Spykman, Dena Oral History Interview: Class Projects

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RdV: What part of the Netherlands are you from?

DS: I'm from Amsterdam.

RdV: Can you describe your homeland and what it was like to live there?

DS: I lived outside of Amsterdam before we came here, it was something like Grandville by Grand Rapids, you know, just a little bit outside. I had 3 brothers and 6 sisters, but my one brother and my dad died in '45, they both had typhoid fever, and so I had 2 brothers left and 6 sisters. What else do you want to know about it? We had all trees lining the street, but they were all cut down during the war because people were cold and they needed wood for the fire, so it was quite bare. But later on they planted all new trees after the war.

RdV: Can you tell me why you immigrated?

DS: Because my mother was a widow, and I being the oldest was a baby nurse and didn't make enough money to support the whole family. We needed help all the time and the social services were not all in place yet. I had an aunt in Holland, Michigan, and she had a rest home and she told us to come over that she would have work for all of us.

RdV: What concerns did you have about leaving the Netherlands?

DS: I didn't really have any concerns. I was happy that maybe now we'd have a future.

RdV: Who did you travel to the United States with?
DS: With my family, my mother and 1 brother and 6 sisters. One brother was engaged to be
married and had a good job in the Netherlands.

RdV: Why did you chose the United States and not Canada?

DS: Because of my aunt, she was a sister of my father.

RdV: What were your first impressions of Holland?

DS: Big, everything is big, the streets are wider.

RdV: This is true, I learned that when I was in Amsterdam.

DS: The streets are narrow there and all those little cars.

RdV: Can you describe some of the problems you faced adjusting to life here?

DS: I didn't know English, I only knew yes and no. So, that was a little problem, but within
1/2 year I learned to make myself understood.

RdV: Did you know many people?

DS: No, I didn't know many people.

RdV: Where were you first employed and was it difficult to find employment?

DS: My aunt was our sponsor and she had to have work for us, otherwise they wouldn't allow
us to immigrate. So I worked for my aunt in a rest home as a nurse's aid.

RdV: Tell me about the jobs you've had since moving to Zeeland.

DS: I moved to Zeeland when I got married because my husband worked in the Zeeland
bakery. In Holland, my mother remarried and then I quit by my aunt because I had some
problems there. Then I worked at Cremton in Holland, it was on 13th Street. When
mother remarried, I didn't have to help support the family, so I applied to go to Reformed
Bible Institute, it is Reformed Bible College now. I thought I'd go in the mission field.
But then after a year I met my husband and he had plans to get married, so I got married.

RdV: How did the move affect you and your family?

DS: You mean the move from the Netherlands to the United States?

RdV: Yes.

DS: We all were happy about it. My younger sisters were 12 and 9 years old and they started school a grade lower because of the language. Two of my other sisters went to high school.

RdV: What traditions did you bring with you that are still part of your family?

DS: We have a very close-knit family and we get together quite often. Birthdays--here they don't celebrate birthdays. In the Netherlands, everybody, all the cousins and everybody come to a birthday, at least if they live around. Then we have cake and coffee and a little wine or whatever they have. You celebrated more. Here they don't do much about it, and now my children don't either. They grew up here and now that's all gone.

RdV: What were some of the most difficult adjustments for you to make? And what did you find easy?

DS: I didn't really have any problems. The only problem I had was my aunt took advantage of us...but with the people here, I didn't have any problems. I got along fine with everybody.

RdV: Why have you stayed in Holland?

DS: Because I married and my husband worked in the Zeeland Bakery, so we moved here to Zeeland.

RdV: In what ways have you been involved in the community?
DS: I go to the rest home once a month and sing there, like tomorrow I go and do it again. I did work at Evergreen Commons a lot, but I quit that after I broke my wrist. So right now I just have a little job by Russ's.

RdV: Do you have a church affiliation?

DS: Yes, right now I go to Victory Point in Holland.

RdV: What influenced your decision on which church to attend?

DS: We used to be a member of First Christian Reformed Church in Zeeland, but we had some problems. My children, two daughters—by the way, I have 4 daughters—but two of my middle daughters sang together and they were invited in that church. We liked it and that's how we stayed there.

RdV: Increasingly, Holland is becoming more culturally diverse. When you see newer immigrants settling in Holland, how do you feel? What are your feelings about the Hispanic community? And what are your feelings about the Asian community?

DS: They are all people, they are all creatures of the Lord, so they have just as much right as the Dutch people do.

RdV: Do you see them facing similar problems or opportunities that you faced?

DS: Yeah, the only thing is what I don't understand that the Spanish people, they seem to have problems with the language and want the teachers to speak Spanish to the children. We didn't have that, we had to learn English. I think that is the language of the country here and they should learn it too, according to me. (laughs)

RdV: How do you feel about the Dutch heritage that Holland has tried to preserve?

DS: We don't have a Tulip Time like they have here in the Netherlands, so, but it's cute.
RdV: In fact, that's the next question, can you describe your feelings about Tulip Time?

DS: It's cute. (laughs)

RdV: What are your feelings about the Cinco de Mayo Festival?

DS: That's the Spanish?

RdV: Yes, the 5th of May, I don't know much about it myself.

DS: I don't know, I never saw it. They are here too and they want to have their Spanish, I can understand that.

RdV: Do you feel the community celebrates your heritage well?

DS: Yeah, they try to.

RdV: How do you think they could improve it?

DS: Well, the Netherlands is not like it used to be when I left there either. It's going downhill there too, just like it is here.

RdV: Have you experienced any discrimination here in Holland?

DS: No, I didn't.

RdV: What paths have your children taken? Do they speak any Dutch, are they interested in your Dutch heritage?

DS: Yeah, they like the Dutch, but they don't really speak it. They usually understand it. I always say when I get older and I'm in the rest home, maybe I go back to my Dutch and I hope you understand me. (laughs)

RdV: What would you say to a friend considering moving to the United States?

DS: Oh come here, lots of opportunities.

RdV: How do you like working at Russ'?
DS: I like it, I enjoy it.

RdV: What feelings did you and your family have about your accent?

DS: My kids like it, and I don't like it. (laughs) But they tell me, don't change it, because then you won't be our mom anymore.

RdV: How did you and your husband meet?

DS: We met here, I came in 1950 and he came in 1954. That's how I met him, he came for coffee once.

RdV: What is your favorite memory of the Netherlands?

DS: Grandparents and family, but most of them, they are all gone. My mother died and everybody. So there is not much there anymore except the brother and one sister who went back to the Netherlands.

RdV: What is your favorite part of being in Zeeland?

DS: It's small; I like Zeeland, it's nice. Downtown is close by and I can walk it.

RdV: What was the hardest part about leaving the Netherlands?

DS: Leave the friends, you don't have any friends first when you come here, of course, and family too.

RdV: Did you have any feelings about changing your name?

DS: I did change my name a little bit, from D-I-N-A to D-E-N-A because I thought they would pronounce it Dina. My name is really like Dinah, the daughter of Jacob. I had to change to Dena because I didn't want to be a Dinah Shore. (laughs)

RdV: Why don't you like your accent?

DS: Sometimes people make fun of me when I don't use my TH right, and like if I say yust
instead of just--things like that. The trouble here is you don't pronounce all the letters and I see in my mind how it is spelled and I want to pronounce more letters. Like pneumonia is a very hard word for me. What is that p doing before the n?

RdV: Are you in any organizations with other Dutch immigrants? Do you have a community of them around you?

DS: No. The only group that are originally Dutch we sing at the rest home, but we don't sing Dutch Psalms anymore like we used to because there are not many Dutch older people anymore. So it's usually English with the Dutch brogue.

RdV: Well, there is nothing wrong with that. How did your family feel at the end of the war?

DS: We were happy that the war was over and very thankful for the Canadians really got us free. And there was food again, there was nothing to eat during the war.

RdV: Is there anything that stands out in your mind from that time period?

DS: Oh yeah, the darkness. You had to have all the windows...there couldn't be any lights shining out. There were no street lights. A lot of people walked into the canals and drowned during the night. You really weren't supposed to be out after eight, I believe, I don't remember exactly. Then the bombings were very hard, but it goes slowly on and it gets worse and worse and you slowly get used to it. It's not all of a sudden real bad, it's not all of sudden there's no food anymore, but it just slowly on gets worse and worse, and that's how it happens. My sisters, who were all younger than I am, were sent out from the church to farmers where there always is food. Because in Amsterdam there was nothing to eat. My mother ate tulip bulbs and sugar beets, she boiled them. My younger sister was quite small, she was born in '41, and she had to stay with my mother because she was
too young to be separated. My brother, who is a year younger than I, was picked up by the Germans and put in a concentration camp, but he dug underneath the fence and got out and walked all the way home. Then he had to be in hiding.

RdV: Why did they pick him up?

DS: Because all the young men had to go to Germany...for the tanks and whatever they need for it, and he didn't want to work for the Germans.

RdV: I don't blame him, I have Dutch friends in the Netherlands today who have nothing nice to say about the Germans even now.

DS: Well yeah, but you can't blame the ones now, you have to forget and forgive too.

RdV: How many times have you been back to the Netherlands since you've been here?

DS: I've been back in '77 and then every other year after that. The last time I went there was last March when we had that storm and the plane couldn't go. I had to go a day later. That was March 9.

RdV: Have your children gone back with you?

DS: Yes, in '77 one of my daughters with her new husband, they went along with me for the honeymoon. They got money from his dad, and they enjoyed it there.

RdV: Have your other children gone?

DS: My youngest daughter went at the same time then, the other two have never been there though, no. They would like to, but can't afford it.

RdV: Well timing is everything with that too. I spent a week there, and I felt like I could have spent a lot more time.

DS: Oh yeah, yeah. Well, my daughters are all married and they have children, you know
how that goes. Then the children need money so there is never anything extra. When
they shoot the airplanes the pieces fall down, big pieces sometimes so it was very
dangerous to walk outside. In the morning when it was all over, we would pick them up.
I was always sorry that I didn't take them along to show my kids. (laughs)

RdV: How did you feel about Hitler having the Jews wear the Star of David?

DS: I thought it was terrible. A lot of Jews I never saw anymore, just picked them up and
most of them got killed I think. It was awful.

RdV: How radically did your life change after the invasion?

DS: Well, there was no school, there was nothing. I went to a cousin of my dad because they
had a farm and I worked there and that way I got some food. It was just very different,
you didn't have the family and it was a terrible five years. When I went to a cousin of my
dad, that was maybe a year before the war ended. So, I was there about a year.

RdV: Do you feel that the Dutch should have fought harder?

DS: They couldn't, there were a lot of people who worked with the Germans who told
them...how would you say that?

RdV: Collaborators?

DS: Yeah. There was no way they could fight them off.

RdV: I'm just asking because my aunt is native Parisian and she feels that the French should
have fought harder.

DS: I don't know how they could have fought harder, it was just a losing war.

RdV: How did you feel about the people who put pictures of Hitler up in their houses after...?

DS: I never met any people who did that, so I don't know.
RdV: Diet Enman talks about that in her book, *Things We Couldn't Say*. How one family down the road from her put Hitler's picture up in their house after the invasion, and she talks about her feelings with that.

DS: Oh, I never met anybody who did that.

RdV: Did Amsterdam sort of shut down at that time?

DS: Not right away, but all the homes who had a little room, they had to have those German soldiers in there and sleep by them. The soldiers went around and asked for extra blankets. My mother said I have 10 children, I don't...oh alright, you don't have to give any blankets. They took everything out, all the medication and everything, coal for heat and so on. There was nothing left anymore, they used everything up. My dad and my brother both had typhoid fever, and there was no medication for it and so they both died a week after each other.

RdV: Do you have any hard feelings about the war, or did you move past that?

DS: I am past that. It just happened, you just can't dwell on it and you can't have hate, that's not right either for a Christian. You have to forgive and forget. The Lord rules, whatever happens God still is in control of it all.

RdV: Did your other brothers have to fight in the war or serve in Hitler's Youth?

DS: No, my younger brother (3 years younger than I am), was always short. They put a false identification in his pocket, but he was too young. No, only my oldest brother who is year younger than I, was picked up then because he didn't want to go.

RdV: And he came over with you guys?

DS: No, my oldest brother was the one who was engaged to be married. He worked for Shell
Oil in the laboratory; he had a very good job. So he didn't like to go to the United States.

RdV: Do you have other cousins that came over or other relatives?

DS: No. I don't have too many relatives. I had only two cousins, my father had a brother and a sister in the Netherlands; the one sister had boys and the brother only had one daughter. They never had any idea of coming this way.

RdV: How did your coming to the states affect your relationship with that older brother?

DS: Oh good, he went to the Indies, New Borneo, working for Shell, and he was gone anyway. I think that was in '55 when he came and visited here with his two boys and his wife. No, I love my brother.

RdV: What are your children doing now?

DS: One daughter works part-time by Herman Miller, she shares a job; and the other daughter works full-time by Herman Miller. The one who works full-time is divorced and the other one her husband works for Bareman's, drives a truck. My oldest daughter works for Haworth, and her husband works for Hemco. My youngest daughter, her husband works for Cran-Hill, he is the head of the maintenance there. His name is Marcus.

RdV: What stands out most about your education in the Netherlands?

DS: In the Netherlands, if you want to be something then you just study just for that. Like I wanted to be a baby nurse and that's all I studied for. Specializes more in whatever you want to become.

RdV: Do you think that's a good thing?

DS: I think it is, yeah. You have to learn everything in grade school of course, but then later on when you're higher...Some people are not college material, and then if you just have
whatever you want to become, I think you learn more because it interests you more, don't you think?

RdV: I think so. I was just wondering what you thought about it since you've seen both, since your children went through here. How do you think that compares with our education in the United States?

DS: I think here it is always much easier, it seems that way. Even in grade school they don't do as much as they do there. I don't know how it is now, but I imagine it is just...they are working on it here to get the schools better. When you are not good in 1st grade they don't pass you to the second grade, they hold you until you got it all. They don't do that here; most schools don't do that here. Or they should be tutored. Some children have problems with either eyesight or hearing or whatever.

RdV: What kinds of changes have you seen in this community since you've been here?

DS: Buildings, buildings and more buildings. Condos. Otherwise not much changes. We have a lot of churches here but you do in Holland, too, don't they?

RdV: How do you feel about the whole bilingual education stuff and how we teach foreign languages here?

DS: They don't teach it here like they do in the Netherlands. In the Netherlands, most everybody can speak English there even the younger children, they have more language there. Of course, Dutch is not as popular as English either, but they get German and English. When I was in grade school, I don't know much of it anymore, but we had French when I was in the 3rd grade, we took French for a few years. I don't know much about it anymore.
RdV: Do you think that was helpful?

DS: I think so, with pronouncing some of the words, because now the language changes all the time too. In the Netherlands, in my younger years, a lot of French words in the language now they changed that all, but I don't even know how to spell good anymore, they change that all the time. I can't understand it, but that's how it goes I guess.

RdV: That's true, in fact the year I took Dutch, they just changed the Dutch spellings right after it.

DS: Yeah right. We used to have all the names with capital letters, they don't do that either anymore either, maybe some of them. It's just very different.

RdV: Do you think social issues are handled well around here?

DS: Yeah, I think so.

RdV: It's probably different than the way they handle them in the Netherlands.

DS: In the Netherlands the way it is now, I don't think it is good because people figure out from the government they can get more money so they don't even try to get a job then, and that's not right. I'm glad they changed that here because like Governor Engler...that the people, if they are able to, have to work. I think that's good. You feel better yourself. When my husband had cancer, he was sick for 10 months and was in the hospital for over 3 months. The bills mounted up and mounted up. He worked by Hemco, and they went on strike while he was sick and then they changed insurance, and then because he never was working under that insurance, we didn't have any insurance, nothing. I didn't know where the money was going to come from and then the man in the hospital talked to me, he said you have to ask for help for Medicaid. I did and was refused. I told that
man that I was refused and he said that's not right, you have to ask for a hearing. So we had a hearing and then that whoever told me I couldn't have it was reprimanded, it was not right and I had to have some Medicaid. Then I had Medicaid, so after my husband died I got Medicaid and money from the government because I had children under 18. I looked for a job and got one at Herman Miller. Then I could quit my Medicaid and I had my own insurance and everything and it made me feel so good. It doesn't feel good if you have to live from the government, I think. So all those people who are lazy, and not everybody is lazy, but I think it is better for them if they find a job if they're able to. It makes you feel better.

RdV: Do they have in the Netherlands programs that help people do that?

DS: Yes, but in the Netherlands they help everybody--it is almost crazy. A son-in-law of my sister in the Netherlands got laid off from work, so he gets help right away. He is supposed to look for a job, but he says, "Baloney. I get a lot a more if I have it from the government than when I get my own job." I think that is wrong, so it is too easy in the Netherlands, something has to be done about it.

RdV: What do you think about Proposal B that was on the ballot the last time around on euthanasia and the right to die?

DS: I think God decides when it is time to die for us. I don't think it right to kill somebody. The same with abortion. I am absolutely against it; it is just killing babies. Even though they aren't born yet.

RdV: Do you think there are things that could be done to make women more aware of the alternatives and make the alternatives more prominent to people?
DS: Well they try hard, but there are some people that think a woman has her own right for her body. They don't think of the baby and they want to have sexual relationships and then if they get pregnant, just kill the baby, and that's not right. Where is the right of the baby? I don't know I think they do a lot for it already. You can't tell people if they don't want to listen to you, they don't. Doesn't help.

RdV: That's true for the war on drugs too.

DS: Yeah.

RdV: How do you feel about the changes the Netherlands is making in their drug policy?

DS: I don't know. Marijuana is alright, that is what they say, but I don't think it is. It's bad for your brain.

RdV: Was it as big a deal when you were in the Netherlands?

DS: No, we didn't have that at all. I never heard of drug use or anything when we were in the Netherlands; that all came later on. It's terrible now. Amsterdam is an awful city, really, the way it is now. Not all the people are awful, I don't mean that, but all that is going on, the stealing...They just steal left and right in order to support themselves for drugs, that's usually why they do it. The same with homosexuals. I don't think it is right, but I'm a Christian. Of course some homosexuals think it is good and that God loves you, but God doesn't condone it, it's still sin. If you read the Bible, then you can see it for yourself.

RdV: So how do you feel about all the fervor that's going on our campus right now about this?

DS: I don't know. They don't want a man who is a converted homosexual and now they're going to have a homosexual talk. I don't quite understand it all.

RdV: I don't either, I just get bits and pieces of it.
That is alright then if the homosexual comes there, but the one who is a converted homosexual they don't want to believe that. They think that you can't be converted. I heard of a lot of people who did change. They say it is impossible, but I don't think it's right.

RdV: How many grandchildren do you have?

DS: Eleven. Then my one daughter who remarried, she has three. I have 3 step-grandchildren, so that makes it 14.

RdV: Does that generation have any opinions about your heritage or wanting to learn Dutch or any of that?

DS: Yeah, some of my grandchildren say, "Grandma, I want to go with you along to the Netherlands." Well, start saving money! (laughs)

RdV: Do you speak Dutch with some of them?

DS: They don't understand it. If I go to the Netherlands then I speak Dutch, you never forget about it. I was 25 when I came over, so it's your mother tongue. My husband was Dutch too, that's why I never got rid of my brogue.

RdV: Did you speak Dutch to your children when they were real little then?

DS: No. We always tried to talk English because we had to talk English. Right away we started to read the English Bible at the table. We didn't talk Dutch, but my children understood it, because we had a grocery store on the corner here and I didn't want to take all the children along. When the oldest one was five, I said to my husband in Dutch, "Ik ga naarde winkel." ("I want to go to store!") My daughter hollered right away. I don't know how she knew that because we never said winkel! (laughs) But they still
understand, and I think if my daughters are among Dutch people, that they still get the
drift of it.

RdV: Do you wish that you had spoken more Dutch to them?

DS: My kids wish that I had. But they hardly use any Dutch anymore. It used to be we used
to have Dutch church too, and we don't have that anymore.

RdV: Is that happening in the Netherlands too? Are they moving away from their Dutch?

DS: In the Netherlands, no, they speak Dutch in the Netherlands. But I live here in this
country and this is my country now. That is my motherland, but...I just try to think
English although if I have to count fast, then I always count in Dutch, it goes faster!

RdV: How did you feel when you became a U.S. citizen?

DS: Good. I waited for my husband. I think you had to be here five years before you could
become a citizen and he came four years later than I did. So I waited until he was here
five years and then we became citizens together.

RdV: How was the class for that? Was it a tough class for you to take, the citizenship class?

DS: No, you had to learn certain things. Maybe it is harder now, that could be, I don't know.

But when we became citizens we didn't have any problems, we just had to go to classes a
few times and learn things; they ask you questions about it. It wasn't all that hard.

RdV: Do you have a lot of correspondence with your family that is in the Netherlands still?

DS: I do talk on the phone a lot more, I don't write letters much. It is so easy to call and talk
to them, and then you can hear their voices.

RdV: Makes for big phone bills though.

DS: Not too bad. It's worth ten dollars to me to hear them. You don't do it everyday, maybe
once in three months or so that you call.

RdV: Do you have trouble keeping track of the time change between here and there when you call?

DS: Six hours difference; no, I don't have any problems with that. You just have to count six hours ahead, they are six hours ahead of us. You have to watch out that you don't call at midnight there.

RdV: Easy to do on a busy day. Do your children have much contact with that family that is in the Netherlands?

DS: No. If they come here, but otherwise they don't correspond or anything.

RdV: Do you miss the Netherlands a lot?

DS: No. If I am in the Netherlands I can't wait until I am back home again.

RdV: Why is that?

DS: Maybe because of my children. I like it better here. It is more convenient, there is a lot of convenience there too, but it is all smaller. I wouldn't dare to drive in Amsterdam. You've been there, you know.

RdV: I know, I almost got ran over a few times.

DS: Well, that's why I wouldn't drive there.

RdV: Public transportation is much better there than it is here.

DS: That's true, if you just want to go someplace, you can get the bus or the street car.

RdV: Which takes away the need to drive.

DS: Yeah, well it is so crowded. On my sister's street, everybody has a car, and it's lined up cars here and lined up cars there and then here they have the road, and they can't have big
cars because they never could pass.

(end of side one)

DS: Nobody that I know of had them. In fact, we didn't have TV until after I was married a year.

RdV: What happened to the radios? I know everybody had radios in the Netherlands had radios and then World War II happened and they were all confiscated. Did people get those back?

DS: No, they don't get them back, but a lot of people hid them and they secretly listened to radio that came from England and then the queen would come on there. We were not supposed to, but everybody did it. But you had it hidden somewhere in the wall or whatever.

RdV: Did you go to the dedication of the immigrant sculpture when Princess Margriet was here?

DS: No. I didn't go there. When Queen Beatrice was here, she was here too?

RdV: I know she came to New Jersey in '82, but I don't know if she came to Holland.

DS: I wasn't there, I just listened to the TV.

RdV: Do you have any opinion on the Dutch Royal family?

DS: They are alright, but it's just they just have the name of being the queen, but the ministers do all really. It's not like it used to be like in Bible times when there was a king and the same in England too. I think it's all over that way.

RdV: How do you feel about other parts of the Netherlands, other than Amsterdam?

DS: There are nice places. The Netherlands is kind of flat and it's easy to ride a bike-- there
are bike paths all over. I like that, I like to ride a bike.

RdV: Is your family still in Amsterdam or are they in other parts?

DS: They are close to Amsterdam, my sister lives in Amstelveen and that's on the outskirts you might say. My brother is in Abcoude, just a little village quite close to Amsterdam, an old village and they have old farmers there yet and nice neighborhoods. It's nice there, not like Amsterdam; Amsterdam is quite bad. But in the country are nice places yet. Church life in the Netherlands is no good either, it's all liberal and there are a few churches which are good Bible teaching churches, but it's just getting worse right along.

RdV: How do you feel about the new immigrants that are going to the Netherlands?

DS: What do you mean?

RdV: When I was in Amsterdam there were a lot of Arabs that were immigrating over there and a lot of other groups as well.

DS: They have a whole melting pot there, they always say America is a melting pot, but in the Netherlands they...It is so that I think the Dutch people don't want to do some of the work and then the immigrants will do it. I don't know what to say about it. Maybe they have more freedom, but the Netherlands is so small already I don't know how they can have all those people. People emigrated out from the country because there is no room and they went to Canada and to the United States, and now they have all the other people coming in so it is more crowded yet.

RdV: Do you have friends that went to Canada?

DS: Well, no. My mother remarried a Dutchman but he lived in Canada, and my mother lived in Canada the last years of her life close by London, Melbourne. That's where she died.
She was married 20 years; she had a very happy marriage with that man. He had 12 children and my mother had 9 children living, and so together they had an awful lot of grandchildren. My mother was almost 94 when she died, two weeks before her birthday she died.

RdV: What is your favorite memory of her?

DS: She was very close to the Lord. She went through an awful lot during the war and with the death of my dad and my brother. She took everything so patiently, and she just knew the Lord had a purpose for it all.

RdV: What's your favorite memory of your father?

DS: My father was 47 when he died, and he was a good man also of course. He was not an old man when he died. He was a hardworking man. He had rooms that he rented out and he made meals for the people, they had room and board there, like a pension—so that's the job he had. He used to be a baker, but later on in his life he had that. He and my brother both ate something that gave them typhoid fever, that was toward the end of the war—was in '45 that they died and the war ended in '45. So my dad died March 23 and my brother April 1. My brother was 17 and that was a real hard time. I was at the farm then, I wasn't even there. I didn't even know about it, I never saw him in the hospital, I never saw him sick. I just got a notice that he had died.

RdV: Do you think it's better that you didn't see him sick?

DS: I don't know. I would have loved to see him, but it was not to be.

RdV: Do you have feelings about having seen your husband sick since you didn't get to see your father sick? Did that bring back memories?
DS: No, not really, that was my husband. I never looked at my father like my husband. He had things that my dad might have done the same way as he did; they always say that you look for a man who's like your dad. In some way he was, because he was a baker too. He had his own bakery in the Netherlands, and he went for adventure over here. He had had a girlfriend and she broke up with him and everybody tried to get him coupled with another girl. He was getting so sick of it and said he was going to the United States for some adventure. He found me and he had his adventure! (laughs)

RdV: When did he die?

DS: He died in February of '76--twenty-three years ago.

RdV: So what do you do in your spare time now?

DS: I do stain woodwork and I crochet a lot. I go to rest homes and visit shut-ins, I like to do that. We have a choir, Evergreen Singers in Holland, you know Evergreen Commons and I enjoy that every Wednesday morning. And of course church life. I go to Bible lessons, things like that. I always keep busy.

RdV: Do you participate in intergenerational Bible studies?

DS: I have a Bible study. I have the book here right now. The Image of Christ is what we are studying now. We are all supposed to imitate Christ and have the mind of Christ and that is what it is all about.

RdV: What do you think about what young people say in these types of Bible studies about the Bible?

DS: It makes difference, some children are real good. They really are interested in Bible study. And there are some children who are turned off with it. The church I go to is
more geared for young people and I don't always enjoy the way they sing, but I feel that the youth is the future of the church and that's why I joined that church. Their preaching is really good and they're really evangelizing more, especially in the morning service.

RdV: Are your children still members there?

DS: Two of my daughters are and my other daughter goes to Central Wesleyan Church on 40th Street because her husband goes there, that's the one who is remarried. My youngest daughter lives in Cran-Hill and she goes to church there somewhere, I don't know what church that is.

RdV: What do you think is the most significant change you've seen in your lifetime?

DS: I don't know. There were a lot of changes in my lifetime--when I had my young family that was a big change. I used to take care of my younger sisters, my little sister is 16 years younger than I am. When I had my own children, it almost seemed like it was my second family. Now they are all married, grandchildren are wonderful. The youngest one is 12, and the oldest one is going to be 20 this year, so I have them all in between there. I really enjoy them.

RdV: Do you get a lot of time to spend with them?

DS: Oh, yeah. The boys like to play the drums and I don't like all that noise so well, but that's the way. A grandson comes in the driveway hear boom boom (laughs), but I enjoy them, they're fun.

RdV: Is there any advice that your parents gave you that has stood out and that you have continued to use in your life?

DS: The only advice to always stay close to the Lord. God knows all things and sees all
things, that is really what my advice was. The advice from my parents for me.

RdV: Do you find that difficult to do sometimes?

DS: No. I live close to the Lord. I wouldn't know what to do without the Lord, really. You need the Lord in your daily life. You have to talk to the Lord; you're never lonely. So I don't have problems with being lonely, some people do, but I don't.

RdV: What did you think about the way the impeachment process was handled in the press and by everybody involved?

DS: Well, that was very bad. I don't know where the morals are nowadays. I think it was terrible what he did and what she did, they both did wrong. But he should have known better as the president, and he deserved to be impeached I think. But then we would have had Gore--I don't know if that's any better either!

RdV: Would the same situation be handled the same in the Netherlands?

DS: I don't know anything about it really. Morals there are gone too; nephews of me sleep with girls and they don't think a thing wrong of that. That is going on all the time, and if you say something then you are narrow minded. But still, it is not right.

RdV: Is there a movement to get back to traditional values there? Like we're having here with the Christian Coalition...

DS: I don't know. My brother goes to a church that is quite close to the Lord yet, but he just gets upset about things too. I don't think there is too much. I think it used to be that people from the Netherlands would go as missionaries, but I think now missionaries better go there. It's just turned around. You hear them curse all over, well, you do here too, on TV they're cursing like that and making fun of the Lord. I just think it is all over.
The world is not getting any better.

RdV: Do you think it'll continue to get worse?

DS: I think it will continue to get worse. Of course we still have to speak up. It says in the Bible that it's going to get worse right along until the end of the world.

RdV: What do you think is going to happen to us conservatives? Are we going to fall off the earth?

DS: No, I don't think so. You just have to do your best to live for the Lord and be a good example. That's all you can do. We can't change the people. It's the Holy Spirit who has to work in the hearts of the people to change them around, but we have to pray for them, like we have to pray for the president and all the people who are over us. I don't know what to say about it.

RdV: Just thought I'd ask because I know the Dutch are a different people than we are here and have different standards.

DS: Your parents or one of them is originally Dutch too, so you have Dutch blood in you.

RdV: Actually my great-grandparents were the immigrants, but they held it pretty close.

Birthdays were a big deal in my house. I don't like that they are not a big deal elsewhere, my day to be the center of the universe. Are birthdays a big deal for your grandchildren?

DS: We always celebrate their birthday. But quite often if they have a birthday during the week, then we celebrate it on a Sunday because then everybody can be there. And see in the Netherlands you wouldn't do that, you just have your birthday on your birth date. But we always celebrate it, sure.

RdV: Do you have big Sinterklaas gatherings too?
DS: No. I tell them about it, it was so much fun in the Netherlands. It's just very separate from Christmas. Here they make Christmas like a Sinterklaas. I don't like that; I just like to have that separate. But everybody here does that so you give Christmas presents.

RdV: Do you give them chocolate letters and stuff like that?

DS: We used to when the kids were small.

RdV: That's my favorite part of Sinterklaas. I used to be in a Dutch dancing group at home in New Jersey and we used to dance at Sinterklaas every year. The chocolate letters, the krakeling, the figure 8 with the sugar, and the speculaas, all kinds of yummy desserts.

DS: Do you like black licorice?

RdV: I do not, but my mother loves it though.

DS: I do too, but my kids don't like it either.

RdV: I like red licorice though.

DS: That's what my kids like.

RdV: The black sometimes is too salty.

DS: Oh yeah, you can have different ones too. That's no good if it is too salty.

RdV: Do you take peppermints to church with you?

DS: Sometimes I do. I don't do it as regularly any more. It used to be in the Netherlands when we went to church, my mother had for every child 3 peppermints on the table and each got these 3 peppermints for church.

RdV: Did you take peppermints to church for your children?

DS: Yeah.

RdV: Did it keep them quiet?
DS: I didn't have too much problem with my kids, except the 2nd and 3rd ones, they were just a year apart and they didn't sit still in church. But my youngest daughter had a lot of imagination. She had a hanky and she would fold that hanky and open it up and fold it again and sat real quietly in church. I took her to church when she was 1 1/2 already, and I never had any problems with her. It's just difference of children.

RdV: Are there traditions that you wish you had brought with you?

DS: I wish I had celebrated Sinterklaas. I didn't because nobody else did and it was strange for the children. In school they don't have it either. My kids went to Christian school and they had to bring a present at Christmas time. If you say the 5th of December is Sinterklaas only then I want to give a present, you can't do that.

RdV: That's one of the things that amazed me when I came here. This is such a Dutch area and Sinterklaas is such a small deal, and where I am from is very Dutch too, but it's getting dilute because New Jersey is on the East Coast and everybody's coming in, and we have all these Dutch people that come from all over the state and all over the country to come to sing these Dutch songs and see Sinterklaas ride in. And here we have this Dutch area and there's nothing.

DS: Sinterklaas and Zwarte Piet, you have all that?

RdV: We have Sinterklaas and Zwarte Piet, and Sinterklaas usually rides a white horse, except for one year they couldn't get a white one so it was brown.

DS: They couldn't paint it white either. (laughs)

RdV: They could have, but that would have looked mighty funny.

DS: But does he come in a boat from Spain too?
RdV: There's a canal—it used to be the front, but is now the back of the house—and he comes on a boat up the canal and then he gets off and rides around the front and the children can ride on the horse and Zwarte Piet gives out candy. He sits and reads from his big book. One year Zwarte Piet terrorized this kid because he tried to put him in his bag to go fight the war with Spain. He tried to put him in the bag and the kid got terrified and he ran off the stage screaming. I think that was the same year that we tried to sing Sinterklaas Kapoentje, all of us.

DS: (Sings the song)

RdV: All of us being non-Dutch speakers, except for two at the time, it was quite something. And we said "we'll just had this over to the Dutch people who come in because we obviously can't do it." We had so many funny pronunciations to it. Do you think there's a reason that Sinterklaas isn't so big here?

DS: Well, they just don't understand it. It's not their way of doing it and they don't want to do things like what the Dutch people used to do. That's probably why.

RdV: Do you think some people leave the Netherlands to get away from that and then just don't want to...?

DS: No. I think everybody likes Sinterklaas because we had so much fun writing poems for people what they have done.

RdV: And putting your shoes out.

DS: Oh yeah. The kids put the shoes out and if they had been good they got candy and they put carrot and straw for the horse (laughs). I remember that I really believed in Sinterklaas when I was little.
RdV: So when you went to Sinterklaas stuff did Sinterklaas come? Is it different from our Santa Claus who only comes when children are sleeping?

DS: No, they come when they are sleeping, but Sinterklaas doesn't come through the chimney like Santa Claus does.

RdV: He's also not a big fat man like Santa Claus.

DS: But Sinterklaas rides on the roof and you can hear the horse's hoofs on the roof. I don't know how they did that, but when I was small I really thought Sinterklaas went on the roof. Can you imagine a horse riding on the roof? Walking on the roof of the house? But anyway that's what I really believed until I was about six, I think. Then one time there was a Sinterklaas...there was a cousin of my mother and she had kind of a low voice and she was dressed up like Sinterklaas. I remember that I thought that Sinterklaas looks familiar, and I wasn't scared for him or nothing. I sat on his lap and I just felt it was somebody I knew. I knew then it was not real.

RdV: Did you take your picture with Sinterklaas?

DS: No. I don't, they took no pictures in those days. It's a long time ago, you know. Was in the '30s.

RdV: Well they could have painted your picture.

DS: No.

RdV: Do you tell your grandchildren about Sinterklaas?

DS: Oh yeah. I tell them about it. "Oh neat!" they say. Sometimes I think I want to do it and show them how they did it, but I never did it.

RdV: Seems to be hard to do from one person.
DS: Yeah. If you would be a group you could do it together.

RdV: We would dance to welcome Sinterklaas.

DS: Oh yeah.

RdV: It just seems like it needs to be a communal celebration.

DS: Yeah.

RdV: Did your family feel that way too, that they wished they could have held on to Sinterklaas in a deeper way?

DS: Well they never had that, so they don't know. They don't know what they are missing, let me say it that way.

RdV: What do you think of Tulip Time here as a tradition?

DS: We have a lot of flowers in the Netherlands. It is not only tulips, we have a lot of hyacinths. Did you ever see in the Netherlands all those fields? They smell so nice...hyacinths, narcissus and daffodils. Here they just have the tulips. I never thought of the Netherlands only with tulips.

RdV: Do you think it is silly that they are just hyping up this one flower?

DS: I think it's good that they do it. I think it is nice. The tulip is a nice flower, but I like other flowers too.

Rdv: What do you think of the tourists that come into town for that?

DS: They seem to enjoy it, and it's good for the town, it gives them some money.

Rdv: Do you feel that it gets too crowded?

DS: It always is crowded if something is going to be done like that. You want it to be crowded otherwise it is not very successful.
RdV: Do you feel there is too much involved in putting the town back to normal?

DS: No. I don't think so.

RdV: Are there similarities between living here in Zeeland and when you were living at home in the Netherlands?

DS: No. It's just very different. It's too close in the Netherlands everything is close together. I never realized that when I lived there, I never knew that; but after you are living here and you go back, you think "Oh boy, those streets are narrow. How come I never saw that?" But you are used to here, and there is so much more room here. But now they are building so much that pretty soon it's going to be like the Netherlands!

RdV: What do you think is the biggest difference...is that what you think is the biggest difference that everything is so close there as opposed to here?

DS: Yeah, well everything is different, the stores are different. When you check out they are sitting there. Did you notice that or not? And you bring your own bag and that's where you put your stuff in, you don't get a bag. I guess people are a little closer than they are here, like neighbors and so on. It seems to me if you live in a small town everybody knows everybody, but then I have that here too. I know my neighbors.

RdV: Do you like that everybody knows everybody?

DS: To a certain extent, yeah. I wouldn't want to bother the neighbor for every little thing, no. But it's good to have a neighbor who keeps an eye on you a little bit, especially if you live alone.

RdV: Do you have concerns about living alone?

DS: No. My kids are close by. If there is something what I have, just a ring and they are right
here. I feel good so I shouldn't have any concerns.

RdV: That's good.

DS: I like to be my own boss. I always tell my kids if I can't take care of myself anymore you stick me in a rest home. "Oh mom!"

RdV: Do you find yourself being more stubborn than other people, or having any of what's stereotypical Dutch? Do you find yourself doing those types of things?

DS: I'm kind of set in my way because I'm alone, you just get that way. I can go whenever I want to go, but that is not typically Dutch. When you get older you get more mellow too.

It used to be if someone would say something I would just go right back and say something to them, but when you get older you don't do that anymore-- you're wiser. If they say something that isn't true I speak up, you can just say things in a nice way, you don't have to be snotty always. I think that comes with getting older, you know more how to handle yourself.

RdV: Do you have concerns about getting older?

DS: No, I don't. If the time is there that the Lord takes me home, then I'm ready.

RdV: Are your children concerned about you getting older?

DS: Maybe, I don't know. I was 3 years ago in Canada--I have a sister living there--and I got sick there and they put me in a hospital. My kids were very worried. I didn't like that; I didn't like to be so far away because I only had my sister there, not my children, and if you're sick you just want your children. But I got over it and I got home safe and sound again. I just kind of hesitate about going on trips after that. Last year I went to the Netherlands and I thought "I hope not that I get sick again."
RdV: What do you think about the name hyphenation that's happening with a lot of people, they get married now and then they hyphenate their names. Where she keeps her maiden name and takes his name as well?

DS: I don't know. Why do they do that?

RdV: I don't know either, I just thought I'd ask what you think.

DS: They don't like to change the name?

RdV: I guess.

DS: They do things differently nowadays all over and every time there is something new.

RdV: Did all of your girls take their husbands' name when they got married?

DS: Yeah. There is no other way. I never even gave that a thought. My maiden name is Bloemendal.

RdV: That's a nice name.

DS: You translate it as flower valley. (laughing)

RdV: And Roosevelt is rose garden, but it's still nice. My name is of the field which is really silly.

DS: Yeah (laughing)

RdV: I have a professor who's maiden name was Winkels.

DS: Oh, the store! (laughing).

RdV: Do you think society is getting too much change?

DS: It's changing so much faster than it did years ago. The last ten years, you see all the changes. It started right in the '50s you had the TV, and now what else do they have? The computers, I don't even know how to work a computer and I don't know if I want to
learn it either. Now they talk about that in 2000 the computer is going to be off, so I don't know how bad that is. Sometimes they tell you that you have to take care of it and make sure you have enough food in the house, and they are worried about the medications, maybe we'll get stuck with no medications because the hospitals are not ready for it and whatever. I don't know, why don't they fix that? (laughing) If they know that's probably going to happen, they better make work of it that they can fix it.

RdV: How did you feel when the Berlin Wall came down?

DS: Oh I thought that was a good idea.

RdV: Did you ever think you'd see that happen?

DS: No. All of a sudden it happened. It just went fast all of a sudden. I never could figure out why that city had to be divided, East Berlin, West Berlin.

RdV: Were you upset when the wall went up?

DS: No. It was not my country so I just heard on the news that they had a wall, and I didn't know really when it started, right after the war I guess, didn't it?

RdV: It went up in '61. It was completed in '61. I don't know when they started to build it. 1960 maybe.

DS: One side was the Russian. I don't why that all was, I don't understand it really. I never really tried to figure it out either, because it didn't really concern me. But I thought for the people it was bad.

RdV: How did you feel about Joseph McCarthy and his seeking out of the Communists in Congress and everywhere?

DS: I don't know what to say about that. I'm not that much in politics. (laughs)
RdV: I just thought I'd ask you. I noticed it has been a big deal in a few of my classes for that time period.

DS: I can't say much about that.

RdV: Was your trip to the United States...did you fly or....

DS: No, in a boat--took us 11 days. The Volendam, that was the name of the boat and it was the last trip it made because it was an old boat. We had a lot of immigrants who had to go to Canada, so we first went to Halifax in Canada and then dropped them off. Then we went Hoboken, New York, and that's where we got dropped off.

RdV: Was it a hard trip to make?

DS: I got sick on there. I had some kind of rash and they thought I had small pox, but I didn't. It was some kind of rash because of nervousness, I think, and they put me in isolation. I was three days in isolation and the ocean was real rough. When you would brush your teeth you (moved with the ocean). My brother and sisters had a lot of fun; they found friends there. We were in an old, big room and all cots, 3 on top of each other and it was all for the women and the children. There were babies who were crying, it was very noisy; it was not really nice. The food was well, good, but I really didn't enjoy it. I was glad I was there, it's a long time, 11 days to be on the sea, but I made it.

RdV: Your rash went away?

DS: Yeah. It just went away. It just lasted for two days. I do get a rash when I get nervous and I was nervous. Being the oldest with so much responsibilities and everything.

RdV: Were they nice to you in Hoboken?

DS: Well, my aunt came and picked us up there. We never went to Ellis Island, a lot of
people go there, but my aunt came with two cars and they picked us up and we left for Holland.

RdV: I think Ellis Island might have been closed then, but I don't remember.

DS: No, some people were there. I know people who were on the boat and who had to be there for quite some time.

RdV: You had your aunt sponsoring you, maybe that had something to do with it?

DS: Yeah, but they had sponsors too, I don't understand what was the deal, but anyway, we went right away. It took us 3 days, we travelled 3 days and stopped in bed and breakfast places. We had a nice trip.

RdV: Did you aunt hold onto her Dutch, she kept her Dutch language?

DS: Yeah she could talk Dutch and she had a bad accent, like I do, and I think her's was almost worse, but maybe because I don't hear myself.

RdV: You do not have a bad accent, I am understanding you fine. Whether or not I understand you when I play back the tape is another story, but right now I understand you fine.

(laughter) Do other people think your accent is bad too?

DS: No. They just joke with me. If I correct myself, then they want me to say it the way I said it first. They think it's fun, it's cute they say then.

RdV: Do you find yourself putting an accent onto your Dutch when you are in the Netherlands?

DS: Yeah, my brother told me once, "You don't speak your English right and you don't speak your Dutch good either anymore." I said, "Okay, thank you." (laughs)

RdV: Do you find yourself mixing them together?

DS: No. Not that, but sometimes, I can't think of the Dutch word right away and then...
(End of tape)

(End of interview)