11-19-1997

Padnos, Stuart Oral History Interview: Sesquicentennial of Holland, "150 Stories for 150 Years"

Larry Wagenaar

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.hope.edu/ses_holland
Part of the Archival Science Commons, and the Oral History Commons

Recommended Citation

http://digitalcommons.hope.edu/ses_holland/93

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Oral History Interviews at Digital Commons @ Hope College. It has been accepted for inclusion in Sesquicentennial of Holland, "150 Stories for 150 Years" by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Hope College. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@hope.edu.
Oral History Interview with
Stuart Padnos

Conducted November 19, 1997
by Larry Wagenaar

Sesquicentennial Oral History Project
"150 Stories for 150 Years"
LW: Mr. Padnos, could you state your full name and your date of birth?

SP: Stuart B. Padnos. I was born [date removed], 1922.

LW: And where were you born?

SP: In Grand Rapids--Butterworth Hospital, only because Holland did not have at that time what was considered to be a satisfactory hospital.

LW: The Holland Hospital at that time was...

SP: I don't know what it was but my mother delivered both my brother and me in Grand Rapids.

LW: What were your parents' names?

SP: My mother was Helen Kantor Padnos and my father was Louis Padnos.

LW: So you lived in Holland all of your life?

SP: Yes, I have.

LW: Tell me about your first memories.

SP: We lived on Eighth Street where the Post Office is now located. I always jokingly tell people that we didn't quite live on the wrong side of the tracks but we got full credit for being over there any way. The scrap yard was right next door and that was our first playground. There were no playground facilities at all so we played in the railroad yard on Seventh Street and down in the swamp which is now Windmill Island. That's very early on.
LW: Your memory goes back farther when you were five or four?

SP: Yes, four or five years old. I went to Lincoln School which was right just down the street a little bit. It wasn’t long after being born in ’22 by the time I was seven or eight years old, the Depression was in full swing.

LW: How did the Depression affect your family?

SP: Not as much as it might have affected people who didn’t have a job. My father always worked. He always employed people. And there was a different feeling in people then. Even though there were times when he couldn’t pay them their whole week’s pay, he would give them part of it. And even though they could have gone on some work relief program or project administration or PWA and made just as much money probably, what my dad had to offer at that time was considered to be a real job. Today we don’t have any welfare recipients in Ottawa County anymore, but at one time when we did people equated a job offer as to how much more that would be than what they were getting as a welfare check. If it was only modestly more, the answer was, “Well, I’m not going to work for that amount of money when I can sit on my buns and collect this much. Back then, that wasn’t the way people felt. They refer to them today as entitlements which I think is a terrible term. But then it was welfare. They would rather work, even though work in the scrap business was unbelievably hard. A major piece of equipment in a scrap yard when I was a little kid was a sledge hammer. Today if I wanted a sledge hammer I’d have to go in the garage to find one.

LW: So much of the material was dismantled by hand?
SP: By hand. Loaded by hand, broken by hand, picked up by hand. Everything done by hand, and it was hard work.

LW: What age were you when you started working for your father?

SP: My father never would pay us for working. He took the attitude that this was a family business and we all did whatever we could. Not that I was denied that which could be afforded. My father was extremely generous. Years later in high school, if I was going out on a date, for example, and I asked for a dollar, I usually got more than that with the expectation that when I got home I would give back what I didn’t use. Later on I did work elsewhere. I worked when I was in high school. I ran the cigar counter in Peck’s Drug Store--that’s right where Reader’s World is today. The reason that was such a good job was two-fold. One, it paid ten cents an hour, and on Saturdays we worked twelve hours a day--that store was open twelve hours--so we made a dollar and twenty cents which was twenty cents more than a lot of grown men were making a day. Also, they had little tabs on the merchandise--they were called inventory control tabs. All the little coupons that the clerk tore off when he sold it and pasted it in a book just like Green Stamps and they had things you could get with the coupons.

LW: Do you remember the kinds of things you got with the coupons?

SP: They were almost like a Green Stamp book. All sorts of things, you know, baseball gloves I suppose, things that you could use. But basically they were pushing their own brands, so if somebody, for example, came in and asked for aspirin, if you could sell them the brand that Peck’s was featuring rather than Bayer, for example, you got
the coupon. But you know, everybody was poor in those days. I only know a couple of families who before World War II were not just as poor as everybody else. Our financial leaders today, most of them would be the first ones that would tell you that. If you interviewed Jerry Haworth he would tell you what he started working at as a teacher in Holland, Michigan, for very little. And how he needed ten thousand dollars to start his business and no bank would loan it to him. Ed Prince worked his way through college. I’m proud of these things. Some people may not be, but there are very, very few financial leaders in Holland that weren’t poor during the Depression. How did the Depression affect people? Many of those who were wealthy people before the Depression went broke. They were worse off than people like my father because they lost their businesses.

LW: How was your father able to keep it going given the economy. Did he ever relate that to you?

SP: Well, the office was in the house and there wasn’t a matter of relating it. The business was discussed across the dinner table so...How did he keep it going? It didn’t take a lot of money to keep it going. If you worked hard, you found markets. There was always some activity. The foundries and the steel mills and the paper mills were doing some things. People that liked you, and my dad made a lot of friends, if they had the ability they went out of their way to help you. I can recall an instance when the Holland Furniture Company was owned by a man named John Vander Veen. And my dad’s original scrap yard was right where Youth for Christ is now, right across from Holland Furniture. He had no children, and the Boyds who
later owned Holland Furniture Company, inherited it from John Vander Veen. John liked dad and he would stop in just to chat with him. My dad told me that one time John Vander Veen came in and he said, "What's the matter, Louie? You look like you're down in the dumps." And he said, "Oh, you know, I buy paper and newspaper and what not from people and I just can't sell it." John said to him, "Well there's this mill down in Otsego. Why don't you sell it there?" And at that time they were getting everything from brokers in Chicago and that was the easy way to do it and they just wouldn't talk to anybody else. So Dad told him that. And John said, "That doesn't make any sense when the stuff is right here in their back yard." Well, a few days later out of the clear blue my dad got a call from the Mac Sim Bar Paper Company in Otsego. The president of the company said, "I understand you are baling waste paper there. We buy that. If you want to sell it, bring it down and we'll buy all you can produce." And many, many years later, John Vander Veen died and his obituary noted that he was the Chairman of the Board of the Mac Sim Bar Paper Company. He never said anything to my dad. He just did it.

LW: That was just the way it was done. Help each other out. Where did your father buy his scrap? Can you tell me a little bit about how the process?

SP: He left Russia as a young kid all by himself and he arrived in the United States all by himself. He knew that he had brothers and sisters in Chicago and he tried to get there, and that's too long a story to go into but that's another whole history. But when he finally did get back to Chicago, he was peddling dry goods around Chicago. And in going across Europe, he had landed in the Netherlands and you couldn't walk
any further. My dad had a unbelievable capability of picking up foreign languages, just uncanny. My middle son inherited that. Dan, the one that just called me, I think speaks five or six languages.

LW: I wish I had that skill!

SP: Dan speaks Hebrew, of course, because he lived there for fifteen years. Spanish, he’s fluent in Arabic, German. My dad learned to speak fluent Dutch. He not only spoke Dutch, but he could speak Fries! I have been with him when he would talk to a Frieslander and then turn to a Dutchman and translate into Dutch what the Frieslander had just said. So somebody told him about this little town up in Michigan where everybody spoke Dutch and they said, "You’d be a natural!" So he got on the boat and he came here and he was peddling around here, and I can’t think of the man’s name offhand...I can get it but one of Van Raalte’s grandsons, I believe...my dad was looking at an empty store building on River Avenue and this man talked to him and said, "Well, you know you seem like an industrious hard working young man. Why don’t you move in here? I own this building. Try it out for location and if you can make a go of it, you’ll start paying me some rent. And my dad soon discovered that the farmers around here liked the merchandise he had, but they didn’t have any money. But they all had scrap iron on the farms or they had hides. They trapped in the fall, bones, anything that you could buy or sell. So he started bartering. There was an empty lot next door to the store and that’s how he started in the scrap business. Then he brought a brother of his to Holland, an older brother, to run the clothing business and he ran the scrap business. After some years the brother
couldn't stand Holland. He wasn't married and was pretty isolated especially for a young Jewish man in Holland, it wasn't exactly paradise. So he quit and went back to Chicago and that was the end of the clothing business.

LW: I would imagine that your parents found it difficult, at least religiously.

SP: Well, that would be the case. There's times I've gone to Grand Rapids and back two or three times on a weekend because of some circumstances or another. And when my kids were young and we were a young married couple, it was standard procedure. We'd go to religious services on Friday night. We'd be invited out to some party or another Saturday night and on Sunday morning I would take the kids in to Sunday School. So on a weekend it was at least three trips back and forth. But when my dad was young, a trip to Grand Rapids was an adventure. I can remember this distinctly. When I was in grade school, a teacher asked how many of us had ever been to Grand Rapids? A good share of us. Then she asked, how many have ever been to Chicago? And I raised my hand all by myself. I was the only one because we used to get on the boat and go to Chicago because my dad's family was in Chicago. But I was the only one in the class that had ever been to Chicago. So, you didn't just get up and bop off to Grand Rapids. It was extremely difficult for them.

LW: Did your father run into barriers here in the community because of that difference?

SP: Well, yes and no. There were some people who delighted in making their life miserable if they could. There were a couple of people on City Council that did that and that went on even many years later. I fought that battle and won it. There was an ordinance in the City of Holland--and I laugh about Western Machine Tool because
it's the same ordinance—that prohibited industries in Holland. A big, long list. Of course, scrap yard (I think it was called "junk yard") was on the list, but you couldn't have a machine shop in Holland, you couldn't fabricate iron and steel, you couldn't have a foundry, you couldn't have a paper mill. You could make furniture in Holland—period. And this was something that was initiated by the furniture manufacturers. Woodworking trades historically, and have been low paying jobs. Whereas the metal working trades were high paying jobs. Well, now, if you're in control of the City, what do you do about that? You outlaw them.

LW: Because you want to control the labor market.

SP: That's right! You see, this is what happens when you try to write a history you jump all over the place. When I came back out of the army, I joined the Junior Chamber of Commerce. The first thing, if you're a new member, you better get a job right now. So I was appointed Civic Affairs Chairman. One rainy day I was sitting out at my folk's cottage, nothing else to do, so I got this book of ordinances down they'd given me and started reading. And I came to this ordinance covering junk yards as well as every other thing—including Western Michigan Tool and Holland Furnace and anything that was job producing in Holland other than furniture was covered in that ordinance.

LW: Was technically illegal (laughter).

SP: Was technically illegal. There were these two aldermen, Bertal Slagh and Tony Peerboldt. Tony was a old country Dutchman and he was an alderman. And I'm loaded and I'm waiting for him. They showed up, their semi-annual visit. They
I can't recall why they were going to close us down this time, but they had a reason. I looked at Tony and said, "Tony, you know, I always thought you were an honest man. I didn't think you'd use your position on City Council to run an illicit business." And he looked at me and he says, "What do you mean illicit?" I said, "Well, Tony," I said, "What do you do over there? You have that tin shop. You bend metal, you weld it, you solder it." "Ja! Ja! Ja! That's what we do!" And I said, "Well, that's fabricating!" I walked back to my desk and I had my ordinance book all earmarked and I just had to flip it open and I said, "Tony, read this. Prohibited industries in Holland: Fabrication of iron or steel." I said, "That's what you do and it's against the law." He turned to Bertal Slagh and he said, "Vat the hell kind of ordinance is this!" And I said, "Well, it's the ordinance. That's what kind it is." I said, "Further down the list we're down there too. But, you know, I'll tell you what I want you to do. You go out of here (and Holland Furnace at that time was the big gun in Holland) and you kick Holland Furnace out of town and you go down across town to Bohn Aluminum and Western Machine and Holland Hitch, Busse Machine, all these outfits. Kick them out of town! Got no business here. It's against the law. Get rid of them. Don't worry about us. Long before the last one is gone, we'll have left. But until that time, I don't want to ever see you back down here again. I don't want to have any trouble with you. I don't want to hear another word from you. They stood there and they hopped from one foot to another and they looked at each other and they didn't know what to do. And you know, that was the end of their song and dance for a long time. But that was the sort of harassment that
went on. And you have to understand that when there’s prejudice, it only takes one or two people. Most people don’t want to get involved. Most people just want to do their thing. My brother and I had been junior members of the Macatawa Bay Yacht Club before the war and we raced a little National One sailboat. We were informed that when we went into the army that all guys in the services dues were waived. So we came back and went out to the Yacht Club and the first indication that all was not as it might be was there was a big brass plaque in the Yacht Club listing all of our boys in service. And there were two names that were very obviously missing from the list. My brother’s and mine. Now, I didn’t take this kindly. Back in the infantry I was a POW, a couple Purple Hearts to prove it. Well, maybe it’s an oversight. But then we were told that we were too old to be junior members. We would have to buy regular memberships. And we said, "Well, fine! How much is it?" And we were told, "Well, it isn’t a matter how much it is, there just aren’t any available right now." In the meantime, the guys our age wanted to get racing started again, and they had a deal going where if they could sell so many boats at one time they’d get a special deal on them. So they were hot to sell boats and they wanted us to buy a sailboat. I said to them, "Hey, we’re not buying a racing boat until I know whether I’m going to be able to race it or not." So nothing happened and in the meantime Bob Linn started Bay Haven Yacht Club across the lake. Bob was a good friend and asked us to join. We did, and I was out there trying to get sailing for my kids started out there. Ken O’Meara came over to me out there and said, "Stu, why are you beating your brains out? Why don’t you bring your kids over to Macatawa Bay
where we've got a regular racing program going, they'll learn to sail out there and everything will be fine." I said, "If I'm not welcome out there, my kids aren't welcome." He said, "Well, pay your dues and you're welcome." I said, "No, that's not the way it is." So he left and came back to see me sometime later and he said, "Now, answer me this. If I guarantee that you will be accepted, will you join?" I talked to my brother about it and said, "If we are accepted together, both of us are accepted (a friend of mine had an experience someplace else where one brother was accepted and the other not... that was not uncommon. They had to prove that they were not discriminating so they would accept one Jewish member and having done that, why, that took care of that. They didn't have to do it again). So, what happened was the guys our age went to the next board meeting and told them either this stops or you can have all our resignations. So we were welcomed as members. Today they wouldn't ask whether you were white, green, black or yellow—they wouldn't ask what church or whether you go to church or not.

LW: What year was it that you were finally accepted as a member, do you remember?

SP: I came back in '46 and my kids were sailing, my oldest, so it had to be six or seven years. Since that time, Seymour has been commodore and my youngest son has been commodore so thank goodness that's history. You know, you come back out of the army and I suppose that's a junior version of what some of the Vietnam veterans went through. But, you know, that's a funny thing. One of our employees and I were talking about it and I asked him, "Did that treatment you were talking about, did that happen to you in Holland?" I can't believe it. Because I never realized that was
going on. So that’s sort of the same thing. Other people just don’t pay any attention.

I just took the attitude as far as combat is concerned, if you haven’t been in it, you
don’t know what the hell it’s all about. And everybody is "kill or be killed" in
combat and everybody’s an animal. So whatever they did in Vietnam, I’m sure we
did the same thing in Europe and thought nothing of it.

LW: So you think most of the people in Holland weren’t even aware that this type of thing
happened?

SP: No, I don’t think so. Somebody made a point of it that’s absolutely true, that
Holland changed dramatically. It’s Holland pre-General Electric and post-General
Electric. I think there was more prejudice and anti-Catholic feeling in Holland than
there was anti-Jewish feeling in Holland. After all, we were only one family...

LW: It wasn’t like there was a community.

SP: It’s hard to throw rocks at just one family, but there were enough Catholics in town
so they had a Catholic Church and a Catholic School. So I don’t know what that
means, but there were a substantial number here. But the fact that the cadre for this
plant came from Fort Wayne, which must have (I don’t know Fort Wayne at all)...I
would be willing to bet there must be a sizable Catholic community there because
there were a large number of Catholic people that came with GE. One of them
moved in right behind me, just to show you how naive we are around here, his name
was Kawolski. I know now that’s like Smith, Jones and Brown. When I first knew
him I said, "Boy, that’s an unusual name." And he just cracked up laughing
(laughter)...
LW: So General Electric really brought in a new diversity?

SP: A new diversity. And it changed a lot of thinking. They had not only a new diversity, but Ab Martin was the top man here. And I don’t know if it was GE policy or whether it was Ab Martin’s policy, but he wanted his people involved in the community. So it just got to the point where you didn’t serve on anything but there were GE guys there as well. It really had a remarkable impact. We’ve had other industries come and go, and even when they went, who noticed it? Holland has such vitality that when GE left, when Chris Craft left, when Holland Furnace left, who noticed it? We didn’t become an eastern mill town. There was no huge wave of unemployment. Henry House closed up and everybody that’s involved with hiring said, "Hey, that’s great! Maybe we can hire some of those people!"

LW: So there’s a lot of industrial and business diversity?

SP: The other thing about the diversity of Holland is that up until, for the most part we’ve had a lot of home-owned industry and, boy, I’ll tell you there’s nothin’ like it! When you run a charity drive...I’ll never forget, also GE, Ab Martin was a good friend of mine. When we started HEDCOR, I was president of the Chamber of Commerce. I was voted Man of the Year for having started HEDCOR. Well, go out to HEDCOR, see who’s there and tell me who is new. Got Beechnut, that’s a new one. Now where do you go? Who’s next? We provided a place for industry to go! Instead of being scattered like a shot gun all over town...Look where Thermatron is, right across the street from a city park, right facing the Lake. The sugar beet factory was right there on the lake shore. Heinz is there on the lake. We’re on the lake. Board
of Public Works. We’re on the lake for a reason. BPW is there for a reason. But Parke Davis doesn’t need to be on the lake. Holland Hitch doesn’t need to be in a what ought to be a residential area. Now you don’t see that. Now, even though they’ve run out of room in what was the industrial park, it expands into the townships but in the industrial park. We provided a place for industry to grow. We purchased land at a reasonable price and we warehoused it until it was needed at reasonable prices, instead of somebody out there, "Oh, we hear so and so is looking in Holland...Haworth has to expand out here." And they drive them out of town because they can’t get the land.

LW: Tell me the story of starting HEDCOR. You tell me a sort of a mission.

SP: Well, I got sort of roped into it. I was elected to the Board of the Holland Chamber of Commerce. Now, that’s what I’m talking about being in a small town. That just wouldn’t happen to somebody in the scrap business in Detroit. You got too many people from Ford and GM and they’re going to occupy those jobs. I guess I became a vice-president. I was an officer at any rate. And the man who was supposed to become the president worked for General Electric, Harold Denning, I think was his name, and he got transferred. And all of a sudden they needed somebody to step in. And I’m sitting in a board dinner, there were always dinner meetings and as you can tell I like to eat my dinner, and all of sudden I hear this discussion, "What are we going to do?" Have you ever been minding your own business and all of a sudden you get the feeling that everybody is looking at you? And I look up and everybody’s staring and I say, "Whoa! Back off! I am not prepared to be president of the
Chamber. So, a marvelous man, Jay Petter said to me, "Stu, you take it and I'll work with you on it. It won't be that big a deal." So I agreed. I look at the Chamber today and I really laugh because when I took the job as president, Bill Vande Water was the paid secretary drawing a miserable salary, and he came to me with next year's budget. I went through the budget that night and the next day I called him up. "Bill," I said, "what they hell are you giving me? We don't have that kind of money." And he said, "Stu, we don't spend any of that. We have to submit a budget to Washington and we ought to make it look like it means something and so we put all that stuff in there." I said, "Bill, you come back with a budget just the way it is." "Oh, we can't do that!" he said. And I said, "The hell we can't. You come to me with exactly a balanced budget on what we got coming in." And you know they had a set up where they had the Downtown Merchants Association, they belonged to the Chamber of Commerce, but all their money, 100%, went into the Downtown Merchant's fund. And, if it weren't for Holland Furnace there wouldn't be a Chamber of Commerce anyway. We had enough money to pay his salary, a secretary, and a part-time helper. Pay the postage, the telephone bill, the rent and the stationery bill...boom! You're done! That's it! That's all there was. So I went to the next meeting and I said, "Look, I agreed to take the job of president, but either we double the dues income immediately and the Downtown Merchants start helping to support this, and they are the beneficiaries of most of what we do, or I'm not going to waste my time. Because all we have is 'paint me gray, I'm a Chamber of Commerce.' because we don't have one. This is nonsense. And all these
meetings...We do not have a thing." But we did it. Well, now we're feeling affluent and we've got to have a full time secretary. Bill was a nice guy, but he wrote sports articles for the Grand Rapids papers, and then he picked up a few nickels and dimes here. You couldn't ask for a nicer man, but he wasn't a promoter. And you got to have somebody that's got a little...

LW: Marketing savvy...

SP: So we went out and hired somebody. But then everybody said I had to fire Bill Vande Water. I went to the past three presidents who were on my back to fire Bill Vande Water and I said, "If he's so bad, why didn't you fire him?" "Well, he's my wife's cousin." Or, "Bill goes to the same church that I do." And I said, "You know, I'm not going to fire him either! We'll keep him on until he retires." One dealer gave us a car each year and I did have to take his car which was tough enough. But we made it go. Then the idea of economic development came up and we went to a couple of other cities that had them. The first industry that we got, of course, was Beechnut and we did nothing to get it. We just lucked out. They really didn't want to be in Holland, they wanted to be in Benton Harbor. C&O, now it's CSX, had that plant in their back pocket. (end of side A)

LW: So they didn't care as long as it was on the C&O line?

SP: They wanted a hundred acres and Benton Harbor could only come up with an 80 acre plot. Their original plan was to build two plants at Holland--a candy factory and a baby food factory. And we just lucked out that they never built the baby food factory, because had they done it, our waste water treatment employees would have
been standing neck deep because the amount of sewage they would have put down the line could have wiped us out big time! But who knew at that time? But from then on, Brooks went up there and Haworth built up there. It was just one Holland Hitch and Holland Wire Products and Home Furnace which became Lear Siegler. There are a lot of outside names up there now. But they’re outside names because local industries were sold.

LW: So there was quite a bit of local opposition?

SP: Oh yes! And my life was not peaceful for awhile.

LW: How were you able to push it through given the opposition that you ran into at relatively high levels?

SP: We just kept pushing! We knew it was right and it is right! Holland has been cited as an outstanding example of economic development but, as I say, who did we attract to Holland?

LW: Did you have the support of the political leaders of the time?

SP: Yes.

LW: And that was helpful.

SP: That was helpful. Sure, they needed tax base. And this was one way of getting it.

LW: Did you ever consider getting involved politically?

SP: I ran for alderman as a kid. My opponent (laughs) came to me "Oh, you can afford to buy this election!" I can’t even remember his name, another old Dutchman. I said, "Look, I have no intention of buying the election. I’ll do anything you want to do as far as publicity and running ads, posters, anything you want." "Well," he said,
I'd just as soon not run any ads." And I said, "Fine, then I won't run any ads." He said, "Let the people decide." I said, "Fine, let the people decide." The night before the election there was one big ad in the Holland Sentinel, "Joe Blow, member of Fourteenth Street Christian Reformed Church..." I said to Barb, I said, "We're dead! That's all! That's all it took!"

LW: One ad.

SP: One ad. I lost. You know, he swore up and down his friends had done it. He didn't know anything about it. If you believe that, why...(laughs) I've got a bridge up north I'll sell cheap. That was my one and only excursion into politics. But I've done other things. I've been president of the Board of Public Works for a number of years and that's a great experience.

LW: What type of challenges has the BPW faced, especially while you were president and involved?

SP: We had to expand the wastewater treatment plant. We had labor troubles while I was there. But we were fortunate. We were able to hire a young man, Ron Rainson, who did a great job. Well, when I came on the board, I left most decisions to the staff. The day that I was appointed to the Board, I sat down for dinner and the phone rang. There was this big mobile home park on the north side? The man that started that is calling me, and he is just boiling. He's just been told by the Board of Public Works that they will not meter every manufactured home out there. All they will do is give him primary service and he's got to break it down and either meter it or charge everybody a flat fee. But he's got to do the distribution. So I said to the
man, "Hey! Did you read the paper? I was just appointed today. I've never attended a meeting. Give me time to at least find out what it's all about." So I went to the next meeting and I asked the question, "Is that our policy?" "Well, no!" I said, "Even if it was policy, it just strikes me as being not a very smart business move because if we sell bulk power to this guy he's going to buy it at the cheapest rate we've got. If we individually meter these homes, half of them won't even use the minimum that they'll have to pay for. We do nothing but make money on those accounts." "You're right." So, why were we doing this? Why would you guess? Because some meter reader didn't want to have to read all those meters. There was your policy.

LW: And that's how many of the decisions were made?

SP: That's how most of the decisions were made. Is this good for me? Or is this bad for me?

LW: Did you have difficulty wrestling control of those decisions from the...reinvigorating the board?

SP: No, somebody there that would dig into it a little bit. I never want to be a passive member of anything. If I'm going to be on it, I'm going to be active on it.

LW: What other organizations have you served on boards or committees?

SP: I've been on the Community Foundation, the State Resource Recovery Commission, and president of our National Trade Association.

LW: What good has the Community Foundation done from your point of view? What type of impact has it had?
SP: Not the impact that they should have. It's changing and it will have impact. When I came on the board, all it was was a second community fund or community chest. But the same organizations that were going to there, you know, a thousand dollars here and two thousand dollars there, and I said, "This is not what the Foundation is all about." And also in the appointment of directors. You know who should be on? Who's on a college board, who's on--Hope College is a little different. They get some ministers on there. But they're learning also. You either are in a position to give money or get money. Then you're on these boards.

LW: And the Community Foundation at that time...

SP: It was just a social place to be. I looked around for the people that I felt that contribute money or had access to those who could contribute money. Either one will do. Then when it comes to giving money, in my book that should not ever be a repeat giver. They should give the seed money. To me an appropriate thing for our Community Foundation--let's take something like the Area Center. I would say that it would be appropriate for the Community Foundation to donate the money for a feasibility study, for example. Having done so other than pass through funds, you're out of it. You don't give money to the Boy Scouts and the Girl Scouts and this one and that one and the next one for operating costs. Just don't.

LW: Not for operating funds, but to encourage programmatic initiatives.

SP: That's right. It should be a group that is thinking of what does Holland need? Take the Boys and Girls Club. Now, there's something that you can get behind and that's the type of thing. But once they've done it, you don't keep pumping money into it,
even as much as I think of the Boys and Girls Club. It's not something that you keep repeating. Not to pay the director's salary.

LW: They should be raising that money themselves.

SP: Take the museum. You don't keep giving money to the museum. If somebody set up a fund with the Foundation as their trustee to dole out money to the museum, fine! But not because the roof's leaking. Does that make sense?

LW: Yes, it does. I've heard that type of remark from others, not necessarily about the Community Foundation, but what foundations of that nature should do.

SP: Well, what do you think a college president's job is? It's a fund raiser.

LW: Tell me what you think the effect is of...we've see Bil-Mar being bought up by Sara Lee and there have been several other firms that have been bought up by conglomerates. What type of impact do you think that's having on the community?

SP: This is an old Jewish custom to answer a question with a question. (Laughs)

LW: You may do that! (laughs)

SP: Do you think Holland is better off because Prince Corporation is now owned by somebody in Wisconsin? I don't.

LW: I would personally agree with you but...

SP: I shudder to think that one of these days the same thing will happen to Haworth. I look at Grand Rapids. Look what Rich De Vos and Jay Van Andel have done in Grand Rapids. The De Vos family or the Van Andel family--anyway you want to put it.

LW: Major impact.
SP: Major, major, major impact! Because, you see, in the big corporations...why do you think they raise all the money in New York City? Because every board in the country has got their headquarters in New York and every board chairman wants to be in the sunlight at the big event. If he doesn't, his wife does. When I asked Ab Martin...I never finished that story...When I went to him and asked him for money for HEDCOR, you know what he said to me? He said to me, "Well, my God, Stu, you just don't understand! If I were to give Holland money for HEDCOR, GE would have to give money to every town they've got a plant in! And I glared right back at him and I said, "Geez, Ab, wouldn't that be too bad!" Now, it's not that they're not a charitable company. In New York they give money away. Go out here to Heinz and try to get some money. "Get lost," you know. None of them. The only company that's ever acted differently that I know of is Hart and Cooley. As long as I've known that company it was run as though it were a local company as far as charity was concerned. I don't know about the rest of it. They were responsible citizens of Holland. Industry can't just be takers. But national industry, by and large, is.

LW: What ever giving they do is to national groups outside the scope?

SP: Now Bil-Mar, you had De Witts out there. They've given a lot of money all over town. Haven't they?

LW: They sure have.

SP: Go get some now. Not going to happen.

LW: We've seen a lot of ethnic diversity. You spoke of growing up and being Jewish in
Holland. Obviously since you were young, we’ve had a big explosion in the Hispanic community, for example, and more recently the Asian-American community and so on, the African American community. What type of impact, from your point of view, has that had in the community and what challenges do we face?

SP: Well, originally when the Hispanic society in Holland was not as well integrated as it is, the Hispanic families were very, very close-knit, and Hispanic kids did not raise hell. If there was hell raised in Holland it came from the children of some of the best homes in Holland. It did not come from the earlier Hispanics because their father and mother wouldn’t stand for that. I think integration has actually gotten them away from that and I think probably the same thing is true of the Vietnamese families.

LW: Did you run into any resistance as a employer when you began to employ Hispanic members of the community?

SP: This is a funny story if you want a funny story. We had, I think, at one time the only black man that had a job in Holland--Carl Simpson. Terrific man! And I think one of his sons is working for us now. He didn’t want to be recognized as Carl Simpson’s son because he didn’t want to get a job that way. I had a call one day from a man and he said, "Carl Simpson work for you?" And I said, "He sure does." He said, "Well, I think you ought to know that he’s not very honest." I said, "Oh? What would make you say that?" And he said, "He told me he worked for you and he told me that he made..." And I said, "Well. That’s probably right. It sounds a little low. He probably makes somewhat more than that. I’m not sure exactly." He said, "More than that?" And I said, "Well, at least that much." And he said, "Well,
I’ve got a problem with the man.” And I said, "What’s that?” And he said, "He wants to buy my house!” I said, "Oh, and I take it you don’t want to sell the house?” And he said, "No, no, no! I want to sell the house!” I said, "Well…” (I knew what was going on.) I said, "You know, you got a house. You want to sell the house. Carl wants to buy the house. He’s got a good job. He’s not going to get laid off. I guarantee you that. He’s got steady work. He’s a good employee. I don’t understand what your problem is.” And he said, "Well, problem is the neighbors!” And I said, "Oh, now I understand. The neighbors want to buy the house.” He said, "No, no, no! The neighbors don’t want to buy the house.” So I said, "Now wait. Let’s start from the beginning. You have a house for sale. Simpson is looking for a house. He likes your house, he wants to buy your house. He’s got a steady job. Not going to get laid off. He’s got a good income. He can afford to buy your house. Neighbors do not want to buy your house. What’s your problem?” And he said, "Well, my God, man, he’s black!” I said, "My God, he’s blacker than the ace of spades. I know that! But you know, now that you’ve taken this much of my time I think you ought to go to your minister and discuss this, and after you’ve discussed it, I think since you took so much of my time you ought to give me the courtesy of calling me back and let me know what he said.” Bam! Down went the phone! That was the end of that. Simpson did not buy the house. It was near Hope College. I don’t know where exactly it was, but he wanted to buy it because his oldest son was going to go to Hope and he figured if he lived there the kid could walk to school. Live home and walk to school.
LW: Did Carl run into that routinely?

SP: Oh, sure. But Mexicans or Hispanics...the town got used to them because Heinz brought them up here by the truckload. You couldn’t transport animals legally the way they brought Mexican field workers up here. You couldn’t have them live in conditions under which they had these people live. Just before World War II, I was at the University of Michigan, and when they announced gas rationing the Hispanics took off like flies back for Texas. They weren’t going to spend the winter in Michigan. And the sugar beet group was left in the ground. Sugar was a critical commodity. So they went around the University and asked for volunteers to pull sugar beets out of the ground. Well, there’s a war on, you know! The fraternity went out to a man...There was a whole caravan of buses that left Ann Arbor up for the St. Louis, Michigan, area and they took us to the county agent office. The farmers were there and they divided us up and sent us out on the farms. And these people thought we were going to live in the same quarters that they had the field workers living in. Well, you know, squat over a hole in the ground? No running water? Filthy shack? We were willing to work, but nobody was going to live under those conditions. But that’s the way they had these people living here. As far permanent employees, there was never any big influx. It was just one family would stay here for the winter and another family would stay here for the winter. We’ve had some tremendously good Hispanic employees. At the company, we have a policy that anyone who has worked for us a year or better, their children can get a tuition grant to go to college. They can go any place they want to, but it’s based on the
tuition at Grand Valley. So if they want to go to Hope, for instance, which is expensive, they’re not going to get Hope’s tuition; they’re going to get the tuition at Grand Valley. One Hispanic young lady who just got married had graduated from the University of Michigan. She’s got to be the first one in whole family that ever went to college. But her father works in our garage and probably worked there for thirty years or better.

LW: We were talking a little while ago...you mentioned the humorous story of Mr. Simpson and the church and that sort of thing in passing. Obviously the church has a big role in the community because there’s a lot of churches. What type of impact do you think that they’ve had, either positive or negative or both, in Holland?

SP: Oh I think the churches, by and large, have had a positive influence. I think you’ve got more good church leaders by far than you’ve got bad ones. We like to have our employees belong to a church. I don’t care which one. I don’t care how often...I don’t think attending, whether they go to church every Sunday or not, is that important. I would be classified as a heathen if that were the criteria. But I think just taking the responsibility of belonging, of supporting the church is a good...We want solid citizen employees and I think that’s part of it.

LW: Have more Jewish families move into Holland?

SP: Oh yes. One of the comical things about that is my wife started this and it’s traditional at Passover time...the tradition is that you should invite anyone that is without the capability of attending a Passover Seder. You should invite them in to yours. So she started doing that years and years ago, and when it got to the point
where it was too big a group to have it in our house, we went to my son's house because they've got more room. When we finally outgrew my son's house, where do you think we went? Macatawa Bay Yacht Club! (Laughs) And I'll tell you, to the kitchen's credit there, they have done such a fantastic job that you'd swear to God there was a little old Jewish grandma someplace out in the kitchen doing the cooking. Because they make the traditional dishes and they've gotten all the recipes--they just do a fabulous job for us. But I think we had eighty-five people. Now, it's a lot of people. My oldest son has four children. My youngest has one and Seymour's family is here, so there are a lot of Padnoses involved in that--but there's a lot of other people as well.

LW: Tell me a little bit about your wife. How did you meet? Where did you meet?

SP: The army sent me to school in Boston. A lot of circumstances happened there and I met her. She was at Mt. Holyoke but had come home for a holiday or something, and I was introduced and I obviously knew almost from the go this was the little girl that I was going to marry. We didn't date all that much before I went overseas, but I found the one postcard that I was allowed to write from prison camp...and on that I said, "Make sure Barb knows!" I think back. I had a lot of guts to bring her back here because I was offered two fantastic jobs by friends of Barbara's parents who weren't totally enthusiastic about her coming out here to the midwest.

LW: But she agreed to come to Holland?

SP: Without hesitation. She got here and the first thing she did was join AAUW. At that time it was a very small organization because Hope wasn't accredited, so their
members could not belong. So she promptly became an officer. They found new blood for that (laughs). The Garden Club, the Literary Club, and she was president of Junior League. She helped found the Cherry Lane Nursery School. She was on the original board of Community Action House. She started ladies sailing at the Yacht Club and then skippered the ladies’ team in the ladies’ nationals. Their team lost. They sailed in Canada in Montreal, and I think they were in the semi-finals. She was a very good sailor. She loved to ski. She was active in our temple in Grand Rapids, active in the ladies’ organizations there. She was on the board of the executive committee of the Grand Rapids Art Museum. Part of the reason that I donated the room at the Arts Council was that I feel very strongly, and I think very accurately, that there would not be an Arts Council of any consequence if she hadn’t been there. Because when she joined, they were meeting upstairs in the post office. I used to get just furious with her because she would line up a program, a good program. One year she got the New World Quartet, which is world-famous string quartet. Then arranged, rented the hall, got the tickets printed and proceeded to sell the tickets. I said to her, "Dammit, Barb, if the other people won’t at least sell tickets, they don’t want this thing!" And she constantly came back with that statement, "They want it. They just don’t know they want it!" But the next year she got a New Orleans Jazz group, so it was not catering to high brow, low brow or anything. But she just worked her buns off for that. You can ask anybody in the Holland Friends of Art, and that’s why this last year, totally as a surprise to me without my doing anything, they dedicated their year’s membership book to Barbara.
This town is not the same.

LW: She played a major role in a lot of areas.

SP: She just plowed into it and...

LW: Put a lot of enthusiasm into it.

SP: Yep. People loved Barbara. She was something else.

LW: You mentioned that she started sailing...ladies' sailing. Did she run into any resistance because the role of women had changed?

SP: No. They used the kids' boats. It was cheered on with enthusiasm.

LW: How has the role of women changed in Holland?

SP: Well, my wife used to harass me later in life. She was a chemistry major in college. She was also licensed. We had to have a wastewater discharge permit and we had to have the water tested quite frequently. As soon as we applied for a permit, we were inundated with offers of contracts by environment groups that would do this testing for us. The prices they wanted to do just a simple test was just ridiculous. By this time she had been on my case because supposedly I had not let her work, being the male chauvinist pig that I was. So I said, "Okay! You got a job." So she had to take the state test and she passed it the first time out which they told her was extremely unusual. But she was a licensed wastewater treatment operator, Class IIA or IIB (laughs). So she did the tests. She put her chemistry major to use. The role of women? Sadly enough, there isn't the degree of volunteerism anymore that there used to be because the majority of the women are working. I ride out here on the north side and I look at these homes out there and "My God! Who are all these
people that can afford these things?" Well, there are two family incomes that can afford them. God help you if a wife or husband lose their job. They work all day. Who’s got the energy to go out and do a volunteer thing? I think it’s sad. Sadly enough also, women got the notion, just like I talked about the WPA people or PWA whatever it was. You know, working for my dad was a real job. Working for the Holland Area Arts Council didn’t have a paycheck attached to it. The rewards were other than that. But it wasn’t a ”real job” as far as the women are concerned. Working for Prince Corporation is a ”real job." I think that’s sad. I think that’s too bad. My wife, as busy as she was and as active as she was, was always at home with our kids. You know, before all this busing nonsense, kids came home at noon for lunch even though it might be a mile or a mile and a half away, they came home riding their bike or whatever. My wife was always home when the kids came home for lunch. And she was always home when they came home from school. Now, they’re not home.

LW: So it’s had a negative impact.

SP: I think it has had a negative impact.

LW: Depends on your point of view. You’ve been in town for many, many years and many things have come and gone. As you look back, what were some of the major controversies that you witnessed? Either recent or...?

SP: HEDCOR was a big one. Major controversies. I don’t know.

LW: If something comes to mind... We talked about your parents and they obviously had a lot of impact on you. Could you describe other people who have had a major impact,
role models or other individuals that you look to and say they had a major influence in your life?

SP: My mother and father stand out in large bold letters as the greatest influence on my life. The rabbi that married my wife and I was a world-famous man, an author who died at a very young age. One of the things he drilled into us (and my wife was far more dedicated to this than I might have been) but she held me to it, thank God, was "You never go to bed on an argument. You disagree, you settle the disagreement before you go to bed." And I'll pass that on to you for whatever it's worth because it only just gets worse. If you settle it and then when you have time to reflect on it as I did these past several months, and you think of some of the arguments and you realize how stupid they were and how mad you could get. There's nobody that's been married that can tell me that there haven't been disagreements, and some more serious that others. But I think that many people go to sleep still mad and that's why the divorce rate is what it is. I think the University of Michigan, just going there, had a good effect on my life, and I've been forever grateful. That's probably why I dole out money there once in a while. Individual people. There are people that we've done business with that taught me a lot. There was a buyer from one of the big foundries in Muskegon that taught me a great deal about the brokerage end of the business. It's probably the second greatest influence on my life after my parents, no doubt about it, the one major shining star is my wife. I would have never gotten into the arts, I would never have gotten anything artistic. I wouldn't have gone to art museums. I wouldn't have been an art collector. I wouldn't be an artist if I am one,
had it not been for my wife's guiding hand. As young marrieds, we didn't have the
wherewithal to take real vacations, so our vacations primarily were to go back to
Boston to see her parents or pay to take an extra day or two when there was a
business meeting or convention someplace. She would always drag me kicking and
screaming all the way to an art gallery or an art museum, and she felt they needed the
help so she would join. We've been members of Los Angeles, Dallas, Kansas City
Side B ends)
SP: (Tape 2 begins) it just gets to the point where I'm suggesting we go museum looking,
so progress is made.
LW: Her influence is made known.
SP: You know, social responsibility...I would probably have gotten more bitter and angry
in some of the things like the Yacht Club instance that happened and some of the
snubs that were given my mother and father. She had a way of working through
those things and coming out a winner. Showing me that you could do that. Charity
the same thing. My father was an extremely charitable person. Not in any major
numbers or anything like that, only because he didn't have any major numbers.
LW: Coming towards the end and wrapping up with just a few odds and ends and bringing
us into more contemporary times, what are your views on the new Area Center
concepts, that's obviously been a controversy, too, for that matter.
SP: It all depends the way it's handled. I'd like to have them make public the original
blueprints for the Civic Center. It wasn't called the Civic Center. It was a youth
center, and they lied to the people. It's never been a youth center. And it should
have been a youth center. It’s right where a youth center should have been. I know that Hope College plays their basketball games there. They also practice there every day! So that’s sacrosanct! I don’t want you to misconstrue this because I don’t have an argument with Hope, but it’s not along those lines. But I’m saying that if Hope needs a basketball court, go build one! Holland High School built one. West Ottawa built one. Hope has built a lot of buildings. If that’s important to you, do it! But they don’t have the right to that...that’s a misdirection and misuse of that building. It all depends on what they intend to do with it. If they’re building this thing as a convention center--come on! Get with the program here. You aren’t going to compete with Grand Rapids twenty-seven miles away. Not likely. Not with De Vos and Van Andel and all that’s there. But if they want to build it...I just got a thing in the mail, they’re building an ice arena. Well, okay, I don’t see anything wrong with that. But the question is, how many do we need? I just don’t know. I think that the first location made the most sense, the Western Foundry site, but I would vote against it. And I’m reluctant to get into this but here I am again with Hope College’s being greedy. I am totally opposed to knocking down fifty, sixty houses. Maybe you don’t want to live there, and I for sure don’t want to live there, but we need places for those people to live too. Unless you’re going to take those people out of those houses and you’ll say, "Okay, buddy, we want that house so we will build you a house over here." You can’t just go in there and have somebody put a price on those houses and say, "That’s what it’s worth," because you sure won’t find another one to replace it with for that amount of money. And that is totally wrong. Now at the same time,
right across the street, Hope College has got a soccer field on Fairbanks. Now wouldn’t it be easier to move that and have parking over there? But, oh no! They’re not going to give up that soccer field. No way!

LW: You think Hope College is primarily pushing the Western Foundry site?

SP: Absolutely they are. There’s no two ways about that, and it’s the right site I think, but not to sacrifice all those homes. Not at that cost. And what’s really a riot, the GE site, which I don’t think is any great shakes but nevertheless it’s bigger than the Fairbanks site, which is big enough. But that one isn’t. To use that one, you’d have to have the Holland Transplanter property along with it. Now, come on, guys. Which way are we going here? If you can get by with the Western Foundry site with those fifty homes and that’s less acreage than you’ve got at the GE site, how come the GE site isn’t big enough? The third site? They claim they’ve done soil drillings there. I know that land out there. That’s the old city dump. I know what’s in there because I’ve dug in there. Back during the Depression years, in Holland Furnace’s tin shop where they made the duct work, coated scrap like that was of no value. And so they dumped it in the city dump. We owned a little piece of land...You know where Mooi Roofing had a little plot there along the side? We had a little scrap yard there at one time. And there’s a big concrete wall...there used to be a big hole in there and I built a big concrete wall I could show you down in there and then filled it in. Well, to build the concrete wall I had to excavate there for footings. We dug up tons and tons of tinplate that then had a value. But there’s everything. You see, that was all swamp. There was no Pine Avenue when I was in junior high school. The
lake came to where our old office is. The lake came within fifty feet of that office.

LW: If you look at the old pictures in the Archives you can see. We’ve got those pictures so I’ve seen that.

SP: Speaking of archives, now how would I find this? I’ve just....(you can turn that off for a second) (Tape is interrupted).

LW: We were talking about the area center and the old dump. Probably not a very suitable site for the building?

SP: I don’t think it’s a very suitable site. I know that where we are, any building we put we go down eighty-five feet with piling. Now, to give you an idea. That blue building that is IXL in our truck garage? On the west side of that building we poured a concrete slab outside the building because it’s where the guys change tires and they wanted a concrete slab for the trucks to sit on while they were changing tires. Well, when it went down ten inches we poured another slab on top of it and when that went down ten inches we poured another slab on top of that. And now there’s a black top little ramp that goes down to that. That’s what you got.

LW: It just keeps sinking.

SP: It’s just a slab. Who needs an 85 ft. foot piling under this thing. I’ve been there before and you can say we can do this and when you get started then we find out well, we’re going to have an adjustment here. I think the cost gets to be a little wild.

LW: What about the other major initiatives that seem to be on the horizon? Windmill Island? What are your thoughts on that concept?

SP: I think it’s off the wall! There are people who say, "Oh, I’d love to live out there."
Sure you would! You'd be a good candidate, Larry! You'd like to have people peeking through your windows to see what you're doing in there. You'd like to park...they'll have some sort of horse and wagon or some thing to take you up to where you can park your car because you sure aren't going to want people parking cars out on the island, are you? I just think it would be fun to live out there on that island. I think, you know, to have tourists tromping all over your front lawn all day long? No, you'll always have company. You'll never feel lonely.

LW: Have you ever had thoughts of what they might do with the place?

SP: Well, Seymour was on the original Windmill Island board. Carter Brown was the one that got the idea and he went to Henry Maentz, First National Bank at that time, First of America now. (Phone rings - interruption)

LW: We were talking about Windmill Island and the original thought...

SP: Henry Maentz got Seymour. Seymour lived across the street on Twenty-sixth Street from Henry Maentz. He got Seymour involved and Henry forked over the money and they paid for Bill Wichers to go to the Netherlands because he was the Netherlands counsel and head of Information Services. Well, he had the in and they were able to get the windmill. Everything was going well with Windmill Island and they issued bonds and they paid off the bonds and Seymour resigned from the board over this as a matter of fact. Then they had to build more buildings and they got more elaborate and that's went they ran into borrowing more money and they built the buildings and now they're having a time paying for it. And the idea was that once they had the bonds paid off, this would become a city park which is what it
should have been. And it would be lovely. You know, you can’t have too many parks and you could have some recreation facilities out there as well. Instead of a barn, you might have had a baseball field or a soccer field or anything and get the townspeople out there. I’ll bet you half the town’s never been there.

LW: I’ve heard that comment frequently by long time residents. Either they’ve never been there or they haven’t been there since the 1960s or something like that.

SP: Yeah, they’re not about to pay five bucks or whatever it is to see a tulip.

LW: And they can see the windmill from the road.

SP: They can see the windmill from the bridge so…(laughs). Now if you want to go one more, Western Michigan Tool I think is really off the wall! First place, if you want to preserve an industry in Holland you want to preserve a furniture factory. Then you’d have something indigenous to Holland.

LW: The city owns it now but I don’t know of any…they talk about maybe putting businesses in there or some tourist stuff. I haven’t been aware of any plans to make it into a museum or anything, but the cost would be astronomical.

SP: Sure it would be and what are you going to have after you’ve got it? We’ve got a lovely museum.

LW: They’ve been working on it. They’ve been trying to do more with getting people in the door.

SP: But it’s an event when somebody walks in. And there’s a lot to see in there. They do a good job. We’ve donated money to it. I’m all for it, but I’m a realist too. I happened to nail the mayor one day right after they announced that the flower show
was going to be abandoned, and I told him point blank that if my wife were living
she'd be up and down his back with spikes in her boots. I mean, if the flower show is
going to be, it's going to be at the Art Center and we're paying whatever it is they
are going to be losing. But you know, here's one of the few things...What's the guy,
the singer, Jim Nabors. This has to do with Tulip Time? But that gets the Civic
Center, you see. Or...what was the TV show...the band leader...Lawrence Welk
group. That's Tulip Time? When Tulip Time was started...since you're asking about
history...Tulip Time was pushed by Holland Furnace Company. Without Holland
Furnace Company you got no Tulip Time. Then we had a Chamber of Commerce.
We had a man named Pat Connelly as chairman or president or whatever the title was
and he was a promotor. They brought in movie stars and it was on radio...This was
big time! Because of Holland Furnace Company. And the idea was (a) sell furnaces
and (b) show off Holland and what a nice town it is. Okay. I can handle a little
commercialism if that's what it takes to get the job done, but I'm also proud of
Holland. Do a hundred, if it's that many, elephant ear wagons make Holland an
attractive place to see? People are going to come from all over to see that vaudeville
act? But the Tulip Time Flower Show, which is unique to Holland, they put it in a
building with a whole bunch of steps in front of it. The busses wouldn't stop there
because half the people wouldn't get off the bus.

LW: Couldn't get up the stairs.

SP: They take one look at the steps...Who do we get here for Tulip Time? Young
cheerleaders? No, I don't think so.
LW: We do the show in the Knickerbocker, the Story of Holland, and most of the people we see are senior citizens. Some young families.

SP: But shouldn't the flower show be given a prime location?

LW: Especially since tulips are a major focus of Tulip Time.

SP: I used to think so. I think elephant ears are now.

LW: There sure are plenty of vendors.

SP: But I think it's sad. So, it's going to be at the Arts Center and it's good for the Arts Center, but it shouldn't be necessary that we do that. It should be a featured attraction.

LW: Just a couple more and then we'll wrap it up.

SP: Fine! I'm not concerned. I'm concerned for you. (laughs)

LW: You talked a bit about Hope College earlier when we talked about the area center. Hope's been here a long time and you've been here a long time. Tell me what role from your point of view the College plays...

SP: The college is very important to Holland. We used to be financial supporters and would like to still be, but I cannot support their provincialism. When they (and they don't have to tell me this is not true because I've seen their letters to the faculty) when they refuse to hire anyone on staff that isn't a member of the church, don't ask me to support that.

LW: That's understandable.

SP: I'm not dishonest. It would be easier to support them...take the easy way out...be far less controversial.
LW: Holland has been recognized as one of ten All America cities. What qualities do you think earned Holland the honor, from your point of view?

SP: You have a college here. That's a got to be a plus. For the most part we've enjoyed, let's say, very small amounts of civil unrest. It's just a good place to live. And you know, (laughs), we're spoiled here. You read about some of these inland cities that are picked as...some one magazine picks the ten best cities in the United States....but Indianapolis? What lake is that on? Who wants to live there?

LW: I only have two more questions and they we'll wind up for the night. Do you think there is a perceivable generation gap in Holland between the young people today and the older generation?

SP: It's not fair to ask me that question because even though I don't feel like it, I'm obviously from the older generation (laughs). Well, I certainly don't have it in business and I don't have it in my family. At the tennis court out here I take on my kids on a regular basis and hold my own. They're glad to come over and play with me. I crew for them on their sailboat when asked. And I get asked quite often. I may be naive, I don't know, but I don't perceive that to be the case. Look at council. From my point of view the councilmen are kids! Who's Al McGeehan? How old is he?

LW: Probably around fifty.

SP: Yeah. My oldest son is 49. So I would not think in terms of addressing Al as...you know, I refer to my sons as my kids, that's a father's privilege, and Al's probably one of the older members of council, come to think of it.
LW: He probably is. Most of the council from my age up are about ten years older.

SP: Yeah. So I don't perceive that.

LW: Do you think the concerns of the Holland citizens have changed over the last fifty years? And if so, how?

SP: Things have been so good here over all, that I don't know that Holland citizens are all that concerned. How many people do we get out for an election?

LW: Never very many.

SP: Okay. So how concerned are they?

LW: Anything else that we haven't touched on?

SP: We haven't solved half the world's problems! (laughs) Holland, all in all, is a good place to live. And I guess you'd have to say that if I can handle it, most anybody can. I don't think that we've always been totally fair. I think there's a measure of truth in what they say that the courts haven't been even-handed with Hispanics. I would have to guess it's probably true. But that may be out of fear as much as anything else.

LW: I think you may be right. Well, thank you for taking the time to chat with me tonight. We've been together quite a long time and I think we covered a lot of topics.

SP: Well, when you've been knocking around here for seventy-five years why...

LW: You've got a few stories to tell. Let me give you my card if I can. When you get those dates, just give me a call and I'll track down the press stories...

SP: When you get the time, I'd still like to talk to you about seeing what we could put
together...My own history and my family history and so forth.

LW: Let me put something together and I'll run it off to you.

SP: I'm not looking for anything elaborate. I did a little book of my sculptures some time ago that was published by Vanity Press. You know who Vanity Press is, don't you? (Laughs).

(End of tape).