3-30-2000

Kleis, Margaret Oral History Interview: Class Projects

Michael C. Bona

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.hope.edu/class_projects

Part of the Archival Science Commons, and the Oral History Commons

Recommended Citation


MK: My name is Margaret Wolfensburger Kleis. I live in Holland, Michigan, at 117 E.
38th Street and I’ve lived in Holland ever since I came to the United States on a
scholarship to Hope College in 1947.

MB: And you emigrated from the Netherlands you said.

MK: Immigrated from the Netherlands, yes. I finished my High School in the
Netherlands and then I got an opportunity to come here and I thought that that
sounded like an exciting thing to do so I’ve never been sorry.

MB: Sounds like it would be to me too... I know we talked about this on the pre-
interview but date of birth and place?

MK: Okay I was born one of two children twins, I have a twin sister, on [date removed] 1927 in
Zwolle, the Netherlands. It is the capital of Overeisel, it’s in eastern part and it’s
quit a nice commercial city with some industry and some culture- about seventy
to a hundred thousand people.

MB: Sounds good, and that goes on to where you came from and what it was like there.
What was childhood like in the Netherlands?

MK: Well, I grew up in a family of ten children. Which was a lot of fun, especially
when you are one of the younger ones—you seem to be getting away with more
stuff then the older ones did.

MB: Yes.
MK: And all the older ones, of course, taught us things and they kinda included us in things at times, and we grew up mostly before the war. And my dad had a car so we got to go places a lot of people didn’t—they just had bicycles, but my dad needed his car for his work. So we sometimes would go in the car and we’d go places. But most of the time for our own benefit we used bicycles, which, of course, is about the best transportation and the best exercise you can find. When you look back now—I keep jumping in my car all the time and I keep thinking if I only didn’t have to get all these groceries for these people or only if I didn’t have to take all these people to the doctor, or only if I didn’t have to use my car—I’d maybe use my bicycle. But, I don’t do much of that any more. But growing up was very nice. My parents were all happy and healthy and well. And we weren’t rich, of course, because we had ten kids, but my dad had a good government job. He was a civil engineer. And my mother was content to stay home but in the evenings she would go out to different groups and clubs and teach Bible lessons. She was also quite well educated—she was a chemical engineer—she didn’t quite get finished, but she did do most of her studies.

MB: Interesting… you told us you emigrated from the Netherlands to come to Hope… Was there a particular reason you came to Hope versus studying in the Netherlands?

MK: Yes… I’ll tell you, it just so happened that in 1947 it was the centennial of the foundation of Holland, Michigan. It had been a hundred years since Van Raalte and his followers came here and so the City Fathers that were in control at that time decided we should celebrate this as they had done at the fiftieth anniversary
too. They’ve done that for many many times in the past, but especially for this hundredth anniversary they decided to have this big ado. And they did—they had lots of things going on. But I missed all of those—by the time they decided they would like to have some students come… it took a little while to advertise for some students. I found the advertisement in the newspaper. It said if you’re interested, just call or write or do something. So I filled in my name and I just thought I would never hear from them that again, you know, going to Hope College way on the other side of the world. I thought, I’ll never hear from them. And low and behold, about two, three weeks later they said, yes they were interested in me. I don’t know if it was because there weren’t very many people competing for the job or if it was because they thought many be having a couple ladies would be nice because evidently there were some men of course too, some boys that applied. Anyhow, they wanted some references and wanted to know how soon we could go, if we were able to go yet that fall in September. And this was about June or July by the time I heard about that. So I sent in the request they made and sent my transcripts from high school. And then another two or three weeks went by, and then I got another letter and they said I would be offered this scholarship to Hope College and if I would like to come. Well, then we had to start talking to my parents and make some more decisions. Before that it was always, ‘well it’s not going to happen’, you know, one of those things. They probably will have other things and other people who would want to go and many good reasons. But then, no, they said I could come. So then it wasn’t long—a couple days—and we decided we had to let them know right away if we were
interested. So my parents said I could go, and so after that we only had a week or ten days that I had to get my passport and all the kinds of things you need to travel. I think that they were... I don't know, through Hope College, I think they made the reservations for us on this ship. We came with a transport ship right after the war in 1947. There weren't many luxury liners going across, and there were a lot of immigrants who wanted to come. A lot of them, of course, went only to Canada because the US border wasn't open for immigrants. Only those people who had relatives here, uncles or aunts or grandparents or whatever, were allowed to come in on their visa. But, in Canada you could just come if you said you were a farmer or you wanted to work hard. They had plenty of room to accept more immigrants then the United States did at that time. So we got in this boat, which was a freighter that had been changed over during the war for troop transport, and so they had two places to sleep: a men's department and a ladies department. And the ladies department was so lucky that they got to sleep with all the children too—the little boys the little girls. So you can imagine these mother were awfully busy because the fathers were alone on the other side having a good time jumping in bed, and the mothers were taking care of those kids—which, you know, meant waking up in the middle of the night or getting diapers on and who know what else. But sometimes we could help those mothers, which was nice because we were all single girls all eighteen, nineteen years old so we're all young. That way we could help these people, and that was kind of rewarding.

MB: Did you have any concerns about leaving home?
MK: No... I think at eighteen or nineteen you don't have to many concerns, believe it or not. Later on I thought a couple of times, my parents had more concerns about letting me go than I had about going. But once I got here... after three of four months—the first Christmas—boy, I wasn't so sure I liked spending Christmas alone. And so that's when I started thinking, 'boy I don't know if this is such a great deal'. But everyone at the College was very receptive and they were always kind and so many people invited me. I was invited at a family to spend Christmas days there, my Christmas vacation, at a doctor's home here in Holland. So it turned out to be really very nice, and I was perfectly happy. Usually, I get along pretty good with a lot of people, and I'm not so shy and I'm not so introverted. I figure you better just make the best of every situation so put on a good front and have a good time.

MB: For sure for sure... none of your family came with you I suppose?

MK: No, I came alone. They've been here, of course, to visit since that time but I came alone and I was only supposed to stay for this one year. But then after the first year I told them I thought I liked the college environment and I liked the classes I was taking. I took mostly foreign language--I had had quite a few of them in the Netherlands, and I took some here. And I took some math classes and soc. and psych.- like the required things that everyone has to take. But it was easy for me, in a way, to feel at home because I around people who had the same interests—college students who were also away from home, some of them for the first time but then a lot of them came... I was rooming with mostly sophomores at Van Vleck Hall at that time. But a college student quite often is in same boat as a
foreign college student--you know, they've all left home and all having to adjust.

Your class work usually keeps you busy. You don't have much time to sit around and pout, if you know what I mean.

MB: Yes that's for sure.

MB: Did any other students travel with you that came from the Netherlands or did you travel by yourself?

MK: Yes, there actually were seventeen students--there were eleven girls and six boys. So we did have a whole group of them, which made it easy on the boat because we soon got acquainted. There was somebody, the bursar or somebody, on board of the boat who, a couple times, took us aside and had us get together and get acquainted and told us some things about the English language that would be helpful for us to know, things that we might not be able to... I can just think of the one word that they always use: the word shower. The word shower in English is douche in Dutch. Well a douche in America is something entirely different from a shower. If you were to say, 'where is the douche?' They'd say, 'well wait a minute- I'm not sure we know what we're talking about'. So, we'd have to explain, 'well this is where you stand under when you want to get washed up.' So that's one I remember, but there was other things too--little things about culture, typical American Culture to give you some feeling that you would be feeling at home to help you to get used to, you know, having to go to this new country, which was new to us. None of us had ever been to the United States before, and most of us were between eighteen and twenty.
MB: You mentioned something about going to Canada versus the United States. Did that boat come to the United States or did it go to Canada?

MK: No, it went to Montreal.

MB: To add to that, what city from Montreal did you come next?

MK: From Montreal we traveled by train to Kalamazoo. We went through Port Huron, and if I remember correctly, in Port Huron they looked at all of our papers because that's the border city. And then from there we went to Kalamazoo, and I know we came in on a Sunday evening like at six or seven o'clock. About six or so professors for Hope College were there with at least four or five cars. So we all divided up three in one car and three in another car. So that was very nice that they took the extra effort to come personally rather than sending just a van and say, 'just pick up the kids' which was very nice. We really, from the day that we came here, were received very well, and it was a great experience.

MB: So Holland was basically the first city in the United States that you saw?

MK: Yes... because we didn't see much in Kalamazoo and no, Montreal either. We saw a lot beautiful lights, we came in over the St. Lawrence River, which was a beautiful trip. It was like at night, the lights of Montreal and Quebec and then in the daytime, the grapevines and the beauty of the St. Lawrence River and things.

MB: What were your first impressions of the city of Holland?

MK: Well, of course it was quite a bit different from what it is now. It reminded me of a small village, small city with a big college. And a lot of the people who were living here were of Dutch decent, and they were all very eager to talk Dutch and to learn more about the Netherlands. It seems like we learned some, of course,
here, but we also were reminded that the people here were of Dutch descent and were very eager to hear what things were like in the Netherlands after the War. Several of them had also sent clothing to relatives in the Netherlands, or they even had sent food packages and things because they knew that the last couple of years in the War was really kind of rough in Europe. And so, as soon as they were able to start sending things by mail again, which couldn’t be during all of the War—from ’40 to ’45 you could not send anything—but right after the war then they start sending things. And they were very eager to know how it was with the supplies and if people could buy a winter coat when they needed one, if they could get leather shoes and if they could get bananas and oranges again. Those are the things that I as a child, and a lot of other adults too I think, missed. We could not eat or find anything of the tropical fruits. None of those were imported from Spain or where they would come from normally. We did have some of the food, of course, that’s available in the Netherlands—cherries, apples, pears and all those kind of things, but the tropical fruits were not available. And so after the war, I think I ate bananas until they came out of my ears almost. And I think there were a lot other people in that same boat—especially oranges, which are so good for you. You know, they are an item that we really missed during the War. But where I lived, my father knew quite a few farmers, and so we were always able to get some food. It wasn’t always the food that you liked the best, but we were able to get food and things like that. But over here, the people were wonderful. They invited us and it was easy to get acquainted because we could talk some Dutch to them. And the food was so much the same from what it is in
the Netherlands. We eat a little bit more salads here. In the Netherlands they eat more applesauce and cooked vegetables. They have little lettuce but not nearly like you do here. You go into a restaurant and every meal would be steak and do you want salad or soup... salad or soup... Do you know what I mean?

MB: Exactly. I don't think I was ever asked that question when I was in the Netherlands. If I wanted salad or soup.

MK: No, no they don't. In fact, they usually have four courses. If you go out to dine in the Netherlands, first you get some hors d'oeuvres, and then you get some soup and then probably the main meal and then you get some coffee, and then you get some more desserts, all that stuff, five six things in a row. And here, well most of the time, if you get three you're doing well. And, of course, you don't need seven--the portions sometimes are a little smaller. Also, I guess, a lot of the food goes back to the kitchen because at many places they serve you, you don't get to serve yourself. Very few places where you can have cafeteria style. It's usually the water comes around and asks if you would like a piece and then he gives you a little piece. If you're really hungry, you could maybe ask a little later if they have some more. But generally speaking, the portions are smaller and that's mainly why people don't get so fat... we overeat I think.

MB: They ride their bikes all the time too. Did you have any problems coming to Holland, and did you have to adjust to them in any ways?

MK: Well for me, I can't really say because I spoke the language quite well, I had studied it for four years in the Netherlands. The people who came here who were less educated or didn't come here as students had probably less education, they
usually could not get out of the house so much—they were taking care of kids and they got plenty bored and they got homesick. But I can’t really say I had much problem with that. Even though there were times I missed my whole family because every Sunday afternoon, for example, we would always play games and if it was a nice day we would go out for a walk or play ball or whatever. Especially on Sundays because the rest of the days we had to go to school. And in the summertime we spent a lot of time at the beach. My parents had a cottage on the North Sea. And so, half the summer months from school, at least four to six weeks, we’d always be there, and we would go to the beach everyday and get spoiled—do lots of fun things. But, I can’t really say I felt that I wasn’t too happy. And most of the things, clothing I had to get used to I did find that it was hard to find clothes that fit me. Because I wear a large size shoe, a 12 4A and for woman that is hard to come by. And so I’d go from store to store trying to find shoes that fit and they’d say, “Oh this ten this fits you can wear this,” and I’d go half a block and you can’t wear shoes that don’t fit because the arch didn’t fit. Things like that but and I did have some money because I was able to take classes to 1 o’clock and then I worked at Heinz, the pickle factory, which was nice because if you have some spending money you can buy some things you like to get and things that you maybe even need you know things like that.

MB: I think you touch on most of the aspects that were different from here versus home in the Netherlands. The fact of the riding of the bikes and the food is different are there any other aspects that you can see as differences?
MK: Well, one of the things that always struck me is that the "you" in the English language is familiar but it is also respectable you can use you for a professor and you can use you for just the neighbor friends you play with. In the Netherlands they use the "thee and thou" yet. And so when I talk to my professors I just always wanted to say, "Professor so and so," or your and always felt a little uncomfortable thinking I’d say you to them. And a lot of here call their professors by their first name I don't know how it is now but I now I felt there was less respect even though the respect was there and it only looked like there was less. In the Netherlands, when a person is older you never use their first name you just say Doctor so and so or Mrs. so and so or Mr. so and so. And only to people that are younger you use their first name. I had some older people here who would say you can call me John you know and I'd say okay and the next time I'd see them I'd say how are you Mr. so and so or I just could not get used to it.

MB: I come the same way with professors it is a lot easier for me to call a professor especially when I'm talking to them, "Professor so and so." Where they have all said you can use our first names call us are first names because they want to make it more familiar. But when I'm speaking with them it is always "Professor so and so," but if I'm talking to my friends about the same professor I'll use their first name.

MK: Sure... well I can understand that because you keep thinking of all the education they have and knowledge they have and you know. I think you can still feel very comfortable with them at least I can feel very comfortable when I say Mr. so
and so to somebody. It is not really the differences they just think it feels better for them maybe to just be called John or Mike or whatever their names are.

MB: You talked about working at Heinz while you were attending school was that where you were first employed and was it difficult to find employment?

MK: That was my first job... it wasn't too difficult somebody said go to the dime store, well I went to the dime stores and I decided I did not know enough English to work in the dime store. Because people would ask you where is this or that and if you don't know exactly what they are talking about you have to say pardon me pardon me and I thought I was not ready for that. Then someone said try Heinz because they have summer help all the time and summer help has gone back to school now it is September. So maybe they will be able to use somebody and that was a great experience for me. First of all, I met students and professors at Hope College but I meet really working people at Heinz and that was about really a nice experience because you get to know how other people live not just the professors live or the students live. Because a lot of students would invite us for a weekend once and a while they would go home or so if they lived not too far from here. Or for Thanksgiving vacation couple three days vacations they would invite me to go to Wisconsin they would have the car and they would say we have room for one more and so I would get to know all those kind of people. But I really did not know much about the everyday working person here, the laborer. So it was nice, I worked in a department at first where it was all women. So I got to know who they were and quit a few of them were young girls who were not married yet. I got to know what they were doing in their spare time and how they spend they
evening and what their families were like it was really good. Then later on, in those days, you did not get a fifteen minute break you got one when some one was there to relieve you, and I got to relieve different people on the line and got to talk to so fellows to. Some of these people also invited me to their home, which was very nice. Their homes were a little more modest then the professors or students home. But they were very nice and clean and I was really impressed people could really keep their places neat and clean and painted and well-taken care of.

MB: You mentioned you had a couple other jobs as well what were some of those again?

MK: Later on I worked in the dime store. Well acutely the first year after my first semester in June I worked as a chambermaid at Point West, that was a big hotel chain that was right by to Hotel Macatawa. I cleaned rooms there for the rich people from Chicago and who ever wanted to stay there. That was a really nice experience too, a lot of hard work but a lot of fun at night because after our work was done we would all go tot the beach and have a camp fire and have hotdog fights. Because there were a lot of other kids who were students too and they didn’t go home either. We had lodging there it was not the fanciest but how many hours do you sleep, you go to bed at 12 or 1 and get up at 6 or 7. So it didn’t matter so much what kinda place we slept so. Then I got to see what kids do when they hang out in the summertime and stuff.

MB: How did the move effect your family?
MK: Well I really don’t know how it affected my parents they never said too much about it in their letters. But my brothers and sisters all said, “Go and have a good time,” they didn’t mind and some started coming to visit as soon as they could, not the first year but the third year or so. Some of my brothers had been out of the country too and two of my sisters had been to Indonesia, and so had been to Austria and Italy. It wasn’t like they had never been and they said by all means go, they didn’t think I was going to stay. And after awhile they said we don’t blame you for staying. My mother really when I told her I was going to get married then she said, “Now I’m going to lose you for a long time.” But she came here to visit many time and so did my dad and we went over there after I had a husband and children, we went to visit over there several time. But at first we did not have so much money and now it is not so much as big a job to go, besides a lot of times I go alone I’m going to go again in two weeks from now. April 11, and when there is one person going it is a lot cheaper then when you go with a whole family of five.

MB: Did you bring any traditions with you that you still have as part of your everyday life?

MK: Yeah…. I’d say so, one of the most important things is every morning we have tea for breakfast and hot oatmeal, those are two things to start with. Then we always have coffee break in the morning and a tea break in the afternoon, when I was a kid we always had coffee about 10:30, that is if we were not in school in summer time. And always in the afternoon we would have tea after school with some nice cookies. Plain cookies and we would tell about school, she would
always what did you do and I have always done that with my children. It is not always tea but always milk or something it’s never been pop. When my children were young it was never pop, but now it is all pop, when I have the grandchildren over, you want something to drink? “Oh yeah grandma what kind of pop do you have? Okay grandma I have this pop or that pop.” Then, another thing I still do a lot is try to find time to do so reading other then watching television because I think television is good for news but you can spend so many hours wasting your time. You could better do a few other things and we still like to do a lot of reading. One of the other things I still like I like to go to museums and hear speakers. In general I think people in the Netherlands are really interested. But I must say in Holland, Michigan a lot of people are also interested in museums and speakers and you know doing things for others too that comes with it that’s one thing my parents, my mother especially because she was not full time employed. She would take care of so many people do things for them. We are still doing that here my husband and I do and a lot of other people do here to. There is such a great need for volunteers and volunteer work that we do a lot of that.

MB: What were some of your must difficult adjustments that you had to make and how difficult was you transition into the Holland community? The second question I think you have answered already with the professors being so open we you guys arrived… but were there difficult adjustments you had to make?

MK: I don’t know it is a little difficult, when we were kids we would also go to church twice and of course I did that here too but not the first couple years when I’m in the college I didn’t always. But that doesn’t make much difference as far was
adjustment goes. Because when you go to college you don’t always have time for those kind of things… So you have to adjust your studies first and then you do the church going later even though you have your faith and you think it’s important it does sometimes take second place as far as you time is concerned. I really think it was so easy for me because I came from a large family and I was used to getting a long with everybody and fitting in and doing the things I could and helping people so when I came here I did the same thing. If a person needed help I would help them; I ran into some problems with students, can you help me with my Spanish? I just can’t remember how to do it. Or some math I took so math classes that were almost repetitious of what I had had in high school. Not on purpose they said this was a good class to take and of course math is a lot easier for someone who does not speak the language so well so it was easy for me to do the math. Basically just getting used to the college and trying to divide my time up right was one of the big things. Because I would think I could this or do that and then pretty so there was not enough time left for my studies or to meet with my friends that I needed to talk to. Adjustment of my time was probably one of the bigger things I had to work on at first.

MB: Why have you stayed in the Holland community?

MK: Well partly because I finished Hope College and my husband was living here and we decided to get married, my husband to be. After that he had a job here so I decided I better stay in Holland too. There wasn’t much use for me to look in another city for a job, so I decided to look here. At the time I just had a BA from Hope College I did not have my teacher’s education, I got that later when my
children were in school I got my teacher certificate and I started teaching, lots of times part time as a substitute for many years. Once I was in Holland I got involved with my children and for quite a few years I didn’t work outside of the home because I was taking care of the children. But when I, at first I did work at two stores. There was a Woolworths store here at one time, and I was a clerk there first and later I was the cashier. I did that for about a year or two. After I was married, I worked at Montgomery Ward. There was a store on 8th Street, not the one in the mall, but there was one on 8th Street. I worked there also as a cashier and I worked in the catalog department. After that, I had my first child and I started staying home because I had enough to do there. What I did after that, I took care of kids mostly in the daytime. And in the evening, my husband would be home. I joined things like different study groups, a Bible study group at church. I also joined the junior welfare league and I ended up doing projects for the community. We have what they call an ice skating festival we had all the kids form all the Elementary school come to Fairbanks Park. And at that time there were two little bathing places and in the winter those would freeze over and we could have a little ice skating festival with prizes and things like that. Then I later on I got involved with HOME which is Housing Opportunities Made Equitable, we helped find people lodging try to get reasonable and affordable housing which is not always easy. One of the things we worked on was this unit that is right across the street from Thrifty Acres (Meijer), about 50 to 75 units there for older people. We built that with some government money’s help of course. Just two years ago, they finished another 32 units there. Those are the kind of things that
are nice to work on. I also work with another group that I’m still involved with now, and that’s the Holland Area Beautiful; they have to do with the beautification of the area. There are people who clean the highways four times a summer and we put new flowers in on the highway and have the grass cut and we have a little tracker that drives around that says Holland area beautiful on it.

Anyhow different groups that I have been involved either were helping for children or were helping for beautification. Then I was on the board of the museum for a long time. Because when I first came here to the United States and Holland, Michigan, I said “What a bunch of junk you have in this museum.” It is nice junk but the way it was organized and we had such a small space for it and so the Mr. Wichers said we, “All realize that we have too much stuff in this place but we’re going to try and get a bigger place.” So over the years we kept working on it, and he kept accumulating stuff, always talking to people and saying, “Boy you ought to consider giving this to the museum.” I catch myself doing that everyday if I see somebody who’s got some nice things in the house. I say, “You ought to consider giving that to the museum.” Some man just told me last week he had this very old fashioned telephone—you crank phone. He said, “Yeah, my neighbor wants to buy it.” I said, “Don’t let him buy it, just give it to the museum because they can use it, or give it to Hope College.” I have often sent people to Hope College too because for the different place and they quite often could use things like that. So anyhow, making a long story short about the museum, we got a new museum and a great director, and a nice curator. We have lots of exhibits. I think that place is going very well. My husband thinks I’m too busy. I’m also
involved with Hospice for 18 years; I don’t always have a patient. When you get involved it does take quite a bit of time. You just don’t go there for one time a week for a couple of hours, you just sometimes call the people or they call you. It’s very rewarding work—I like it. I’m also very involved in different things with my church and with my Classis and my Synod. I’ve worked on different committees. I was very involved in the Crop Walk, I did that for about 17 years I was in charge of the Christian Reformed Churches. We had to contact all these churches and that way we did well. We’ve gotten a lot of good leaders and a lot of students from the College take part. There are so many different things that if you want to help, you can work and help. There are so many needs. College students are good. I guess I started some of that during the War. Because we needed some help for American flyers that got shot down or we needed help for the Jewish children or adults that we had to save from perdition, and so my parents did stuff love that. It gets in your blood if you do the same thing everybody else does and I think it is really important to be more concerned about others than just think about yourself.

MB: You mentioned the CRC as your church affiliation. What kind of things influenced you to attend CRC instead or versus a RCA?

MK: Well I’ll tell you I grew up in the RCA. When I came here I was RCA and I think I’m still RCA at heart. My husband was CRC and so decided since this was his home church and I didn’t want to make a lot of fuss because I think CRC and RCA are very much the same. They all go with the basic truth, Heidelberg Catechism and all of these things. The only difference is they disagree whether
you should send you children to Christian school or whether you should teach them all the Christian things at home. Well to me I think you need to do it all over no matter, wherever you are it should be done. At school and I think more people now in the Reform Church sending their children to our Christian schools because they find that in the public there is so much, ever since this Bible out of the schools business some 30 years ago, I think there are more problems. I think maybe TV is probably the worst cause some of the TV programs all time shooting and kids don’t think anything of shooting. When they get older and into the drug habits and things, I think that carries over to the school. We all know about cases of children who never had the chance to grow up in a good home where the parents loved the children. It’s difficult. It’s not really such a big deal anymore I think it is less and less. Right now it is the women’s issue yet. We are still working on the women; eventually we’ll get that too. I have worked on some of these committees too and it is really silly because the Bible says distinctly that you are save through faith and only through faith alone and no one else can do it for you. No husband or other person, you are the only one that has to trust in Jesus and that is how you will be saved. Whether you are a man or lady you talk to people and witness and do all those things when it says something in the Bible it is culturally dictated.

MB: With Holland becoming more culturally diverse how do you feel about the new immigrant communities such as the Hispanic and Asian? And do you see them facing similar problems or opportunities that you faced when you came to the States?
MK: I think we found when the Dutch people came here they wanted to hang on to their Dutch language as much as they could at first but eventually they realized that if they were going to really succeed they needed to use the English language like everyone else. So when the Spanish people started coming here it was just about the time of 1947 when I came and I studied Spanish at Hope College. I found the same thing these people wanted to speak Spanish and wanted to stick to there language which is fine, but when we are now 50 years later they have been here 50 years, not everyone has been here for 50 years but a lot of them have.

When we start thinking we need to put two languages on Census forms and two languages in Hospital corridors to help these people. I feel that it is not really necessary, these people may certainly keep their language which is very important and I think today there is still quit a few people who know Dutch and some of them have come here and other have learned Dutch purposely to be able to read some things. We don’t want to do away with the language but they need to realize that in order to become well-educated people they need to know the language. Sometimes the Spanish have not done that and I have learned that too when I was teaching school. I was teaching Spanish class, and some of the kids would say, “I have to sit here but you can’t make me study and learn.” They were stubborn because they felt hey I know how to use that language, when they didn’t they just knew hoe to use some slang words that they picked up from their parents but the didn’t really know how to use the language well. And they certainly did not learn the English language like they should if they would have concentrated on that, it would have been better. So I think these people are here and are doing
a fine part in our community. They are definitely going to stay here and like I said they started at Heinz same time I was there in '47. They first were here for summers '43-'44 and then later on they started going to factories and they asked if they could stay here year round. That way they would not have to go back to Texas and Mexico and it would be better for them they could earn a lot more money by having a regular job. So I think these people are very industrious and they want to work hard, but once in a while there kids are ending up being lazy. The second or third generation sometimes in some of the Spanish families and I don’t know why that is they don’t seem to want to work like the parents did. I think that will get better again. Then of course you have that in the Dutch people too, everybody can, but the people who get in trouble with drugs or with these Latin Kings, those kinds of things. I can’t say that they ever had Dutch people like that getting involved which is bad. It’s alright to have friends who are Latin, Latinos, too, but when you start doing things like Latin Kings are doing, they go overboard. They start doing things that are destructive. Then of course they get into trouble with other groups or other things. The Indo-Chinese who are here are all fine people too. I think they have been an addition to our city. They are hard working and usually quite intelligent and their kids don’t hang around doing nothing, they are all busy working. They usually all live together in the homes like some of the Spanish do too, three generations, you know? That’s mostly because they can save money that way. Most of those people, they are real eager to do well in school, while the parents of the Spanish people don’t always seem to stress that as much. I think the Dutch people always did. My mother, that’s all
she ever talked about, “Get an education, get an education.” The black people here in the United States—when I first came to the Holland, MI I think there were two black families that lived on the north side of town. So we also have an influx here of black people and they have done a good job because they are all working hard and co-operative and do well at work and then get better jobs and they get more money and if you have more money you can buy better homes and your children can get better educated. So the combination of things that this things all these people are going to be a nice asset to our community. We just have to somehow stop this gang activity when they do that. Of course, every family can—in every race and in every group of people you can have a couple people that do it. There’s just as many Dutch people in prison as there are of other groups. I think the Dutch were interested in keeping families together and really helping them. I think the Indo-Chinese too, they all do their best to help the people. I’m certainly glad that they’re here. I think they have to make sure, especially the Spanish, that they don’t get into drug trouble and all of that kind of stuff. First you’re on drugs, and then you need money, and then you start stealing, and then one thing leads to another. But I think the majority of them, I know several people of those other diverse groups that I could find (?).

MB: How do you feel about the heritage that Holland has tried to preserve? Examples: Tulip Time, Cinco de Mayo festival? Do you feel the community celebrates your heritage well? Is your community well represented?

MK: Well, I think they have done a very good job. First of all, the most important thing is that they keep the city nice and neat and clean, the homes are keep well
even those people who don’t have so much money still keep their homes very well. The streets are keep well, and the whole outlook. When you come into a place like this you drive into town you can tell this is a city that is kept well. I think that is really important. That is the number one Dutch reputation I think and that has stayed with it. Once they started that Tulip Time Festival, it’s just been a good tourist attraction and I think quite a few of the people like it and the kids love it. They get to do things that are constructive rather than destructive. As far as the Cinco de Mayo, I have gone there almost every year. I think it is nice that they keep having festivals like that and that they have a Latino Queen I think is good it keeps those people proud of their heritage, because their heritage is important to them too. In the museum too we are constantly including different groups. Now we have some of even the last ones, the Asians are all represented there too. I think that is what Holland is now. It was originally Dutch, but now it’s a diverse city.

MB: Does Tulip Time represent the Netherlands well or is it kind of an Americanized Netherlands?

MK: Well the clothing is a little bit difficult to decide because they can’t get the originals, but they have done a great job in trying to look... (Phone Interruption)...I think that most of the things at Tulip Time are really very much appreciated and the tourist business is helping the people. There are a few people that like to leave town when things like the festival take place they don’t want to get involved, well that is their choice I guess they go fishing or do something else. Mostly the men, the women come quit a bit a lot of women are involved in either
dancing or whatever, serving meals. We do a lot of that at our churches and our schools and so we do all that kind of stuff.

MB: Have you experienced any discrimination in the city of Holland or in the United States for that matter?

MK: I don’t think so... I have certainly never experienced it. I have heard of people who said they were discriminated against, but they say, “Well, I was stopped by this policeman because I have dark hair or I have dark skin or I have done something else they think they pick on me.” But I think it’s usually because the people are conscious of it and they think they’re being discriminated. I don’t think some of these young kids will say, “Oh they always stop those 23 year olds, 25 year olds for all those things.” But I don’t think that’s true. I think that most people are very fair and are not discriminating against anybody.

MB: What paths have you children taken as second generation, do they speak the Dutch language as well? Are they in with the culture heritage still?

MK: Well I’ll tell you, my children don’t speak much Dutch. They just know a few expressions from when they go there. When my children grew up, we were in a Dr. Spock age, his baby book: “Don’t get kids confused, Don’t teach them two languages.” I was at a disadvantage because my husband doesn’t speak Dutch so if I start talking Dutch then after two seconds he would say, “Quit that because I can’t hear, don’t understand. I don’t know what you are talking about.” So they did not do that. They are very interested in Dutch culture, nice Dutch paintings, nice Dutch pewter tea sets anything like that they have those in their homes too. Of course they like to go to the Netherlands every so often because all my
brothers and sister are still living there. I still have one brother who is still living
and seven sisters. So when they go there the can see their cousins and do all that
kind of stuff. Other wise they are always interested on what is going on in the
Netherlands and look at pictures and like books about the Netherlands too.

MB: If you had a friend or a family friend living in the Netherlands who considering
coming to the United States what would you say to them?

MK: Well if they were considering coming just on an immigrate visa and if they would
not have any specific qualifications, I would kind of discourage them. Because in
today’s society in order to get any kind of decent job, to make a good living you
would almost need some specific knowledge in a certain field so you would be
able to at least make a living. If you don’t have that it would be rather difficult
because even the factories, they are starting to pay less and less in comparison to
what they paid years ago. Also, you don’t get the benefits anymore that they did
years ago. They’re starting to cut more and more because they always want
profits and less overhead and more for the C.E.O’s. One thing of course that
really gets me is that the C.E.O. can make six million and the poor little worker
gets six thousand a year. I’m just giving that as an example. I think if the person
has a good education I think there are lots of jobs for them, and I think they would
adjust well in Michigan. I think almost anyplace it would be a nice place to live
and work except some inner cities where it would be difficult to adjust if you
came from the Netherlands. But there are a lot of places where maybe they would
do very well. They would be able to get a job. Our unemployment right now is
low and I'm sure that for anytime you have educated people who have some special profession, it shouldn’t be hard to get a job.

MB: ______________. (Thank you in Dutch?)

MK: ______________. You’re welcome. It was certainly nice to work with you on this project. I hope you can do a good job for your professor, Wagenaar.

MB: Is there anything else that wasn’t asked?

MK: No, I think you did cover quite a bit of different things. Basically, during the war, there were a lot of things that were happening. They’d teach you to be understanding of people and to be willing to help people. I think going through the Depression here in the United States too, a lot of people learned to be tolerant and to be patient and content and happy with what you have, rather than always saying, “I need more, more, more, more, more.” We have a materialistic mind sometimes. We see that ourselves because we have nice homes, plenty good, three bedrooms, but our kids are already starting with a nice home and three bedrooms, you know? Of course we all started out with the television and the microwave. We start with all that now. We used to get that as we had money but I don’t begrudge anybody that. If they can afford it, if they can work for it, that’s alright. They mustn’t think that things are going to make them happy. The important thing is that helping people, trusting in God, and knowing that you’re doing what you can for Him is really the important thing. I think that everyone that grows up, the older you get, the more you realize that, so, “What are you going to get for the birthday?” “Mom, I don’t need a thing.” “What do you want?” “Not a thing! I’ve got everything I need.” Fortunately we have enough
money that if we need something, we go and buy it. If you don’t have any
money, then it’s nice for a birthday to get something that somebody needs. I
think there are a lot of people who have worked hard and we have been fortunate
to be able to save some money when we were first married. During our latter
years, we are feeling that we are rich. We’re not anything like millionaires, but
when you have everything that you need for every day, what else would you
want?

MB: Exactly. Another question I just thought about: Citizenship. Are you a still Dutch
national?

MK: No, I am an American citizen. I did have some trouble after I got married because
I was here on a student visa. After I was married they warned me when we went
to the Niagara Falls, into Canada, they said “Be very careful that you make sure
that you can come back out. It’s easy enough to get out of the United States but
coming back in is more difficult.” That’s when I ran into some problem. When I
got on the other side, I wanted to go back in, they said, “No, you can’t. You’re
going back to school.” And I said, “No, I wasn’t” because I had gotten married,
and I had my B.A. There was no need for me, “Well then you can’t go back
because you have your student visa.” Well, I had to go through a lot of hassle to
get some papers and post the bond. It took me five years to get it straightened
out. That wasn’t their fault, but it has always been that way. You have to be
married for at least three or five years before you can be an American citizen,
before you get the citizenship from your husband. You can apply for the papers
but you still have to wait a certain number of years. Today, it’s even fussier.
Every two years you have to have your neighbors and everybody else make some
sworn statements that you’re still both in the house all of the time and that you
still love each other and that you indicate that marriage is going okay. Sometimes
people get married and after two years the guy says “goodbye,” and you have
your papers. That happens some. I don’t think that’s the routine. I worked in the
federal government for Hockstra and Upton, the congressmen, the last eight years
of my work. Oh boy, what I ran into, the problems these people have. I said,
“I’ve gone through it, I know what you mean.” But I guess they have to be really
careful. We don’t want just everybody within our borders. I think they’re
sometimes too fussy. I’ve talked worked with some women, all they had taken is
some petty cash out of some place and she could not get her citizenship papers
because she had some record. I think that’s bad, because we all make mistakes
sometimes.

MB: Again, thank you.