighborhood complaints, neighborhood issues. Neighborhood complaints can be from a dog barking to kids running around in people's yard, people throwing trash in a neighbor's yard, people blocking their driveway. There's a lot, especially
with these older homes, they have one driveway they share, and those are
terrible...People can probably kill each other over this...

LW: You'd love to get rid of those. (laughs)

JB: Suspicions of drug activity, gang activity. I've had people call me, and they'll say,
"There's this house, and there's a lot of people going in and out, and they dress
weird, and all kinds of people walk to that house at all different hours of the day,
especially certain hours." So I go by and I check it out, and I find out who lives
there, and if there's an officer that works in that area, then I'll call him and ask him
to give me a history if they have anything on that house, and if they do, we say,
"Yeah, it's a problem house." I'll find out who lives there, and they'll tell me and
give me a little bit of background. Or, vice versa. A lot of times the officers don't
even know what's going on in that house, so I'll go in and investigate, and then I'll
call the officers, and say, "This is what it looks like."

LW: Do you actually go up to the door and talk to the people then?


LW: I can imagine. Have you been threatened?

JB: Oh, not so much threatened, but kind of just, you know, doors being slammed, or
they'll just tell me to get the hell out--those type of things. But you never know what
you're going to walk into. I don't know if it's because I get so much involved with
seeing the police officers that they caution me, and I'm starting to be more leery. So
sometimes before I go to a house, I find out where I'm going, and I look it up in the
computer, and I, more or less have, and if the officers know, I'll tell em, "Hey, I've
got to visit these people, you know anything about them?" And they'll kind of caution me if there is something to be concerned about. Those are the kinds of complaints, or if it's an issue, say a whole neighborhood calls me, there's not enough street lighting, our kids, they walk to school in the dark, and it's too dark in our neighborhood.

Well, we have a meeting, we follow up, do we need a street lighting, those kind of issues, drainage issue. Maybe they need a stop sign or cars are going too...I had one this Monday where cars were going too fast by the high school, and she was very concerned because the young kids walk to school, and she's just afraid somebody might get hit. Those kind of issues I get involved with. I also organize Neighborhood Watch. We've found out that by organizing before anything happens has really been very successful because you have your block captains, and if something's going on in the neighborhood, or something happened in the neighborhood, you know who to contact, and the neighborhood block captains will contact their neighbors. Unfortunately we've had it when things happen, then it's after the fact, and they come storming in saying, "Well, what are you going to do about it?" Well, we need to organize. We need to find out who your neighbors are and get to...and we've had that where there's, the whole neighborhood is against the family, but we always try to have a meeting, social, try to break the ice and invite those people over. A lot of times, it could be nothing. I had one last week, and these people kept calling and complaining about this family. I talked to one of the officers, and he says, there's really nothing going on in there, it's just that they have a lot of company all the time. They're just in and out, in and out, and I can relate to that
because when you have young kids, like when my kids were in high school, their friends were in and out, in and out, and I was like, I finally said, "You're either going to stay here, or don't come back." So, I can relate a little bit, but when people especially a lot of senior citizens, they get kind of worried, and I don't blame them because they live alone, and...

LW: And some of it's cultural, because for example, Asian families tend to live in more people...

JB: Exactly, they're always visiting. Especially the Asian and Hispanic families. If it's a birthday party, if it's something small, the whole family has to come over, or if it's somebody just got pictures or something from vacation, everybody has to come over. I see that in Florida when everybody, you just have a little, after church everybody, my mom...

LW: We have an Asian family in our neighborhood which is a new neighborhood, cars everywhere, all the time.

JB: Oh really?

LW: Which I understand, because I understand the cultural dynamics there.

JB: Right. I have one too, well, my neighborhood has really changed a lot. We used to have a lot of senior citizens, but as they pass on, now younger families are moving in. We have a couple of Hispanic families, we have an Asian family, and now, most of them are caucasian, but it's a good mixture, and you see that with the Asian family, in and out. But then I'm sure they probably say that with my family because when my boys are home, like when my son comes on leave, then cars in and out.
LW: Do you ever take a police officer with you when you visit these homes?

JB: Oh yes. Sometimes I do. It all depends on the situation, or they'll take me. They'll say, "Let's go visit this family." Sometimes people won't trust an officer, but then they'll trust me. That's where we say I'm the liaison because I'll find out a lot of things, and then I'll come back and I'll say, "This is what I saw, and this is what I suspect." I take a lot of training.

LW: You're in a difficult situation because you have to engender that trust, but sometimes you have to relay information.

JB: Exactly. I did one, Larry, not too long ago, and it really bothered me when I did it because I don't see myself as a snitch, or a tattle-teller. But I went to visit this family, well actually, this single person, he's divorced but he has custody of the little girl, and I knocked and I knocked and I knocked, because there were some complaints. I'd been trying to get a hold of him, and I couldn't get a hold of him, so I went over there, and I knocked and I knocked. The little girl answered the door, and she was just wearing her underwear. She's probably about three or four, she just had her underwear, and it was cold. I said, "Where's your daddy?" She says, "He's upstairs sleeping." I said, "Can you go get your daddy?" It took her maybe like fifteen minutes, I stood outside waiting for that little girl to go get the daddy. Finally when the daddy came down, he says, "Oh, I was sleeping," but then the little girl went outside, and just in her underwear, was playing. It was like about ten-thirty in the morning, this little girl had all kinds of candy, just eating candy like it's going out of style. I saw that this little girl was alone all that time, and, with no clothes on
other than her underwear, and I was just concerned for her. So, I had to report that because it's not normal. This man, and then he hit her. He also hit her.

LW: While you were there?

JB: While I was there, but he thought I ... because as I turned around to leave, when, he jerked her inside and then whacked her, and then I saw that as I turned around. I'm thinking, oh my God, he hit her! I came back and I had to report that because those are the kinds of things that we don't tolerate. So, I don't know what's going to happen with that, but that just happened last week. This little girl was so innocent, so cute. You just hate to see something happen to her. She opened the door to me. What if she opened the door to a stranger and just walked out. So many things that went through my mind. But those kinds of things that I deal with occasionally, and with the gang members.

LW: Tell me what interaction you've had with a gang.

JB: We used to do mediations in the middle school with the gangs. They're always fighting against each other. Then we bring them together, both groups, and kind of just talk about it. Talk about what the real issues were. That used to help a lot, but we haven't been doing those. I really didn't feel comfortable doing them by myself because we need two, I feel that, because most of them being males, and they're real strong, I just didn't feel comfortable, and so we really need stronger, maybe I shouldn't say men, but.. And, even sometimes we did have some girls. I felt comfortable with the girls doing mediation between the girls, but with the boys sometimes they can get very, very strong, and you never know what's going to
happen, because we've had some mediations where you're almost ready to call the cops, or it gets very tense. We quit doing those, but I think that eventually we'll get back to doing them again, and the school would call us, so maybe there hasn't been a need for that, but they haven't called again. But, I run into them a lot. I know who they are, I know their families, but I haven't had any problems with them.

LW: Are they relatively small? Is this a problem that the greater community tends to see in a larger frame than it really is, or is it accurately perceived?

JB: I think it's small as far as when you compare it to other cities. It's small, but it's not something that we're going to take too lightly. We can't. We can't sit back on our laurels and rest and say, oh yeah, you know, because it can always get bigger. Especially now with our younger kids, they're like the wannabe's, and once they start organizing and get organized, then it's going to be hard to break them apart. But, it's definitely an issue. I was out in the community in the summer, and it made me stop and think, "I wonder if it's gang, or if it's racial," because I was talking to the Hispanic kids, and the Hispanic kid says, "Oh, we hate the black people." You talk to the black people, and they say, "Oh, we hate the Hispanics." And then the Hispanics say, "Oh, we hate the Asian. We don't want anything to do with them." Then I try to talk to them you know, "What do they do to you? Come on, you can't have that much hate." "No, man, nobody cares about us." But, they all say the same thing.

LW: And then they say it about each other.

JB: Right. Of course there are gangs because they're all forming a group. I went home
and I'm thinking, "You know these kids...it's more racial." Unfortunately that's why they can't break that barrier. There's something that has made them, built up that hate towards an ethnic group. But, I'm not saying that it's everybody. It's just a small group.

LW: How many kids, if you were to guesstimate, would you say are involved in gang activity?

JB: That are involved?

LW: Yeah, that are part of, would consider themselves part of gangs?

JB: In Holland, I would say not more than maybe a hundred.

LW: That's a very small number overall.

JB: I would say there's a lot of wannabe's that act and think that they are, but they're not. I deal a lot with the graffiti when businesses get hit with graffiti. They call the police department, the police department sends me the report, I follow up and go look at the job, and then we have a part-time person that goes out and removes it. The majority of it was gang related because they go tag against each other. They finally caught a couple of the kids that did it. Very artistic. I hate to say it, but they were very good, very artistic.

LW: I've noticed that.

JB: So, now what I'm trying to do is, when they get sentenced, I wanted part of their sentence that they go out and remove it, because it's a lot of work. It's a lot of tax dollars, it's a lot of work, it takes a lot of time. People don't realize that it takes a lot of time, and using all the equipment, and buying all the material that we need to
remove it.

LW: Because every paint is different.

JB: Whether you paint, or sandblast it, or pressure wash, it still takes a lot of work. I was talking to a Reverend yesterday and I met with him, and I was telling him, I said there was something positive, that we could turn this around in a positive way. I know bigger cities have done, they'll have not so much walls, but plywoods that they can be removed, and that people can come and paint and do their graffiti. But, then they would be removable, where they can just have that area where they can just go tag it or do whatever. Or, a lot of them do murals. They work with these kids and say, "Let's do something positive with this." They're so good. Some of it was very artistic, very well done. But, that's what I do. I organize groups, and we do a lot of crime prevention, anti-drugs, anti-gang presentations. I do a lot of crime prevention presentations along with the officers. On Monday, we had our Neighborhood Watch meeting, and we had a speaker that talked about teen dating violence. Every month we have a different topic, a different guest, and it's all focusing on crime prevention.

LW: Recently the mayor made a decision I'm sure you're aware of, about lowering the flag relative to the incident at Perredies where a young man was killed. What were your thoughts on that and the controversy that ensued?

JB: My thoughts were that, again, and I guess just being human, and thinking that everybody should be treated fair. I felt the same way as a lot of people in the community that, well, first of all, if he's going to lower it, lower it for everybody, not just for that incident. Granted, I sympathize with what happened. I was very touched
by it, and anybody that gets hurt. As a mother, I'm very sensitive to that, but then also I feel that it should be just used like in somebody very high honored, like having somebody in the service, somebody that has given their time like that, like in the military.

LW: Like Matt Urban passing away, that sort of thing?

JB: Exactly. I guess because I'm more sensitive too because having a son in the military. Now I'm more aware, the awareness has really hit home, where what they have to put up with and what they have to go through and all that. And, so, that's just my feeling. I think he made a big mistake, but he's a good man, and he apologized to the community. But still, there's a lot of people that can't forget. They can't just leave it in the controversy, when the community. I mean they were, they were upset, and they asked me how I felt, and I have to be careful, because I want people to perceive me as not being judgmental because I'm not. So, most of the time I listen, and when people just want to complain, then I just listen. I'm very careful about who I give my opinion to, because I don't want to be, especially like the media, you don't want to be quoted.

LW: Describe a significant turning point in your life.

JB: I think it was when I took on this job. I went through four group interviews before I got this position. I really felt like people didn't have the confidence in me, they didn't have the trust, basically that's how I felt, like I wasn't good enough, and they put me...I want to say, a couple of months before I even found out that I was being offered this position. But I fought and I fought, and I wasn't going to give up. There
were a lot of times when I just wanted to throw in the towel and say, "Forget it. I don't need this." But, I had a lot of determination, and I think that that was a significant turning point in my life. Also, when I saw my boys graduating when they were, and I could turn around and say, "We did it." Because it wasn't easy. We had our ups and downs, we all do in a marriage situation, we had our ups and downs and disagreements, you know. "You can't do this, you can't do that," or things like that. Or beliefs. Like my husband, he believes in going to church, but he doesn't believe in going to church every Sunday. And, me, I'm the opposite. My mom used to say if you could spend a whole eight hours in, or so many hours in (end of tape one)

I think that's what it was, and then seeing that my boys, we did a good job with them, considering how they didn't have that many role models. But I think the family plays a big role. I don't care, you want role models, but I think the importance is the family, the husband and the wife. We have to be role models to our kids because, monkey see, monkey do, that's really how I believe.

LW: That's very true.

JB: It is. My husband's a smoker, and my oldest son was smoking at one time, and he says, "Did you know Philipe is smoking?" And, I said no, and he was all angry, and I said, "Well." I said, "What do you expect? You smoke, he sees you smoke." We of course disagree, he said, "Yeah, but what I do doesn't mean that he has to do exactly." Fortunately, Philipe quit. He was just going through a phase, everybody's doing it, so he's doing it. But, he was just having a fit. But, my husband still smokes, but Philipe doesn't. Philipe, I think just wanted to prove to his dad that, "I
can smoke." So, those are the kinds of things that, just an example of how we play a big part in our kids' lives, and they're going to see what you do, and you got to lead them, and they're going to follow by what they see.

LW: You talk about role models a lot with your children. Tell me about someone, or a number of people, who've played an important role in your life here in Holland; that have been a role model for you, or that have influenced you significantly.

JB: In Holland?

LW: Or before you came to Holland.

JB: Well, in Holland, the Reverend Walter Sanchez, he's deceased now; he died of cancer maybe six years ago. I would say he was one that really influenced me, because he was very genuine, very caring, and you could tell that he was not a fake. You know how sometimes you can tell when people are genuine. I think he was very sincere, very genuine, and very caring, and he encouraged us. He encouraged me to go back to school. He encouraged me to stand up for what I believe and keep trying. I don't know, he just a man of faith that when I would tell him, "I feel this way, I feel this way." He would tell me what scripture to read, and that really helped me a lot when I was going through some difficult times when my mom was ill and then my dad. So, I had like been through some really hard times, and then I was having some problems with my sons, with my oldest son in school, and he played a big role in my life. He was a leader, a strong leader in the community. I don't know if you ever heard of him or anything, but...

LW: I've heard of him, I didn't know him.
JB: But, very strong leader of the community. He worked for the migrant bilingual ed, and he was very involved with the families, very caring, very sensitive to the needs of the children. I would say that he probably one that really influenced me in a positive way. Other than that, in Holland, I think the other person that I don't know her very well, but I know what she has done would be Cora Visscher. She would probably be the Mother Theresa of Holland. (laughs)

LW: Interesting definition.

JB: She would be. I know her, but not that well. But, I know of her, and I know what she has done in the community and for the caring of children, children's needs and for the welfare of the families. I used to read about her, and I know her daughters, but very strong lady, has a big heart, and she was one of them. Then, other than my dad. My dad was one of them that really influenced me a lot. This is why I believe that anything is possible, and if you want to do it, you can do it. My dad came from Mexico, and he didn't know a word of English, but you know how he learned? He bought a dictionary and the newspaper, everyday. He bought a dictionary and he would read the newspaper. That's a bad habit now that we have—all of us have to read the paper, everyday, at least glance through.

LW: That's a good habit.

JB: We didn't have any books or anything, but he would give us all a piece of paper. After he was done with the paper, he'd make everybody read the piece of paper, newspaper. He said that that was the best way to learn, with a dictionary, and then he would ask us what does this word mean. That's the only education that he had. He
was a truck driver, interstate, could read maps, could tell you how far was a state or a
city, and could get around very well, and probably knew more English than all of us
when we were in...and very strong man. He didn't have it, so he would always
encourage us to learn.

LW: What do you think the special needs of migrant families are? I'm sure you deal with
that in the course of your work.

JB: I think housing. Housing and education, education with the families, and
empowerment. A lot of these people that come and they don't have housing, and yet
they don't know how to start, how to do it, where ...

LW: Where do you go?

JB: Exactly. A lot of them don't even have any education. Maybe a first-, second-grade
education, sixth-grade and on. And then the language barrier. A lot of these families
use their younger kids to communicate, and that's what I've seen a lot. I've seen
people where people think that, I run into them a lot of times. Even now, because
eventually they ended up staying in Holland, and then they still are not very fluent in
English, and I'll go to their houses and they'll grab their little kid, and say "Talk to
this lady," and I'll say, "No, I can talk to you in Spanish." Then they're surprised,
they'll say, "She can speak Spanish?" And I'll say, "Oh, yeah." They're surprised to
see that somebody can speak both languages sometimes. Even I have that with my
boys. With as much Spanish as we speak in our family, they were always
embarrassed to speak. I used to get so mad with them, but I think a lot of it was...I
know when I came to Holland, I had a heavy accent. I still have one, because I speak
Spanish as much as I can. I use it a lot. That's the only thing is that people used to make fun my accent and my words, you know, because my English, my Spanish was...and I was raised very Tex-Mex, and so it was very bilingual. We used to have songs that were half English and half Spanish. I think Sue was the one that said, "I noticed that when you're talking, you talk to a certain person, you use both languages, you go back and forth." But I know who to talk to that way because I can see if it's a Tex-Mex, that's what we call it, or if it's somebody that just speaks the Spanish language, than I just stay on one language. That's it. But, like with my boys, I'll use half English also, and half Spanish sometimes. I'll say something and then they'll answer me the same way, but that's just the way we... It's not the correct way, but that's just the way we were raised.

LW: Do you think the experiences of the Hispanic members of the community are similar or very much different than the Dutch who came a hundred and fifty years ago, as far as language and assimilation and... Any thoughts on that?

JB: Boy, I wouldn't know because I've really never experienced how the Dutch were treated or how it affected them. Although, I've come in contact with a lot of families or people that are very heavily, they speak the Dutch language, and they get frustrated also with trying to explain to me what they need or what the problem is. People don't realize that there's still a lot of them that are not fluent in English, and have a very heavy Dutch accent, or speak a lot of Dutch. Working with the community, I run into them a lot, and so I'm sure they had some. I'm sure there were. I think anytime you come into to a different country, different style, different environment, I don't care,
you're going to have some barriers. There's going to be some. This is how I feel, like for a Hispanic that was raised here, say my son, just for an example. He's Hispanic and he moves to San Antonio, he would blend in. He would probably blend in because of the culture, the environment. But then, say a Hispanic from San Antonio would move to Holland, it's going to be a culture shock. But, it's something that we have to learn to live with and deal with. I'm sure you have that with any race; I don't care if it's Hispanic, Dutch, Japanese, Chinese, Asian, whatever. You're going to have some kind of barriers.

LW: Have your priorities changed over the course of your twenty years in Holland?

JB: I would say yes, because my priorities now, my heart is with—not that it hasn't been, but—I raised my boys, they're gone, but now, my priority is to try to make a difference, more on some underprivileged group of kids, and finding a way on how I can be an asset to a certain group. That's one of my priorities right now. The other is, my priorities going, now that you go through that empty nest, and you don't have...is going back to school and maybe getting my master's someday. I think because my son, my oldest son, he's going into his own business, and I'm helping him get his own businesses. "Once I get my own business going, Mommy," he says, "I don't want you to work. I want you to go back to school, and you work for me." I said, "Phil, you're living in a dream world."

LW: (laughs) What kind of business does he...?

JB: He lays carpet, and he also does carpentry. So he's going to try to do that, but it's going to be years before he really gets going. But that's what he says. I'm glad he
thinks that way, but I said, "No Phil, I want you to go back to school." (laughs)

LW: What are your thoughts on the bilingual program in the schools?

JB: I really support it. I really do. Again, I've seen the need for it because you see all these families, and I've seen it in Pine Creek Elementary School. This is another thing, when you see "bilingual" people think Hispanic, but you have your Asian, you have all your other ethnic groups. But like in Pine Creek Elementary School in West Ottawa, their entire population is the Asian ethnic group, and a lot of those children just speak either Vietnamese or Cambodian. Even with the Hispanic children, their parents don't speak English, so all they speak is just the one language, and so when they go to school, that's all they know--one language. So, the only thing that I can say is that I support it.

LW: What are your thoughts of a new area center?

JB: I also support that, and basically because, being a sports fan, and having had my boys in sports, I kept saying, "Oh, I wish we had this. Oh, I wish we had that," because we travelled so many miles to go play soccer or to go play hockey or to go play baseball, and ice skating. We used to go all over the place to find those type of... and we were patronizing other businesses when I believe we should have kept our money here. But now, the north side has a new Soccer Spot, which is supposedly a big soccer arena, which is too bad because at that point my kids...well, there's a lot of kids that are going to use it. I'm not saying that, but I wish it would have been there when my kids needed that. Also with hockey, I support the idea of having it downtown, I'm kind of biased because I also feel for the people that live on that area.
As far as I know, they're still talking about that same area in downtown.

LW: The Western Foundry site?

JB: Right. So my heart is with those families because I don't want to see them displaced out of their community. But then, I can also see where there would be a need to have the arena downtown, so I don't know.

LW: It's a balancing issue.

JB: Right.

LW: How about Windmill Island?

JB: You know, Larry, to be honest with you, I have never been to Windmill Island, in all my years that I've been here. It doesn't interest me because I hear that it's boring, that there's really nothing. My kids went when they were in school, but they used to say, it's really nothing, it's just the windmill, it's kind of boring.

LW: How about this redevelopment plan?

JB: Oh, I support it. When you go to big cities, like look at what San Antonio did with their downtown river walk. Oh, my gosh. You go to Indianapolis, look at what they have done downtown. I was in Birmingham, Alabama, and they also created like a downtown river walk. The only thing is that we need to bring more cultural, be open more on Sundays. I really believe that, like have more of attractions, have it open to the community. We need to break away from nothing is open on Sundays, and Holland is known for that. They say Sunday is to spend time with the family. It is, but you're going to find a way to spend time with your family. Either you're going to stay home, or end up in some of those attractions. You make your family what you
want it to be. I find it hard too, when people say, "Well, you know, you can't have this open on Sundays because Sunday's the Christian day, or whatever. To me, every day is a Christian day. To me, everyday is the Lord's day. You don't have to wait for Sunday to celebrate. That's just my belief, but don't put that on. (laughs). No, no, I'm just kidding.

LW: That's alright, there's nothing wrong with that.

JB: I see this big picture in my mind, and I see that it could really bring a lot of business to Holland. Oh, definitely.

LW: What do you think the role of industry has been in Holland?

JB: I think it's been great, I really do. I think that we're fortunate for it because my husband has always been in the industry. So without that, because he doesn't have a, other than the high school education...Well, I take it back. GE sent him to school, and he went to JC for two years, and he got his certificate. I don't know what we would have done without the industry. And I think that the industry offers a lot of jobs, especially to people that are really, that's all they have is a high school diploma. Not that I'm saying that it's sufficient, I think everybody needs to further their education, but you know, some people don't want that, and people just want to work.

LW: Did you go on beyond high school yourself for education?

JB: Oh yeah.

LW: Where did you go?

JB: I went to Grand Valley for two years, and now I'm in Davenport.

LW: Which is convenient, that's nearby.
JB: It is, but I'm thinking of switching back to Grand Valley because I don't know what I want. I want to go back and do criminal justice, I want to do that.

LW: Do you think you'd like to get more involved in the police department?

JB: Something like that, but not be a police officer, but sort of be what I'm doing now, but maybe have a stronger role.

LW: Is there anything that we haven't covered or things that you think we should talk about?

JB: Not really. I think I...

LW: Covered your job, the schools...

JB: Yes.

LW: We've touched on a lot of different things today.

JB: I hope it was all beneficial to you.

LW: Very helpful. Thank you for your time today.

JB: Oh, thank you.