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Large, Ruth Oral History Interview:
Sesquicentennial of Holland, "150 Stories for 150 Years"

Ann Paeth
AP: Could you tell me who you are, where you were born, and when?

RL: I am Ruth M. Large (Van Domelen). I was born in Grand Rapids on East Bridge Street, which now is Michigan Avenue, February 10th, 1906. I graduated from Central High School in 1923, because we moved to 1601 Coit Street, and then to 735 Fountain Street. Then my father became blind, and he couldn’t work anymore, so he couldn’t send me to further my musical education. I quit piano lessons but continued voice lessons. He said, "You have to have a little more education," so he sent me to Davenport for a two year secretarial course. I was married to an electrical engineer from Purdue on October 8, 1930. Previously to that, I was soloist at Fountain Street Baptist Church. I played for Sunday School in my church, Central Reformed, and I worked for attorneys, Butterfield, Keeney, and Amburg. Then I was married, and we came home from our honeymoon, and Harold’s mother said, "Your boss wants to talk to you." The boss said, "Harold, you’re moving to Saginaw. You’ll have a $25 a month raise, but you’ll have to go Monday." Two days. So we went over there, and I just hated Saginaw. I wrote my mother, and said "it’s another Muskegon."

Well, we never got a $25 raise. Instead, the next year, everybody in Consumer’s Power got a ten percent cut. We had a beautiful apartment in Grand Rapids, 749 Fountain Street. It was a duplex. We had paid $45 a month for that. This was 1930, going into the depression. The only apartment we could afford in
Saginaw was perfectly horrible, $55 a month, and it was the upstairs of an old, old house. The living room wasn't too bad. It had some old tannish wallpaper in it. The bedroom had navy blue oatmeal paper on it. The back end used to be a bedroom, and it was long and narrow. I bought a small table with four chairs for one end of it. I couldn't bring my new stove. Their gas stove was so old. The wallpaper in that part had been pink and blue little flowers, but it was so old, it was tan and gray flowers. Over the gas stove, it was all splattered with grease. It was horrible. We had to live there a year. Then we found a nice bungalow that we could afford to rent. We were there from '31-'36. Then we bought a house at 2406 Court Street in Saginaw. Our son, Jim (James Bernard Large), was born there [date removed], 1937. We lived there until we were transferred to Manistee. We lived on Oxford Court for a little over a year.

Consumer's Power bought out Michigan Public Service, which was in the northern part of the lower peninsula. Then they put their offices at Traverse City, they included Michigan Public Service, the Manistee Division, and the Cadillac Division. The superintendent at the Cadillac Division had been there one month longer than Harold had been in Manistee, so he was superintendent, and Harold was assistant, but Harold did all the work. We built a beautiful house on 1424 Peninsula Drive. I designed it. Of course, we had a double garage, and then the kitchen and the dining room, and a big living room, and the bedrooms in the back. We could look out at the beautiful blue Grand Traverse Bay. I just loved it. I got into everything there. I was president of Tuesday Musical, and secretary of the
Republican Club, secretary of the Garden Club, and I had a huge Women’s Club chorus, and directed the Junior Choir at the Congregational Church. I just enjoyed everything. We played bridge, and we had so much fun. Then we were sent to Muskegon. A friend of mine from Muskegon came to visit me once when I moved here. She said, “You know, you sure were a pain in the neck when you moved here. Nothing was as good as Traverse City.” I said, “I still think so.” She never came back. So when they built this [Freedom Village] in 1991, I moved in October 1, so I will have been here almost six years. My mother’s family all lived in Holland. We used to rent a cottage at Macatawa, because we loved Macatawa. In 1913, I was seven, my dad rented a cottage at Central Park. He rented a big row boat. In those days, a lot of the row boats were flat. But he wanted a real safe one. He put the rope in his teeth, and he put John and me, seven and five years old, in the boat, and he swam across to Waukazoo, and then he swam back, pulling us in the boat. My mother was just terrified. We rented at Macatawa for vacations quite a bit. Then, in 1949, my brother built a cottage right near Hardy’s, if you know anything about Macatawa, Mrs. Hardy is here now, and we spent Labor Day weekend and maybe one or two weekends in between, and Fourth of July, because we just loved it there. Now I am here. This is a good place for an old person to be.

AP: Are a lot of people here from other areas?

RL: Oh, they’re from all over. A friend of mine, Ruth Neighbors, was originally from Benton Harbor. Another friend, that I play bridge with, is from Benton Harbor. But they both have lived all over the place. After they retired, Ruth had lived in Florida.
I don’t remember which town the other Ruth came from. Grace, in my foursome, came from up north. We have someone here from Marquette, a Finish girl. Three of us came from Muskegon at the same time: my best friend, Marge Burdick, she has since died, and Georgia Dephouse, you probably know her son, the eye doctor in Holland. We three came from Muskegon together. Other people have come from Muskegon, but not people that I knew well there. Another friend of mine came from Hot Springs, Arkansas, that’s where they had retired. They’ve come from Illinois, they’ve come from all over. One friend retired in Arizona, and decided to come back here. She still goes two months there to visit. They’re just from all over. It’s surprising.

AP: What’s it like living here?

RL: Well, it’s very nice. The dinners are not as good as they used to be. The dinners the first two years were just wonderful. They’ve had two or three chefs since then. Finally this one is gone, and the meals are more ordinary. In fact, Maxine Herpelsheimer said, “Gee, we used to look forward to coming here to eat, because the Hardy’s would invite us about once every other month.” She said, “Now that I live here, un uh.” But it’s a beautiful place to live. The only thing is, you have to buy your apartment. Then I paid $1,800 to have the glass on the porch. Then I had to pay a hundred to have carpeting in the bathroom. Anything extra you pay through the nose. When I moved here, it was $900 a month, on top of owning it. Now, it’s $1,207 a month. Every year it goes up. That isn’t so nice. But everybody seems to be very happy here. Since I’ve been here, only two people have moved out because
they didn’t like it. One couple was not a friendly couple. I don’t think they’d like it anywhere, really. They have a nice library on the third floor because we all brought books. Every Saturday night there’s a movie. It’s on number 40, so you can turn it on and see it at home if you don’t want to go up to the auditorium. Every Thursday night, they have a speaker or music or something going on. Every fourth Thursday, the people that have a birthday that month get a carnation. They have things going on once in a while in the afternoon.

AP: Well, why don’t you tell me about your family line, where they came from, and how they ended up here?

RL: This is the DeVries family. DeVries was a French Hugonot name - d’fries, my great grandmother always signed her letters "Aaltje d’fries." [Portions are read from family histories written by Ruth Large and other members of her family.] In the year 1846 in the Province of Zeeland, the Netherlands, there was a large group of people, who, noting decline of religion and industry, and influenced by Reverend Cornelius Vander Meulen, decided to settle in America. Amongst them was Mr. Janne Van der Luyster, a man of means. His motive was entirely religious. Mr. Jan Steketee, noting the decline in industries in the Netherlands, also became interested in the idea. They invited the Reverend Cornelius Vander Meulen to become their pastor in their great adventure. The Zeelanders set sail from Rotterdam in April, 1847, in three ships. One under the leadership of Mr. Van der Luyster, another under the leadership of Mr. Steketee, and the third under Reverend Vander Meulen. They made great preparations for the trip. The women toasted huge quantities of bread,
which they used for rusk on the boat, because no fresh bread could be provided. They all sold their farms, their cattle, and whatever tangible things they owned, and they turned it into gold. All the gold was donated to the common cause and kept in a trunk on the passage to America.

After travelling for six weeks aboard the sailing vessels from Rotterdam, they came to New York City: my great grandfather, Berrend DeVries, born May 20, 1805, and wife, Aaltje (that would be Alice here) nee Mulder, born September 10, 1805, and three sons, John (my grandfather), born January 15, 1836, Gerry, and Beuke (their six year old daughter had died on the trip and was thrown into the ocean), together with other Dutch families who all came from the province of Groningen. They arrived at Grand Haven in April of 1847. There they built a scow, or barge, and with their baggage and all members aboard, the men poled this scow along the shore of Lake Michigan for twenty miles to the outlet of Black Lake. I showed you where that was, north of our channel. On arrival, they discovered that a sand bar had formed over the outlet, and not sufficient water flowed over the bar to allow the scow to enter. So the men removed their clothes, and lifted the scow over the bar. They continued up Black Lake, to its eastern end, and they made a temporary camp where the present site of the Donnelly Kelly Glass Company plant is.

AP: Why did they go there?

RL: They wanted to leave the Netherlands, because, I don't know if it's as bad as in China now, but the police would come in and arrest them in their church meetings. They would have some of their meetings in the basements of their homes, because the
Netherlands, at that time, wasn’t very good for religion. Just before that, the French were killing some of the people that weren’t Catholic. The way the French did it, they would put them on a thing and pull off their arms and legs. It was terrible. That is why so many French came to the Netherlands.

AP: How did they pick the spot to come here in Michigan?

RL: I think they first thought they would go to Wisconsin, because some Dutch had already gone to Wisconsin. Then they decided they’d come down farther to see what it was like, because Grand Haven already was a little town in 1826. Grand Rapids was a fairly decent sized town in 1826. They stopped at Grand Haven. That’s as far as their ship would take them, because going north from here, there were no harbors where they could get into.

At that time, the present city of Holland was not inhabited. Forests covered most of the land. On the south side of Black Lake, not far from its eastern end, was located an Indian Village and an Indian cemetery. These early settlers naturally were concerned as to how to secure food, and they wanted to locate on land that could be cleared of timber so crops could be planted. The land near their first camp was not adept to farming, so they pulled up Black River, and they came across the river from the Holland Country Club. There they again established their camps on the stream entering Black River at that point. They explored the surrounding country, and decided the ground was fertile, and good crops could be raised. Each settler selected farm land to his liking, and purchased it from the government at $1.25 an acre. See, they all had money. Each settler started to clear a few acres on his land, planted
crops, and built himself a log cabin. My great grandfather selected some land about one mile south and three-quarters of a mile west of what now is the city of Zeeland.

This was experienced by my grandfather, Jan DeVries, who was then eleven years old, while they were camped on the Black River site, before they got to Zeeland. Like all boys of that age, he was inquisitive, and he wandered into the forest as far as he dared. On one of these exploration trips, he found a pile of split rails or poles, that had been left there by the Indians. Upon his return to where they camped, he reported his find to my great grandfather, who, with the other men, directed by my grandfather, located this pile of poles. They carried them to their campsite, erected frameworks with these poles, and covered them with bark. In these shelters, they lived until they could erect cabins on their land. On one occasion, during the night, the water rose in the river and upon awakening in the morning, they found the floors of their shelters covered with six to eight inches of water, and their wooden shoes were floating on the water. Years later, the historical association erected a monument along the old Zeeland road, with a small monument a little way off in the adjoining field, designating the camp location and memory of this early campsite. Later, my grandfather purchased this land, and my Uncle Henry plowed it for the first time, and he turned up some ashes of their first camp fires. As stated before, these early settlers came from the province of Groningen, the Netherlands. In later years, a village was platted out near their first campsite, and it was called New Groningen. At one time, this village had a store, a gristmill, a brickyard, and a woodworking shop. At present, the land on which this village stood is just farmland,
although the early atlas of Ottawa County still recorded it.

Also in 1847, a group of Dutch settlers settled on land that is now the city of Zeeland, three miles from New Groningen. Since my great grandfather's farm was not far from Zeeland, he associated himself with the settlers of Zeeland. They built a log church there. These early settlers had a hard time of it: food, clothing, medical supplies and care were their main problems. Consequently, many became sick, and their death rate was very high. A lot of the children died. My grandfather and grandmother had ten children, five died. Also, they had a lot of diphtheria and no antibiotics. They established a cemetery near the church in Zeeland in which many of the old settlers are buried. Some years later, a granite shaft was erected in the cemetery, and the names of the first settlers were inscribed on the side. My great grandfather's name was on the shaft. The nearest source of supplies, groceries, clothing, and so forth, was Grandville, Michigan. Each Sunday after the church service, the pastor, Rev. Cornelius Vander Meulen, would appoint two members of the congregation to take the yoke of oxen and the cart and go to Grandville to get supplies. This trip would require usually three days, as there were no roads, only little trails through the forest.

When my grandfather was in his late teens, wishing to help support the family, he went to Kalamazoo, Michigan, and secured employment as a farm hand with a Dutch farmer. Kalamazoo was an earlier settlement, and several Dutch immigrants had settled there. That's the way Van Raalte came, Detroit, Kalamazoo, then Allegan. My grandfather, for his summer wages, received only $3 and a young pig,
which, in the fall, he led through the woods from Kalamazoo to his father’s farm near Zeeland. My grandfather incurred employment later in the saw mill at Singapore. That was a small lumbering village located at the mouth of the Kalamazoo River. Saugatuck was not settled until much later. Grandfather gained his first lumbering experience at these mills at Singapore, which was an influence in his future life. A little later, a man by the name of Manlius built a saw mill about ten miles up the Kalamazoo River, near what is now New Richmond. This was a water powered mill on what is now called Man Creek. The breast works of this dam are still discernable. Manlius Township in Allegan County is named after this mill owner. It was customary in these days for the employee of a mill to board at the owner’s house. My future grandmother was employed by Manlius to assist Mrs. Manlius in cooking and serving the meals. It was here that my grandfather first met my future grandmother, whose family had come to Holland in May, 1848. My grandmother’s name was Everdina Rijsdorp, born February 5, 1836. Her father died shortly after they came to Michigan. Later my Grandmother Rijsdorp, whose husband had died, was made to marry a man by the name of Burgess who had come over on the same ship, the Wichelhausen. He was a widower with two grown sons. Van Raalte just said, “You can’t raise these two little children alone. You need a man, and he needs a wife.” The rule was Van Raalte had to write to the Netherlands and get permission to marry anybody, and he had to wait six months before he married them. He just said, “You need each other,” and he married them right then. Isn’t that something? In an old marriage book of Van Raalte it is stated, "William Cornelius Berghuis of
Holland, Ottawa County, Michigan, age 54 years and Mrs. Hermina Wouters Rijsdorp of the same place, age 51 years, at my home in the presence of J. Rhifl and B. H. Van Finel of Holland, Ottawa, Mich. 5 May 1849, signed A. C. Van Raalte, minister of the Gospel." Grandfather and grandmother, soon after marriage, lived near the mouth of Black River. At this time, grandfather established his own business. He and a friend by the name of Paulus built a scow and would pull this up Black River, empty, and purchase from the settlers along the River barrelbolts, and then pull the loaded scow down the river to Black Lake. When they had accumulated a vessel load, they would sell them to a vessel owner, who in turn would sell them in Chicago and Milwaukee.

Along the shores of Black River, the land was heavily forested. So grandfather conceived the idea of building a saw mill upstream near the forest, sawing the logs into lumber, and floating the lumber down stream to Black Lake. Here vessels would take it to Chicago, Milwaukee and other ports. But they had no capital. He eventually interested a Mr. Huizinga, who had the grocery store at New Groningen, and a Mr. Boone in the project. They called it the Boone & DeVries Lumber Company. My grandfather's house is still standing, built in 1863, Paw Paw Drive, across the bridge, a great big red brick house. Now it's a duplex. In the backyard of this house grandfather had a huge brick barn built. Part of it was a smokehouse for curing their meat. A place to keep the horses and carriage, a place for the animals, and a room for travellers to stop to have grandmother give them food and let them sleep overnight on the straw mattress she provided. At that time, all the
housewives filled their mattresses every six months, and their hands would be scratched in the process.

Mother said that some of the people travelling through were white, some even had little children with them; but twice they took care of black runaway slaves on their way to Canada.

Grandfather entered his horse, Prince, in the harness races in Grand Rapids, little suspecting that the night before the race Prince would be stabbed to death, obviously by a gambler who wanted to be sure Prince would not win. Grandfather and mother were heartbroken because they loved that horse.

We used to go to Zeeland, where the Main Street and Washington Street come together, the first is a red brick house, Veneklassen's, and then there is white square house, and then the Boone house, which is still there. It's beautiful.

They built the mill at what then was known as the Scholten Bridge. This venture had its misfortune at first, for grandfather lost four fingers on his left hand while acting as head sawer. Mr. Boone, nor Huizinga, could at that time speak the English language well and were at a disadvantage when selling their lumber in Chicago or Milwaukee. But it didn't take them long to get used to American business methods. This sawmill business later became very profitable. Grandfather became very wealthy, as considered in those days. He owned his own sailing vessel, a three master, named the Woolen. Some of the descendants of the captain on the Woolen, Mr. Borgman, and first mate Nauta, are still living in Holland--you see those names. Grandfather, along with two partners, owned the first steam boat that was called the
City of Holland. He also owned saw mills at Fillmore, West Olive, Allegan County, Holland, and later he operated a sawmill at Alma and Williamsburg, Michigan. But this venture proved very disastrous. In a high wind, a spark from somewhere came, the mill caught fire, and the whole town burned. All their lumber and the entire village was burned. So the villagers got an unscrupulous lawyer from Chicago to sue grandfather. This attorney put people that had been burned out on the jury, so they made grandfather rebuild the town of Alma. That's up north on 131. Later, my Uncle Albert and Uncle Henry owned and operated his sawmill at Williamsburg, Michigan.

Grandfather sold his beautiful home around 1889, to a Stegenda. His wife had died in 1895, mother's husband and little Evelyn had died, so he and mother and Jamesia moved to Grand Rapids on College Street. There he became a contractor, an elder in Second Reformed Church, and an elected member of the Board of Education. There mother's Jamesia died, and Grandfather died in 1901.

Born to grandmother and grandfather were three sons, Bernard J. DeVries, Albert J. DeVries, and Henry J. DeVries, and two daughters, Minnie--that would be my mother--and Kate, Mrs. Albert Keppel (85 East 10th Street). B. J. DeVries was a dentist. He had graduated from Hope College in 1888, and then went to the dental school at U of M and became a dentist here in Holland. His house is still standing, too, 112 East 12th Street, where 12th Street is closed up, the orange brick house with the white pillars. When I was a little girl in Grand Rapids, my mother was in the hospital for a year, so Uncle Ben said, "Send Ruth and John over here." So John and
I lived there in 1915 and went to school here. It was a lot of fun.

Uncle Ben DeVries had two sons, Bernard and John, and one daughter, Evelyn. Evelyn married Dr. Hosper’s son, Ovie. Albert married Evelyn Mokma and had no children. Henry married Deanna Niblink. They had one son, John Wesley, and a daughter, Elizabeth, who married Mr. Hyma. Then, of course, my mother, Minnie, married John VanDomelen, and had my brother, John Bernard, and me, Ruth Mina. Mother was married on May 25, 1882, to James Moerdyk, who had a store on the main street of Zeeland which my grandfather had built for them. They lived on the second floor over the store. They had two daughters - Evelyn Marie Moerdyk, and when mother was pregnant with Jamesia Minnie Moerdyk, her husband died. Then she kept house for her father until he died in 1901. Then Uncle Ben’s wife died and mother moved to Holland to keep house for him until June 26, 1904, when she married my dad, John VanDomelen.

Aunt Kate had five daughters, Evelyn, Ruth, Catharine, Vera, and Lois. All are dead. I’m the only one living of all this group.

Of course, the early settlers had only crude furniture. Many couples started housekeeping with the stump of a tree for a table and packing boxes for chairs. When my grandparents were first married in 1855, they had only two chairs. When company came, they placed a board across the chairs and all sat in a row.

In the first log church in Holland, the people did not have a musical instrument, so they started the custom of having the best singer start the psalms and lead the singing. The leader was called the Voorsinger. Dr. Van Raalte always
asked Grandmother DeVries to take the part of the Voorsinger, for she had such a beautiful soprano voice. You see, we all inherited art or music from the Rijsdorps. My end was music. My brother's was art.

In 1849, the government paid $10,000 to have a channel built so ships could enter Black Lake. It was built where the old Macatawa Hotel was. The next year, the sand had filled it in, so in 1850, a four foot dam was built at the old harbor site and where the channel is now. When the water in Black Lake rose to over four feet above normal, because there were such rains, they opened the dike, and the water rushed in and made the present channel. Now, that should be interesting.

I did say that my Uncle Ben graduated from Hope? He also possessed unusual musical ability and was artistic. From early years he played the organ and at one time was choir director at Hope Church. He was a member of Hope Church for over 50 years, a member of the consistory for most of those years. He played the piano, played the violin, and he painted. But I never got hold of any of his paintings. Aunt Kate lived in Holland, and when Ben's daughter Evelyn went to sell the house and close it, they all were in wanting his pictures. (At that time, I lived in Saginaw and my mother and dad were dead.)

Ben had one son, Bernard, and one son, John Theodore, who lived in New York City, and was Art Director of J. Walter Townsend, which was the largest advertising agency in the United States. As I said, Evelyn married Reverend Ovie Hoppers and moved to Utica, New York. Bernie went to Hope College, and then the University of Michigan Dental School. When he graduated, he was the head of his
class. He was also given the highest grade given by the state board of examiners. The year he graduated, the kaiser of Germany wrote the university dental school, and asked them to send their best graduate to Germany to serve as a dentist to the Kaiser's children's teeth. So Bernie accepted the honor. He remained in that position until World War I. Before that, the czar's children from Russia came to visit while Bernie was there. So the czar said, you come to Russia and take care of my children. So he went to Russia and took care of his children. He never said what they paid him, but for a tip, they gave him a great big piece of platinum, like a little rock. He showed me that. Then when World War I started in 1914, he had difficulty escaping Germany, and he had to leave all of his possessions, including his violin. I thought that was sort of interesting.

Aunt Kate was the youngest child. She also was a talented musician. When she was 17 years old, her father sent her to the Chicago musical college to study pipe organ, piano, and voice. When it had been my mother's turn to go, my mother got sick and couldn't go. I was too stupid, too young, to ask, "Why were you sick, what was wrong with you?" I'd love to have known now.

Well I told you some things you didn't know.

AP: Could you tell me about spending summers on the lake when you were young?

RL: Of course, when I was so young we were at Central Park, and the only thing that I really remember about it is that, my dad pulling us across with the rope in his teeth. He taught us how to swim. In those days, people swam breaststroke. That's the way he taught us to swim. Then I had other swimming lessons at Central High School in
Grand Rapids. About 1922, they built the YW. Then we had a swimming class from high school there. At Macatawa Park, we just loved to go swimming. I think it was when we were there in 1945, I swam from the pier to the road that went to the hotel. My husband paced it. He said that was over a quarter of a mile, so that was pretty good. Then another swimming thing--after Harold retired, we went to Florida for January, February, March, and April. Harold was president and lieutenant governor of Michigan for Kiwanis. They had a national convention in Florida. Coming home, we stopped in Naples because it was July 3. They said, oh yes, you can stay here tonight, but you have to leave tomorrow before nine, because tomorrow's the Fourth of July, we have a lot of people coming in for the weekend. So Harold woke me up about 7:30. He said, "Honey, you love to swim so, and since we have to get out of here before nine, it might be a good idea for you to put on your swimsuit and go swimming a while. So I went down there, I love to swim, and I swam out about two blocks straight out from the hotel. I looked to the south, and two planes were coming spouting out pesticides to kill the bugs. I was just in a fog of that. I couldn't see land. So I just treaded water for a long, long time, and finally enough of the fog lifted that I could see the side that was land. But that ruined my lungs. If I was a bug, I would have been dead long ere since. When I sing now, I don't have as much wind. I coughed and coughed that summer. It was terrible. I really was poisoned. So you see, I like to swim, and every time we went to my brother's I always swam. Sometimes Lake Michigan would come way in and wash cottages out. At that time, there were three big cottages between that wall and the walk to the Hotel. On the
north side of the walk was a bath house. All that burned in November 1926. They sold these three big lots, made that into four smaller lots. So friends of John bought the corner one, John bought the next one, and somebody bought the third. Where that fourth lot was, a lot of sand came down. Now there's a great big cottage on that high sand hill. So that's where John's cottage was, and it was so nice. In 1945, we had a cottage on Bluebell Court. That was between the hotel and the channel. That part, last night they showed some pictures of Holland, and they showed the Angel's Flight. Oh, I used to love to go on that Angel's Flight. On the top of that hill, there was a restaurant at a place where you could sit and look all over. It was darling, I loved it. That burned in the 1922 fire. The way that fire started was, a friend of mine's, her father, had a cottage there. She graduated from high school in 1922, and all her gifts were sent up there, because they always spent the summer there. The first week in July, the lady in the cottage next to them had a baby. In those days, they had a little kerosine heater that was round, and about this high, and it burned kerosine to make the heat come out. If you wanted to put something on to cook, you just put it on the top where that heat came out. So she put her tea kettle with the hot water there to keep it hot, because she was bathing her baby. She turned around quick to grab the kettle and knocked over that heater... (tape ends) ...that's why all that part burned. So the road up on the hill, all that beautiful thing there, and all those things burned. Those cottages over there are all new from 1922. You see, there are a lot of old, old cottages at Macatawa.

AP: Now people keep building bigger and bigger cottages.
RL: Now you can't even go out there if you'd like to walk on the beach. I can't even go anywhere where I can see Lake Michigan.

AP: Kind of a shame. Well, what do you think of Holland now?

RL: Well, I'm surprised. I would say it was nicer before they had so many Vietnamese and Cambodian and Spanish people here. There were a few Spanish here when I lived here in 1915. It just seems to me that they all join the gangs and everything. As far as I'm concerned, when the courts took out prayer and the Bible [in the public schools], this country has gone down hill. As far as I'm concerned, it's Sodom and Gomorrah. The children—if everybody was taught the ten commandments, what a wonderful world this would be.

AP: Or the Golden Rule.

RL: But I'd hate to be a teacher now. Those kids are very difficult to deal with. I taught piano. In fact, one boy I taught in Saginaw his mother said, "He wants to play a horn, but he doesn't have any sense of rhythm." She said, "You take him." So I gave him all kinds of marches. I'd play the march, and I'd say, "Now you march." Then he'd play the march and I'd march to his tempo. I'd say, "Can't you see?" I worked on that kid for three years to give him rhythm. That was in the 30s. About 1960, Harold and I were invited back to a dinner dance honoring past presidents of this organization, maybe Optimists. Who was the band leader? Lamont Corp, that was the little kid that I taught rhythm to.

AP: Really. So you can learn?

RL: One little girl just didn't take to it much. In Grand Rapids, Dorothy Peterson, when
she went to college and went on with her music, the teacher said, "You've got the
best technique of anyone I have ever seen." Because I was strict. When I was
learning piano in Grand Rapids, before the second World War, Germany was just
putting everybody into their army. These two professors of music got out of
Germany the latter part of 1912. They had a studio in Grand Rapids, and I remember
taking lessons there. They were so strict. If you didn't hold your hand just so, you
got slapped. You couldn't do that now to a kid. You had to go home and practice.
So I had excellent training. It showed when my student was told that. I still play
hymns at the inn twice a week. I still play for community singing at the inn every
Wednesday night before bridge club. Now we're going to start once a month to have
a sing along, community sing. I asked Bill Strong down the way if he would direct
it. He said "yes" if he didn't have to do anything else. So they put something in this
little magazine we have that comes out here called the Crier. They write up
something on somebody every time, and all of a sudden I saw something in here, and
I said, that's our sing along: "Join resident Ruth Large on Thursday August 7 in the
auditorium at 2:00 for a special community sing along. Ruth enjoys playing the piano
and singing and invites fellow residents to join her for a short time of harmonizing to
all your favorite songs. Freedom Village song books will be provided." I thought
that was sort of nice.

AP: So there's lots of things going on?

RL: Oh yes. I said I play bridge Wednesday night, Saturday afternoon and Tuesday
afternoon. I joined Christ Memorial Church. I went to the Presbyterian Church first
when I had my own car. That assistant minister always says, "Hi Ruth," if he sees me here. I have one son, Jim (James Bernard Large) and he was born in Saginaw. He was a very bright child. He was so good, I never had any trouble with him no how. People would say, "I wish my son was as good as yours." Then we were transferred to Manistee and then to Traverse City. He learned to ski there. He graduated from high school in 1955, so where did he want to go to college? Michigan Tech. You could ski up there. It was a good engineering school. So he started out in electrical engineering, and he didn't like it, so then he took mechanical engineering. He was always so mechanically inclined. Then he took a year of business ad, and he got a job with General Motors. In January of 1982, he was manager of General Motors in Houston, Texas, and he had such a good job that he had six weeks vacation with pay, and could get a new car free every three months if he wanted it. So he had arrived. In January, 1982, he called me and said, "Mother, I'm writing a letter of resignation to General Motors." I said, "Why, honey?" He said, "I've decided to serve the Lord." So he went to Rhema Bible College in Broken Arrow, Oklahoma, which is just outside of Tulsa. He graduated in two years with all A's. He still just works there. We have a four o'clock worship service here on Sundays in the auditorium, and once a year he comes and preaches here. They always want him to preach at the big federal prison in Muskegon on Sherman. Now he's coming Labor Day weekend. Ruth Effinger has a cottage at Douglas, and there's a little chapel there. They asked me if I would play there. So I played two Sundays, but I missed going to my church. The bus comes and takes us, then I eat
with the group that I went to church with. So I said I didn’t want to play anymore, but Jim was coming and would preach the 31st, and I will play then. So that’s what he’s going to do. Then I play for him when he preaches here at 4 p.m. I asked Isla Van Eenanam if she would sing a solo, so she brought me some music. We have fun here. Life is so easy. But it makes you so lazy, just terribly lazy. I just have Jim and three granddaughters. Betsey lives in Scotsdale, Arizona. She’s married to Dave Griffen and has a little boy, Christopher, who will be five next month. I have a granddaughter in a little town, Woodland, outside of Houston. She is married to Mark Meeles and has a little boy, Marcus, and a little girl, Megan. Then I have my youngest granddaughter, Sarah, who married Rod Boothby, who was married before, and had a little girl. That little girl just spent summers and Christmas with them. Now that she’s fifteen, the court said she could decide where she wanted to be. Her mother just let her do anything under the sun, smart little girl, pretty, but she just would let her do anything she wanted to. She just got so out of hand that she liked the discipline so she came to Sarah and Rod’s. Then Sarah had a baby, a little boy, a year ago April. So now she has the little boy and 15 year old Ashlie. So that’s my family. My brother John, died in 1994. He had one daughter, Katrina Wikstrom who is an RN and lives in Holland. As I say, all down from the Rijsdorp families, there are musicians. My brother was an artist, and I took to the piano. In fact, when I was two years old--Dr. Baert told me this, my mother never did--my brother would be sick upstairs. When he was born, he got double pneumonia. So mother spent a lot of time upstairs. As I say, mother and dad both sung and played, so I was sung a
lot to. Mother would turn up the little round piano stool, set me on it, and then with one hand I would pick out the tunes of the songs she sang. Then I wanted to add a left hand, and if I hit the wrong note, Dr. Baert said, "You'd be so angry." My mother knew I was okay when she was up there if I was fooling on the piano, she didn’t have to wonder, what’s that kid into? So I’ve really had a nice life, wouldn’t you say? Mother and dad both died in 1938, and they were both such lovely people. I look back now, and I think, I just assumed all parents were that nice, and never told them how wonderful I thought they were. Now it’s too late.

[Interview concludes with Ruth showing some family photos and pieces of art work done by her late brother.]
Grandfather John DeVries paid a man $400.00 to go to the Civil War Army in his place. (My mother told me this.)

The Story of the Rijsdorp Family

Marten Wouters (10-14-1748) married Marie Evants Niedeken on May 6, 1781, in the City of Apeldoorn, Netherlands. When Napoleon conquered the Netherlands, he changed the names of many families. This happened in Apeldoorn in 1796. He changed the name to Rijsdorp. They had four children. My mother was told that the name Rijsdorp means "rising on growing Village."

In 1848, their son, Hendrick Wouters Rijsdorp (sometimes called Hendrick Pieters Rijsdorp), born in 1796 - an artist and a musician - married Hermina van Lille, a French Heugonot, d’Lille, born in 1798. They came to America on the ship G Wichelhausen under Capt. H. Warnken which entered N.Y. Harbor May 11, 1848. The ship’s records showed that they brought their six children - Maria (Mary) born June 10, 1823, Cornelia (Katherina) born Aug. 7, 1830, Hendrick (Henry) born Oct. 17, 1832, Martha Classina, born Feb. 2, 1839, Wilhelmina (Minnie), born Aug. 30, 1842, and Everdina (Dina), mother’s mother, born May 2, 1836. Henry married Alberdina Busch and went to Grand Haven. Minnie married John Snick, Martha married Henry Sprick, and they also went to Grand Haven. Cornelia married Henry Van Zooren. I don’t know what happened to Mary. All these men came over on the same ship with the girls.

Mother’s mother, Everdina, married John DeVries, her father, I think in 1855, in Zeeland.