Mouw, Emily Oral History Interview: Sesquicentennial of Holland, "150 Stories for 150 Years"

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AP: Could you state your name and when and where you were born?

EM: My name is Emily Bielefeld Mouw. I was born here in Holland, August 6, 1919. I was born in the first hospital in Holland, which was on the corner of 12th and Central. Then it became the museum. Now, I guess, it’s a bed and breakfast place. My sisters and I were all born there. I think the hospital was only a few years old when I was born there.

AP: How large was it?

EM: I really don’t know how many beds, I would say no more than 15 at that time. But my mother often said, way up there on the third floor, that’s where the delivery room was. Dr. Kools was our family doctor. He was one of a few doctors at that time. We really loved him very much.

AP: Could you describe what it was like growing up here, favorite memories, things that stick out about growing up here in Holland?

EM: I lived at 199 West 16th Street, which was between Maple Avenue and Washington Boulevard. My folks built their home there in 1915. Then, it was about the middle of the block, a creek ran through there. There weren’t a lot of homes. Only the church corner, the Christian Reformed Church and the parsonage, then no other homes to the middle of the block. My father often said a creek ran through there. We can tell to this day. It’s a little lower in there. He often pointed out a house to
me, that the foundation was a little low. He said, that's due to that creek. My grandparents lived in the previous block between Pine and Maple. My mother's folks and my father's folks built down there and lived there. My grandma used to watch from her window to see me come around that church corner as I went north down Maple Avenue to Washington School. I was the first grandchild. I went to Washington School, which is on the corner of 11th and Maple. My father and mother both went to that same school. But then, there was a new school when I was in the second grade. I had to walk quite a ways, through Centennial Park, to the area where the VanderWerf Physics Math building is right now. There were two big schools there. As a little second grader, I had to go there. My sister was in kindergarten, went to the Holland High School, which now is a community building, on the corner of 16th and Pine. From second grade on, I went to the new Washington School, which is presently, still, on the corner of 11th and Maple. Then I went to junior high school, which, now is an administration building on the corner of River and 16th. The high school was a block over on 16th and Pine. Of course, now there's a new high school. But those are the schools I went to. Then I went to Hope College. That was a couple of miles away, which I usually walked or took my bicycle. I didn't have a car.

AP: So you lived at home when you went to Hope?

EM: Yes, I did. Most Holland students did. If they lived in Holland, they lived at home.

AP: Were the majority of Hope students from Holland?

EM: I would think so, yes.
AP: What was Hope like?

EM: Well, there weren’t nearly the number of students there are today. I don’t think the whole college had more than five, 600. We were all seated in the chapel for morning devotions. Every morning, required, at 8:00. Took role down the rows. The freshman all sat in one place, sophomores in another, juniors in another, seniors in another. We had about a twenty minute chapel service every morning. I know tuition was $65.50 a semester. About $125 a year. Quite a difference, isn’t there? Of course, everything, relatively speaking, was less expensive, too. Ice cream cones for five cents. Hamburgers for maybe ten.

AP: What other kinds of requirements or rules did you have there? Did you have a dress code?

EM: When I look at pictures, my father took a lot of pictures, or even school pictures, I could show you a few, we always wore dresses, skirts. In grade school even. I don’t think we ever wore slacks to school. Even when I went to college, I never wore slacks.

AP: This may seem like such a silly question, but when did you start wearing slacks?

EM: When I started teaching, it was still dresses in 1941. I was a secondary major in English with minors in Latin and speech. Those were my emphases. I taught in Saranac first, which is about 25 miles east of Grand Rapids. There, I had five preparations, four of English and one of Latin. This is the first year. My second year, I taught in Lee High School in Wyoming, Grand Rapids. There I just had English, American Literature in 11th and 12th grades. Speech was part of the senior
English class.

AP: Public speaking?

EM: Yes, and I also had drama. I directed the junior and senior plays at both schools. It was under the English department. Then, I would have loved to have taught longer, but my husband then graduated from seminary, and he did not want to be a bachelor preacher. I was married on June 30, 1943 to Henry Arthur Mouw. We began our married life in New Era, which is 60 miles north of here. There I did some substitute teaching. Then we moved to Holland in about five and a half years. Again, I did substitute teaching. Then you could substitute in elementary or secondary, it didn’t have to be just your own field. But after our three daughters were born and they were in school--I stayed home as long as they were home--after Barbara was maybe in the second or third grade, I got a three month job, then a half a year job, as teachers needed help. Then I got an elementary certificate, I took more classes, because that was required. I taught at Longfellow School. This was in 1968. The principal frowned on slacks. She didn’t wear them herself. But pantsuits became very popular. She could tell a lot of teachers wanted to wear them. She said, "You may wear pantsuits, if it’s a nice looking dress suit, but not just slacks." Like I’m wearing today. There are a few teachers who never gave in at all. But that’s when I started wearing pantsuits.

AP: You mentioned something earlier about your parents’ wedding, about how the reception was in the home? What was your wedding like?

EM: We were married in First Reformed Church. That’s where I grew up. My folks
always worshipped, my grandparents did, too. To think, First Reformed Church was on the corner of 9th and Central, and my folks lived on West 16th. That was a long walk. We always had catechism on Wednesday afternoons. In fact, in Holland, no classes or anything might be scheduled on Wednesday afternoon after school, because that was catechism day in all the churches. I was married in that First Reformed Church. Our wedding was Dr. Bastian Kruithof’s first church wedding in Holland. He became a Bible teacher at Hope College, too. In fact, his son, Fritz, just became elected to the vice-presidency of General Synod. So it’s quite interesting, because his father also held that position at one time. We had a church wedding, as did my two sisters. The reception was in the basement in the church. Today receptions are often elsewhere, but we all had our receptions right there. I remember for flowers, there weren’t that many florists in town, but one of our friends had a big lot of flowers, and at that time, the middle of June, she had beautiful peonies. So I thought, I’ll have big baskets of peonies on the platform. Well, hot weather came in. I always think of June, this time of year, is going to be hot. Just the week before June 30, the peonies were not very good anymore. But, she said, my Madonna lilies are. So instead of a peony wedding, I had Madonna lilies, a lot of baskets of those on the platform, so it was still a pretty wedding. I had a long, white gown, and my father took me down the aisle. My sisters were attendants, and my husband’s sister. They all wore pastel colors, pink and blue and yellow. That seemed to be the style of those days, different colors, but pastel colors. The men all wore tuxes, dark suits.

AP: Did you face the front of the church? I know it’s kind of a popular thing now, the
pastor will turn the couple around so they face out. Have you seen that?

EM: Really? No.

AP: I think it's a very new thing. Were you allowed to kiss in the church?

EM: At the end of the wedding? Oh, sure, yes.

AP: Our church still doesn't, it's a Lutheran Church back home.

EM: Usually at the end of the ceremony, the minister will say, "Now, you may kiss the bride." You say Lutheran. That's what my grandparents were and my father when they first came here from Germany. There was a little Lutheran Church where the Catholic Church now is. On the corner of 12th and Maple, there was a little white church there. I remember going there as a child with my grandparents, especially for the Christmas program. You'd always get an orange and a box of candy afterwards.

AP: Somebody mentioned that in an interview about getting a box of candy and an orange after the service. It was funny because they said how they don't do that anymore for the kids. At my grandmother's church, where my father grew up in, we would go there every Christmas Eve, and they still do. We would get a bag full of nuts and candy and an orange. They still do that.

EM: We had done that at Sixth Reformed Church for many years. We always did that, too. A big orange and a box of candy.

AP: Or sometimes we would get these little, miniature nativity scene that they would give all the children. So that orange was always a nice thing.

EM: We got that camel and Mary and Joseph and baby in Israel. We gave those to a few friends. We did that for our 50th anniversary, went to Israel.
AP: Last time I talked to you, you were planning your class reunion.

EM: Sixty year reunion. That was at the Country Club. I was chairman of it, so I know every detail. That was two weeks ago tomorrow, I can't believe it. There were about 65 there, so that's pretty good. My high school class was 188. Today there are 500 some. A third of our class are gone, passed away. Of course, '37, it was just previous to World War II. After college, the war started then.

AP: And a lot of them served?

EM: Yes. If they didn't enlist, they were called. It was my first year of teaching when Pearl Harbor broke up, December 7, 1941. I remember it distinctly. That's when I was teaching at Saranac. Yes, some lost their lives in the service, here in America and elsewhere.

AP: What was it like when that news arrived about Pearl Harbor?

EM: It was a Sunday evening, and we weren't even aware of it, I don't think, until Monday came, because we didn't have television. I lived in a home, that's what girls often did when they were teachers, they lived in a home near their school. In both Saranac and Grand Rapids, I lived in a home of an elderly couple, had my meals with them. Room and board. The next day, I don't think I even heard that morning. Maybe when I got home from school. Everybody didn't have a radio. It soon spread like wildfire. Of course, in Saranac where I lived, it was a little community. People weren't too much affected by it. But, maybe gradually, young men were called there, too. Then when it came time for my wedding in 1943, we really knew the war was going on. Our food was all rationed, and we had books of stamps, and sugar was
very hard to come by. In fact, Holland had five or six bakeries. Only one would make a wedding cake, and that is, if you provided the sugar. So my husband, who was a seminary student at that time, also had food stamps. So he saved his stamps, and we did, and I know we had chicken salad at our wedding. Just to get cans of peas for the salad, we had to save our stamps. Friends helped us out. Coffee was hard to come by. We used to stand in line. I remember, there was a big A&P store on the corner of 10th and River. When we knew they'd get coffee in, there'd be people standing down the street in a line, waiting to get in, to make a grab for the coffee.

AP: This may sound strange, again, but we're all so familiar with the fact that everything was rationed. But it's never been very clear to me why. I understand, like gasoline, they had to use that in the army efforts. But were they sending all the sugar over? This sounds strange.

EM: I suppose with all the armed forces, a lot of our food stuffs went overseas, too, and to camps.

AP: Was it maybe they couldn't produce as much because they were producing other things for the war?

EM: That could be, too. There wasn't the manpower to work the farms. And canned goods, tin was scarce. I know, even when we were married, too, to buy pots and pans was very difficult. My mother had to share hers with us. I remember we couldn't get aluminum at all, nor refrigerators or washing machines. We got a lot of second hand things. It was hard to get jobs, too. Factories weren't producing so
much. My father worked in the Holland Shoe Company. He did not have as much work, he had to seek another job along with it. Because, factories had to do so much to produce things for the service, for the war. Arms, everything was for the war effort. That’s when women started working, too. Never heard of that before.

Mothers stayed at home. My mother never worked outside the home. Which was good for the family. Now, there are too many mothers working. My daughters now teaching, how they can see that. No parents at home, when the child comes home from school. There’s just not the bringing up that there used to be. Instead, TV is what’s bringing up a lot of children. Our daughter teaches reading, she can tell that there’s not the reading to the children by the parents, as there should be. That’s why there are so many poor readers, I guess.

AP: One of the administrators I talked to said that a lot for kids just lack language, just the ability to have a conversation. Not just kids with English as a second language, but all kids, because people aren’t talking to them. That was one of the big problems that they had found.

EM: Family togetherness. Dinner together. Family devotions. I know even with my granddaughter here the other day, she was ready to get up from the table. We said, "Emily, we always close together. We always read the Bible or we read a devotional." At her home, too, they’ve always got so many things to go to, this and that. Now my daughter, I’m sure, has her family devotions as much as they can, they aren’t a family like that who’d neglect it. Her husband, too, is a wonderful prayer warrior. The children are used to quick, quick, quick. Go here, go there.
AP: A lot of times it’s hard to get schedules so that everyone can eat together for dinner. With different rehearsals and sports and things like that.

EM: Parents work late, have a schedule to go to. It’s harder today. I don’t remember that as a child at all, that we had to hurry away somewhere.

AP: What kinds of things did you do as a child after school?

EM: We had bicycles, we rode bikes a lot. I remember, in grade school, riding through the Hope College campus. All those lanes. Riding our bikes with our neighbor friends. We roller skated a lot. In fact, a block away from our home on 15th, between Van Raalte and Ottawa, they roped off that street by the Holland Shoe factory, and in the evenings, cars couldn’t go through there because that was for roller skating. That was so much fun. All the neighborhood kids would rush out there and skate. We didn’t have music to skate to, but it was just fun to roller skate. We played tennis. The tennis courts came when I was a child, on 21st Street, between Maple and Pine. We played tennis a lot. I loved tennis. It was my favorite sport. In fact, by the old Holland High School there were tennis courts. We had a church on this corner, Christian Reformed Church, and it had outdoor steps slanting down. When I lived in that neighborhood, there were a lot of young kids my age and my sisters’ age. I was the oldest of three girls, Dorothy was two years younger, and Elaine was three years younger than that. After supper, we’d rush to that corner often times, and we’d sit on these steps going down. And the neighborhood kids, too, we’d often play games. Like, one was a leader, and would shout something, we’d rush down to get that person, and they’d get away. Run sheep, run. Some
games like that. It was a lot of fun, with the neighborhood kids.

AP: Now, nobody would let kids loiter in a group anywhere, like they wouldn't let them just sit on the steps of a building. Do you know what I mean?

EM: Yes, isn't that a pity?

AP: Because they think something bad is going to happen.

EM: Yes, might be a gang or something.

AP: Even, on a big scale, I spent a semester in New York, and they have their post office there, the main one on Eighth Avenue, and it's just huge. It's got steps that go up. Everybody would sit there to eat lunch and hang out. Right when I got there, they decided they weren't going to allow people to sit on the steps of the New York City Post Office anymore, so now they station three police officers there everyday so that nobody could sit there. There was this whole community going on there, there were vendors out front and people would sit and eat a hot dog, and nobody can do it now.

EM: That's a pity, isn't it.

AP: It seems like it's hard for kids to find a place to go, just to be.

EM: Right. I don't think my folks ever had a care or a worry when I was on that street corner. Another thing we'd do, we'd put a blanket on the grass beside my home. My girlfriends would come there with their dolls, and we would sew for the small dolls. My mother made a lot of our clothes when I was little, and there were always scraps of clothes. We could sew and be creative, make our own clothes, and our dolls would visit one another. We'd do so much with dolls and sewing on a summer afternoon.
AP: They’d give you all their scraps?

EM: Yes. Also, we’d make tents, put blankets over the clothesline. All of our mothers hung their clothes out on wash day. By the way, I still do, somewhat. I have clotheslines, I’m old fashioned. Even my daughters come here sometime to use the lines to hang out their blankets or big things. I have a lot of curtaining in my home, because my German relatives have a curtain store in Germany, so if you were to go upstairs, it’s all lace curtains in our bedrooms, and in my living room and dining room, because they have always sent a lot of curtaining back with me. Anyway, my mother’s clothes lines would be tent lines, put the blanket over it. Some of our friends a couple doors away had big tents. Their father became a captain in the National Guard here in Holland. In fact, there’s quite a bit about Captain Geerds in the museum, I noticed that this year. He would have his Company D meet regularly in Holland Armory for drills or reviews. Then they would go out to Camp Grayling, which, I believe, they still do. In fact, he went overseas both in World War I and World War II. His daughters, my age and my sister Dorothy’s age, had access to big army tents. Sometimes we’d put those out. We also took those to Ottawa Beach for camping, had a chaperon. They were big tents. We could have a picnic table within them. So we always played in tents, too. Not only with dolls, but later on, we’d have stores. Our parents would save all their empty boxes and empty oatmeal cartons, and we’d so often play store.

AP: Did you ever play school?

EM: Oh yes, a lot. My father was very handy. He made my sisters and me each a desk,
and he made a blackboard and bookcases. We were always playing school or library. We would take down my folks books. They didn’t especially like that, and put a little card inside. We loved to play library. We had some sort of stamp and stamp that before they could take the book out. And we did plays. Even my girls, too. I would always go to a store that sold refrigerators or stoves, and come home with great big cartons. We would cut those up in such a way so that they could be like a stage, or a closet. We would have them by our garage. I did that as a child, and my daughters did too. They’d give plays, and people could sit outside the garage and watch them.

AP: Would you make up your own story or take one from a book?

EM: Yes, sure. We might get the idea from a book, but they’d make up their own. We did that in my home, too, with a closet. My parents would have to sit in the room, and we would appear from that closet, and had an area there were we could change our clothes. We were always giving plays. Really, we were creative. We didn’t have TV to watch. I don’t think we had a radio for a long time. Really, we used our imaginations, and that was good. I think of it today, children don’t do that sort of thing. We’d give those plays in the evening, after supper. My folks would have to watch our performance. The indoor ones. I took piano lessons. My folks were very musical. My father and mother both had a piano when they were married. I think they got rid of my mother’s piano and kept my father’s piano. In fact, I have to tell you, too, that many years ago, even today, a lot of men don’t take piano lessons. But my father had a few lessons. He just naturally was very musical, as my mother was, and he played the piano in the First Reformed Church, for a big men’s Sunday School
class for, I bet, 50 years. They both sang in the choir. I guess that’s why my sisters and I always had some musical ability and passed that on. My three girls all play the piano. In fact, my three girls earned a lot of their tuition to college by giving piano lessons. My daughter, Carole, to this day, still has twelve to fifteen students. She had a recital recently that we attended at Fifth Reformed Church in Grand Rapids. The same way is true of my sister Elaine’s children. By the way, our girls all went to Hope, as did my husband and I. My sister Elaine and her husband and her four daughters and now her third grandchild is going to attend Hope. Quite a Hopeite family. They all play instruments, too. My sister, Dorothy, became a nurse. She went to Butterworth Hospital in Grand Rapids. She had three boys. I had three girls. Elaine had four girls. Dorothy, three boys, and she lives in Florida. Her oldest son went to Hope.

AP: Could you tell me what it was like in the wintertime here? You mentioned a little bit that you would skate.

EM: Yes, at the tennis courts. We did that in junior high and high school. But in grade school, I had a friend who lived on West 10th Street just before Van Raalte Avenue, which borders the entrance to Kollen Park. We would ice skate on the lake. The city would sweep or blow off snow and smooth the ice off in certain section. When I’d go to her home after school, I’d carry my ice skates on my shoulder, and we’d take our boots and shoes off there and get in our ice skates, and walk down to Kollen Park there, and skate on the lake. That was fun, too. We had ice boats instead of sail boats. Then we would go to Holland Country Club. You were allowed then, and
when my girls were little, to slide down there. We’d take a toboggan, do a lot of that on a Saturday, sledding. Now, over here at Van Raalte Park they do it. I don’t think you’re allowed to do that anymore at the country club. It’s too hard on the hills there. But, those days, there weren’t so many people in Holland. At the most, I think, when I was a young girl, there were 25,000 when I was in high school. I bet when I was in grade school, there were maybe 15,000. My father, he was a very friendly man and got about town a lot, in his work and church. I used to think he knew everybody in Holland.

AP: What was Christmas like?

EM: Well, again, my folks always got their own tree out in the woods. When I was real little, my girls today can hardly believe this, instead of just lights on the tree, we had little candle holders that would snap on like a clothespin. You, of course, would have to be there all the time, but we had little candles on the trees. My folks made a lot of Christmas. I had two sisters, and my mother would arrange our gifts in sections by the tree. I remember running down the stairs...

AP: Did they all get out right before you woke up, the presents? They set them out after you went to bed?

EM: Yes. So we’d run downstairs. We couldn’t wait: "May we get up now? May we get up?" We’d run downstairs, and I guess my mother would say, that’s yours. I remember so well my last, big beautiful doll sitting up in the box, a big baby doll. Then, maybe a sled or a crib with it for the doll. We each would open up our gifts on Christmas morning. Some people do it Christmas Eve, but we always did it
Christmas morning. Relatives, we’d have a meal. Maybe that more on New Year’s. Christmas was our family. New Year’s we’d always get together with relatives, take turns going to their homes. We’d always have a big meal and everybody would bring something. I can remember, one time my mother even bringing the chicken soup. We had a great big kettle in our car. Today you’d think the hostess would have the soup. And mashing the potatoes in a great big tub. I can remember my uncle mashing those potatoes by hand.

AP: My grandpa still does.

EM: Really? It’s funny, at this garage sale at Barbara’s last week, I had a potato masher. I thought, I’m not going to use that anymore. But she wanted that. She said, I’ll take that. I don’t know what she’s going to use that for. But, Thanksgiving, too, we always made a lot of Thanksgiving dinner with relatives, take turns going to their homes. My mother liked to entertain. Often on Sunday nights after church, we would have guests, or they would go to other homes, too. I guess that’s why I’ve kind of followed that tradition. We have guests often. My mother was immaculately clean. That’s what my husband says I take after. But I think, really, my grandparents were, too, very clean in their homes. I remember some relatives visited my grandmother from Germany. They told me, when we visited them from Germany, the younger ones, "We remember how your grandma didn’t expect us, but her home was so neat and clean." So maybe that’s passed down. Everybody thinks my mother was true clean, and I guess they think I’m true clean, because I clean house regularly every year. Every room gets touched. A lot of people say, we just
clean a room when it needs it. I guess I’m like my mother. We thoroughly clean house. Walls, ceiling, everything. But it just makes you feel good. My mother had an open front porch with spindles. People tell me it was the cleanest porch in Holland. She was always washing her front porch. But being open, the wind and dust can get at it quicker. I just figure it’s good exercise, too. I get a lot of exercise bending, going up and down. I couldn’t live in a condo at this point. I tell people I’m not old enough. I couldn’t just be cramped into a little house or a few little rooms. Now, of course, our family’s not here anymore. When we built this home, when we retired, which now will be 14 years, then Barbie was still home. Mary went into a condo then. It’s ideal for her as a teacher. Barbara has her bedroom upstairs and chose her own carpet and coloring on the walls. It still is nice when they come home. We have all of our holiday meals here. When I have guests, now my little granddaughter will be in that room now again, for three more nights, like she was last weekend. She says, "I want to be in Barbie’s room. She wants that big room." But Aaron, he hopes to come to Hope in a year, he’ll be a senior next year. He even said, well, maybe I could save room and board money by staying at grandma and grandpa’s house. Who knows? It would be great if we’d have another room for him. Last year in July, we had two German relatives come here. They stayed with us for a week. We’ve had others previously. Of course, my husband’s got relatives in Iowa, so they visit us, too. We like to entertain. I still have a dining room table, which comes in very handy. It’s a lot of work, but it’s fun, too.

AP: How do you see the city’s change, the growth? What do you think of it?
EM: Tremendous. Too fast. We don’t like it. I know it’s good to welcome people of all different nationalities, but it’s far from being Dutch anymore. Of course, Dutch people aren’t the only people. When I taught school at Longfellow, there were quite a few Spanish coming in. It was difficult for those children. The parents couldn’t come to conferences because they couldn’t speak English. Now, of course, they’re giving English as a second language, but the children found it very hard. I think Mary doesn’t have as much in Grand Haven, Barbie has it some what. There are exceptions, of course, but they were always the slower students, hard for them to get ahead. It made it very difficult for them. I know the Spanish like to come to Holland because it is such a lovely place to live, and they bring their relatives. But it’s hardly fair to the children. It’s very difficult for them. You find that they’re never the top students. Now, when I go to the grocery store, Meijer is near here, you hear all these languages, and it’s hard to speak with them. I’m just amazed sometimes. There was a clerk just recently, a check out girl. She said, "You look so familiar. Did you ever work here? Where have I seen you?" I said, "Maybe in school." "Oh sure, I had you in second grade." Isn’t that something. Hernandez was the name, and I remember I had a Hernandez. But now, there’s a girl who’s a checkout girl. So she did pretty well in school, I guess, to get that position. We have neighbors here, they’re Cambodian, back of us. They are friendly. In fact, we’ve been invited to their son’s graduation party. Now he’s moved to Texas to live with his sister. The father, who came here with about six children, now has moved to Texas. There are only two girls left at home. They take care of the lawn. They
take care of the garden, a little garden. They used to have a big garden for their father to give him something to do. But, they have nothing to do with the neighbors. We've invited them to our church, but they've always declined to go. They really don't have anything to their life. They work, one girl on one shift and one another, at Haworth. In between, they take care of the yard, they're very neat, clean people. I don't know how they're able to keep up that big home. They built that home. Their father, perhaps, built it for the family, but one by one they are gone. These two girls are not married. They're still living there. When I see that, they don't have much to life in Holland. If they would get involved with the church... (tape ends) We have people back there on another cul de sac, and they are from India. I see them wear their Saris. Of course, they are a little farther removed from us and I don't talk with them, but I don't think they have anything to do with the neighbors back of them. When I think about I grew up with so much neighborliness and fun with the neighborhood, they don't have that.

AP: So you think that the people coming in from different areas, they're not getting involved with the community as much, so they're not getting as much out of it? That's kind of hard, because they come here because Holland is such a nice community, and it's hard for them to take advantage of that.

EM: Plus it's work that brings them. But a lot of people just look for work here, they don't have work. As a result, a lot of them are on welfare and the city has to take care of them. Some of them move back. But we feel it's growing too fast because of traffic, too. There's more accidents then we ever used to hear of. Brings that. It
brings crime. We never had gangs before, never heard of such things. Now the parks are getting filled with other nationalities. You go to Kollen Park on a Sunday, even a Saturday, it's just full of the Spanish people, they just seem to take over. That hinders, sometimes, others from going there. It's changed, the complexion of the community, quite a bit, and not for the good.

AP: It seems that with such fast growth it's hard for the town to keep up. A lot of things like you mentioned with the traffic, things just kind of boom and now they're trying to fix it. We're playing catch-up. So that makes for rough times.

EM: Right. Now they're going to have something in the park this weekend. I'm not sure what they call it. But it's for all the nationalities, and they're going to have ethnic foods and quite a celebration, which is good, too. I think our museum is doing a lot with displays on various countries, which is good, too. Now, I imagine, even at Hope College, when I was there, I don't think there was one black student, maybe not a foreign student. Now, look what there are. Maybe 25 different countries have students here, at least.

AP: They have a good international program. They've worked hard for that. They do have a good chunk of international students.

EM: There's a Japanese student at the seminary that we have befriended. His name is Tominobu Tokisago. His wife's name is Yumi. Very nice couple. They've been at our church. We've had them here for dinner. We've been invited to their home. In fact, there's a Japanese service once a month at Third Reformed Church. Tom, as we call him for short, was going to preach there a few weeks ago, and they invited us
to come there. Of course, we didn't understand a word, but at least we know how he performs as a pastor, when he goes back to Japan. My girls and I have given her quite a few clothes. She seems to be able to fit into them, which is nice, makes us feel good. They're so appreciative. Every time we go there, we first take off our shoes, because when they come here, they take off their shoes. We've always got to have tea or something. Sometimes when I go there, I say, "No tea, I'm only going to be here for a short time, I have a lot of things to do." "Oh no, come in, come in. Have a little ice coffee." He tells me that they are more acquainted with ice coffee than ice tea. "While Yumi tries on the clothes, you must have a little coffee." They are very nice people, we hate to see them go. When we were at Sixth Church, we also befriended a Japanese boy who started Hope College. We got a family at our church to let him live there for room and board. He enjoyed being at our home so much. Barbara was only three years, and he'd play paper dolls with her on the floor, and different games, and he said, "I wish Barbie would never grow up." He just loved to play with her. Thinking of other nationalities, we have befriended them.

When I was a girl at home, there was a black man from Alabama, Brewton Southern Normal School, who came to Holland to speak at our church. My folks had him over for dinner. I took him with me one day to the sixth grade at Washington School, and he spoke to the children. Was that eye opening, the first black person they ever saw. He talked about growing cotton in the south. Then later on, the next director of the Brewton School was Andrew Branch, and he came to the Western Seminary. My folks had him over to dinner. Maybe I get that from my parents. Then, later on,
another year, when we were in the ministry in Holland, he came to Holland again, and we befriended him. Henry met him at the depot. How sad we felt. He was the last person to get off the train. He let all the white people get off first, then he got off. Henry brought him to our home. I told my girls, who were little, that the next morning they were going to see a black man there, because he was going to sleep over night at our home. I wondered how that would go, because he was at the breakfast table when they came down. But he smiled, a beautiful smile, with those white teeth. Just like that, there was no fright at all. He made them feel as if he were in white skin. I know when he was gone, they ran upstairs to see if there was black on the pillow case.

AP: That was the first time they had ever seen anybody of color? So that was an event?

EM: Yes, it truly was. I know my husband, he was about his size, and he gave him a suit. He was so thrilled to get that suit. It was a light beige suit. He was so appreciative.

We have entertained, being in the ministry, many missionaries from Arabia, India, Indonesia and Taiwan. That way our girls got acquainted with those from other countries that way. My parents did that, too, entertained missionaries. In fact, I was cleaning house, my linen closet upstairs, this year and I showed my husband. I said, here's something I got as a little girl. It was a woven fan that the Dykstra's brought from Arabia. He said, you better take that to church. That's what it was used for.

They brought us clay dolls. Of course, those have crumpled since. Then, we have a very good friend in Taiwan. She's from the states. But, we befriended a young student from New Jersey, when he came to Hope College. My cousin, who was a
minister’s wife there, told us about Bill Estell who’d be coming to Hope, and would we make him acquainted, because he knew nobody here. So he had all his Holiday meals with us, Thanksgiving and Christmas, he didn’t go back home. In time, he went to Japan as a short term missionary, three years, then went to seminary here, and decided he wanted to go back as a missionary full time. Over there he met a single girl. They in turn had four boys. These four boys all came to Hope. So, one by one, we befriended these boys, because they didn’t have family here. Every time the Estells came, as we still do to this day, we meet the missionaries, and we return them to the airport. His first wife died, and he remarried another girl, who was a missionary there, named Judy. Here she stepped into this family of four boys. It was really something. Eileen was a wonderful mother for these children, but she died of cancer. Judy took over, and they, in turn, had three girls. Isn’t that something? Seven children. But the boys gradually were older, and these girls, we received a graduation card with a picture of the sixth child graduating now from high school. But Judy, now, is doing secretarial work. She works for the president of this seminary in Taiwan. She also has Bible classes, even in a prison, and she teaches piano and teaches English, somewhat, in the seminary. She now, will come to the states this month. They often stay in a missionary home in Holland, but we will again meet her in Grand Rapids. That way, we learn about foreigner, foreign students in other countries. Very interesting life.

AP: You mentioned, too, you were sad to see churches close and consolidate. The church that your husband had served at Sixth Reformed.
EM: We were there many years, so of course these people die, too. They don’t keep on, the older folks. This is interesting, though, Sixth Church has now joined with Calvary over here in the Holland Heights area. But at one time, Sixth Church was so full, and as people started building in this east part of town, which used to just be country, it was felt that there should be a church here. My husband was on a lot of these growth committees, so they started this church here. We felt we could let some of our people go and start this church. Now, to think this church is now mothering some of their church that they came from. It’s quite interesting. Bethel Church in Holland has just closed this past year. Many of those people are going to Trinity Church. I’m just hoping Sixth Church will still be used as a church. I think Hope College has purchased that property. It seems to me maybe a prof is living in the parsonage where we lived, which is right next to the church. The church has been used now for Ridgepoint Church, which is using it as a youth center. Now they are building a new church on 32nd Street, I believe. So I don’t know what will become of that church. I hope that maybe some other group can use it as a church. So we still can see a lot of our former children, as you might say, that have grown up if we went to this church. But, instead, we go to First Reformed, farther away. That’s where I grew up. The new First Church, now, is on State and 26th. We just built a big addition to it. My husband is one of the calling pastors there. It’s nice for me to go to church with those that I grew up with. Some of the former students who were in Sunday School with me are still there. Of course, I’m very much involved with women’s work there. RCWM, Reformed Church Women’s Ministries, Circle, Guild,
those groups I'm involved with.

AP: Have those groups remained strong?

EM: Yes, really compared with a lot of churches in the city. We still meet monthly, my circle and Bible study. Then we all meet together maybe five times a year for a mother daughter banquet, Lenten breakfast, Christmas parties, so forth. In fact, we’re having our Classis fall conference at our church this September. I’ve been a rep to that from our church, classical union group. So I’m still involved with church work.

AP: Do a lot of younger women get involved with women’s groups?

EM: Now that’s different then it used to be, because with women working. That’s why we have an evening circle, which meets their needs. They aren’t able to go to our morning or afternoon circles. Even at that, we don’t reach all the young women. Some say, we’re busy working all day, that that’s the time to spend with their family at night. I can see that, too.

AP: What kinds of things do those groups do?

EM: We have a Bible study. This year it has been written by Dr. Ed Mulder from the east. I think he’s one of the pastors of the Marble Collegiate Church. Every year it’s written by a different person. Our circles, and this is true of all the Reformed Church women, that’s why if you move from one city to another, you’d still be studying the same book with your Bible study. We have that Bible study first. It used to be that women took turns leading it. This year, one of our calling ministers has led that study. He spoke to every circle. In fact, the morning circles all meet
together first, and then he talks about it, then he goes to our evening circle. We only have one evening circle. After that, we have our business meeting, and then our social hour. This is the one this year: Renewing Your Minds, God’s People Transformed. We have a three year commitment, theme you might say. This year it was God’s People Transformed. Next year will be our triennial, which means women come from coast to coast. It meets in different places. Last year I went to it with my three girls, and my sister went with two girls, and that’s what’s fun, too, you have a lot of family togetherness and friends and people you grew up with and now live in different cities, if they’re involved with women’s work. It was in Saratoga Springs, New York last year, which was a nice place to go to. Next year it’s going to be at the Amway of Grand Rapids. My girls aren’t too happy about that, because it’s too close to home. Six years ago it was at Estes Park in Colorado. Two of my daughters went with me to that, and both my sisters were there, and relatives from Chicago and Iowa. It’s fun to see everybody and still have a nice time of Bible study. We are to read it ahead of time and take part in discussion. This was our program booklet, and our circles were all listed in here with our calendar. We take turns serving. It’s well worked out. We’re all in different circles, and we change circles every two years. Each circle has a spiritual life, organization, and service chairman. Special boards, Leper Board, Bible League, Children Covenant, Resthaven, Guild. We help various causes and have representatives to these. We help a lot in church when it comes to serving at weddings, anniversary celebrations, funerals. Our collections do a lot for the church, help the different needs of the
church. But our main emphasis is missions. Our church supports several missionaries and we give to them also. So if you belong to the Reformed Church, and I’m sure this is true in other organizations, too, there’s a lot of it the women do. It’s good to get involved. That way, you make friends, too. My mother always said that, if you move to a different city, be sure you join the church, and that way you’ll make good friends. That’s what’s true when we speak about all these people coming to Holland. They are invited to our church, our church is open to everybody. When we have Bible school now, we do attract a lot of children from the neighborhood, as we did at Sixth Church. In that way, you get the children, but to get the parents is very hard. Of course, the language is a big thing. Now, at First Church, too, we just don’t have anybody from other nationalities. We’d be glad to have them. For a while, we had a family from Cambodia, but they didn’t keep it up.

AP: But it may just take time. The city’s kind of going through growing pains.

EM: The Catholic Church gets quite a few Spanish, I think.

AP: Well, also Mexican American tradition is much more strongly rooted in Catholicism, so a lot more of them our Catholic and probably have been raised that way, and it’s very important for them to stay with their denomination.

EM: Maybe they have a Spanish service, too. That could be, a Spanish mass.

AP: That could be it too. A lot of them our brought up in Catholicism.

EM: Hard to change.

AP: Especially from Catholicism. A lot of my friends are Catholic. They would compare being Catholic to being Dutch or being German, you don’t just not be Catholic.
That’s very important.

EM: It’d be hard for me to change, too.

AP: Yes. The amount of Catholics have been growing, too, in the city?

EM: We have a Catholic Church north of town now. The Catholic Church used to be a very small church in Holland, very small. Smallest church in Holland.

AP: That was one of the things kids used to tease other kids about, that was the big difference?

EM: When I grew up, as a little girl, we had Catholic neighbors right next store. She had been Protestant, the lady, and she was always interested in what we did in our church. I could tell that she still had that interest. But she went along with her husband.

AP: In the Catholic Church you would have to, or else he couldn’t be Catholic anymore. The priest wouldn’t marry them unless she converted. So either he would have to get married in a Protestant Church, or she would have to convert to Catholicism.

EM: I guess she did, but she was very interested in what we still did.

AP: I think you miss what you grew up with. To you that’s what seems most natural. Everybody craves to keep that.

EM: But we never really had any differences. We never, as children, did that at all. In Holland, even to this day, we don’t have a Catholic high school or junior high. So the children would go to their school for grade school, and then starting seventh grade, come to our junior high or high school. We always began our day with devotions in school. In fact, our principal would get up in front of our big
auditorium where we all met in the morning, in Holland High School. Mr. Riemersma would read the Bible, and we would all say the Lord's Prayer. We had one Jewish family, the Padnos', we still have the Padnos, well, we always called it the junk yard, but the metal works is still run by the Padnos family. But they were very cooperative. Today, if one person is against it, we'd have to stop it. But there were two Padnos families. In fact, my girls grew up with their boys, too. When the youngest boy of Stewart Padnos was born, he was their third child, and they had two other boys. Barbie was our youngest, and I had two other girls. Mrs. Padnos said to me, now, wouldn't it be nice if you had a boy and I had a girl. We both again got a boy and a girl. I would see her every once in while. We always joke about that. But that Padnos family went right along with us. I don't know if their children repeated the Lord's Prayer, but they let us do that. That was really nice when I grew up, we'd have this whole auditorium, 10th, 11th, and 12th grade, all begin our day with devotions. I think, to this day, that just gave a wonderful start to the day. We didn't begin with fighting or scrapping or teasing, everybody was quiet. We began the day that way. It was like our room period.

AP: Did you say the pledge to the flag, too?

EM: Yes, we also did that, too.

AP: That's not required anymore. We never did that in high school. I don't know, just no time for it.

EM: They surely still have Bible in the Christian schools. My grandchildren go to the Christian school in Grand Rapids, just because they feel the public schools are too
diversified, I guess. But they have Bible required there. They go to the Reformed Church. The Christian School is growing rapidly in Holland, too. Of course, there’s tuition they have to pay. Now we’re getting these charter schools in Holland. Black River School and other schools, which is hard on the public schools, because they get the money that’s given by the state to every student. It’s creating a problem in Holland now.

AP: Yes, I think their budgets are slightly smaller now.

EM: Right. They’re to cut out some teachers or some programs. We have a wonderful public school system. Wonderful teachers, not just because I was one of them. But I know that we’ve always had very good teachers, good curriculum.

AP: Good placements in test and scores, I’ve heard that on the news and in the paper.

EM: There’s always been that little conflict between the Reformed and Christian Reformed. I don’t know if that’s true in other cities or not, but it’s always been so here in Holland. Of course, I have two sons-in-law who graduated from Calvin, and they’re very fine young men. We get along just beautifully, until it comes to the Hope-Calvin games. (laughs) And when it comes to Aaron deciding college next year, I don’t know. His grandparents are staunch Christian Reformers in Grand Rapids, and they live right there. But we live here, and we’re Hopeites. I think he’s leaning toward Hope. He went to the Hope day when juniors could come here, with about sixteen from his school, and a lot of them were favorably impressed. It’s just the idea, too, of getting out of town. Although Hope is very high, its tuition is terrific. It’s very expensive. Calvin is almost as much, not quite. But if you went to
a state school, it’d be a lot cheaper. Most students work though, they get a job of some sorts. He’s working hard this summer. He’s at camp this week. He is working for a landscape concern, and he is mowing lawns on a stand up lawn mower. He’s mowing big stretches at a time. We hold our breath and say, Aaron, be careful. These slanting hills and lawns and big estates… But he’s saving his money for college, so he’s working hard. He could work at Eastern Floral, too, which he did, all during the school year. Now that he has his driver’s license, he has been delivering flowers, especially on weekends and holidays. He has to go all over the place, Grand Rapids is a big city. But he can make a little more this way this summer, so he’s saving his money. Even little Emily already, she’ll be a tenth grader next year, I can’t believe it. But she’s baby-sitting. She’s very artistic, so arranges a lot of bouquets and arrangements at Eastern Floral, so she’s saving her money that way. She is very good at that. She better take up art, I think. Well, anything else?

AP: I was going to ask you if there was anything else.

EM: From birth to this point. I’m involved in the Literary Club in Holland. It’s a social activity for me, they have a lot of wonderful programs, good speakers, good music. A lot of it comes from Hope College, too. It’s a nice activity for me. I did belong to AAUW, American Association of University Women. I’m not doing that right now, because I just seem to be involved with so many other things. Can’t keep up everything. We have a lot of neighborhood gatherings here, too. We’ll soon have a picnic, we bring out our picnic tables into the cul de sac. Everybody brings something, and we have a nice potluck. At Christmas time, we take turns. That’s
when I'm glad I have a big home. All the neighbors come here. It will soon be my
turn. We take turns, too. We've only had about one or two people that have moved
out, but then the new people join in. Most of us have lived here a long time. Two
families were here before we moved. We only have about seven or eight, but we
have a nice neighborhood. That, again, is sort of a potluck. It's a nice gathering.

Living here, I'm involved with my flowers, my garden. We don't have a big garden,
but I enjoy flowers. I have a few tomato plants and a few green pepper plants. I'd
like a bigger garden, really, but my husband doesn't want to cut up the lawn for that
reason.

AP: But then he wouldn't have to mow it. My dad says, just make the edges straight so
it's not hard to mow around. He doesn't mind if my mom plants around the trees or
the corners, because then he doesn't have to mow those tricky spot. He's like, we'll
put a flower bed there.

EM: I'll have to tell him that. I have a wonderful husband. We have been married 54
years. For this and our dear, loving family and fine Christian parents, I am truly
thankful to my Heavenly Father.