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Penna, Ernest Oral History Interview: Sesquicentennial of Holland, "150 Stories for 150 Years"

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Oral History Interview with
Ernest Penna

Conducted June 22, 1998
by Larry Wagenaar

Sesquicentennial Oral History Project
"150 Stories for 150 Years"
LW: Maybe we could start with just some preliminaries. Could you tell me, Mr. Penna, when you were born, the date?


LW: And, you were born where?


LW: In the hospital or at home?

EP: Oh, they didn't go to the hospital. I have a good tale to tell you about that.

LW: Why don't you tell me about that.

EP: When our first child was born, they didn't go to the hospital they were at home. But, Nona went to Dr. Masselink in Zeeland. She was from Zeeland. He and his wife, she was a trained, registered nurse and they took care of her all during the pregnancy. We lived on 24th Street over here when the child was to be born. That was our daughter Judy, we lost her when she was 12. When it came to paying the bill, I said "Dr. Masselink, how much do I owe you?" He said, "$12." He said "the other guys are charging $20, but they don't earn it." I always tell that to Bill Westrate when he gets kind of rambunctious on camera deals.

LW: Did you live anywhere else during your life or did you always live in Holland?

EP: No, I worked for 43 years at the Holland Sentinel.
LW: How old were you when you went to the Sentinel? Do you remember? Did you have a paper route sort of thing or did you come on board as a photographer?

EP: Not as a photographer, I was in the mechanical end. Photography got to be a sideline in association with it. The way I was hired, was Mr. French and then there was a Mr. Holt. They were tough on me. Mr. Holt was the superintendent, and I was to be his apprentice, with eventually getting the job sometime. I had to work long hours; they published Saturday afternoons and five week days, and on Sundays I would have to go down and help do repairs on the machinery. That was just for learning, I didn't get a nickel for that. So it was a tough challenge, but that was part of my eventual job. Mr. Holt was the superintendent, or the boss of the whole thing in the back room, a tough, old cookie.

LW: You went through Holland schools right? Where did you go to school?

EP: Just to Holland High School was all. I had a very poor family and that was considered adequate. My father died when I was two years old; I don't remember him. My mother was left with six kids to raise.

LW: You were the youngest then?

EP: Yeah. That was a tough job for her.

LW: You had six children. What did your mother do to support you? Did she work somewhere?

EP: She lived on charity. Things were tough for people, like they didn't go to the hospital. They had their kids at home. She was very strong-willed with a lot of leadership. A great small lady. In our neighborhood she was a midwife. When a
baby was born the mother would have to stay in bed for 10 days then. Did you know that?

LW: You had to stay in bed a long time.

EP: So, someone had to go in and wash the mother and bathe the baby, and so forth, and she did that for free for all around the neighborhood. She also helped young people.

LW: Was she the one who encouraged you to start working at the Sentinel?

EP: No, I was working at the Holland Printing Company, but they didn't do very well. They finally had to cut down. Holland Printing Company was right next to where the bookstore is now. There was an old building in there, an entire shop. Louis Van Hartesveldt had to lay someone off and I had to be the one he laid off. So, I went to the Sentinel and had quite a number of interviews with Mr. French. He was the owner, he was laying the background of what he expected of me. He was a very dignified, old man. A fine man, very intelligent. Finally he said that I could come to work. Well, it took quite awhile because he did a lot of checking and cross-checking, like I was really getting qualified.

LW: What was your first job? Was that at the Holland Printing your very first job?

EP: Yeah, that was a job. I used to set type and try to design letterheads for a lot of people. That was just a small shop. I took printing in high school. I don't know if it was the right career or not, but in a way you get wound up you know. I'm sure I wouldn't have chosen it now. Anyway, that's water over the dam. I met this wonderful wife that I've had for many years and we have five children. Our daughter Judy, who was just a super child, 12 years old, never missed a day of school, and she
came down with encephalitis. We thought it was just the flu and she was over it, and we went out for a ride on a Sunday afternoon, and after that she went into a coma and that was it. We rushed her to Grand Rapids and she just didn't survive.

LW: That's sad.

EP: So, that was tragic. But then we were expecting our fourth child at the same time—death and birth in one month. It was difficult to face that. It was tragic to lose her. But we survived.

LW: Did you meet your wife in high school, or after you graduated?

EP: No, she was in Zeeland and she was younger than I am. My friend says, "I got a date, do you want to go along? There's another girl?" I went and I said, "Gosh, I fell in love with her right away!" I did really. I said, "Boy this is my girl." And, I pursued it and we got engaged and eventually married.

LW: You got married.

EP: She went to the University of Michigan. She has a Masters degree from Michigan State. She taught for many years in the Holland Public School system. We did well, I guess. We did lots of everything. You know she was very active in dramatics. She was in Hope Prep Summer Theatre several times. She was very active in Holland Community Theater. She just did many plays and directed and worked backstage.

LW: You've got some notes there, why don't you tell me some stories?

EP: Well, it is so interesting, I don't know where to start. We were always looking for work, you know, kids—peddling papers. There was a slaughter house up right where Century Lane is now. The Pors had a slaughter house and the Hieftjes operated it.
We kids used to go and help slaughter the cows. There was a Dr. Thomas there, who was a practicing doctor. He had an old model-T Ford, he'd drive up and there would be a completely veiled lady in the car, and we'd have to slit the cow's throat to bleed the carcass. The doctor had a granite cup, and he would go catch that full of blood and take it to the lady, she would drink that. (laughs)

LW: You're kidding! She thought that was some kind of medicine?

EP: Isn't that something? He was experimenting, whether she was anemic or tubercular or what, but he was trying, he thought maybe that he could cure someone.


EP: Yeah. Where the highway goes right now, was what we call Sprietsma's Pond. There was a big gully down in there.

LW: This is where on the highway?

EP: Right down here by Menard's.

LW: Twenty-fourth and U.S. 31?

EP: Yes. We called it Sprietsma's Pond and we would go there and ice skate and also ski down the hill. They had a lot of sledding and so forth. Then right across from Meijers was a Hieftje family who had 10 kids. They had a small farm there. Right there on 8th and Waverly was the Vander Haar's farm. They raised sugar beets--there was a big sugar beet factory here, you know, and they would raise sugar beets with the rows near to 8th street. The kids used to get a job with them.

LW: For the sugar factory?

EP: Yes, and we watched the men scrape that stuff they would get off, and wash off the
beets. They called it "clay" and people would use the clay in their yards. Everybody had to have an underlayer of clay and then put a layer of black dirt in their lawns. The clay would hold in the moisture. Heinz was out there too. Heinz bottled thousands of pickles and also made vinegar. People would take windfall apples down there to Heinz and they would put them in a press, and press the juice out for making vinegar. There was still a pulp left over. I had the job too from the farm. We would go out to the pickle factory with a kind of wooden tank thing and they would run a big hose and run it full of this pulp. And, we would haul that back to the farm and feed it to the cows. An interesting thing about the cows--I had a job--it was hard to come by money. My folks didn't have any extra money. On east 24th Street was G. J. Deur's farm; he was a real fruit authority. Part of his property was where the East Middle School is now located, and he raised all kinds of fruit. He would hire us kids, the three of us--Russ, Art and Ernie. They had 12 cows. So, we would go out there and do the chores, clean the staples, and then milk the cows. We would get a nickel a cow. So, we made 20 cents a night, and by the end of the week we would have a dollar which was big money then. Imagine that. But, we had to walk to and from that farm, usually after school, because there was no riding.

LW: You pretty much rode your bicycle to all these places?

EP: No, we all wanted to walk. We could cross country there. I lived on 17th Street and some other kids from there are Art Beatman and Russ Kramer. We would just walk out there and then walk back. Walking didn't seem like such a big chore, then.

LW: This is while you were in high school?
EP: Yeah. A buck was hard to come by. The Strand Theater was right down near 8th and Central, where the bank is, about in there. They didn't have any indoor toilets, so the boys had to go out in the alley, if you had to use the bathroom. We would go out and we would put a board in there and prop the door open a crack and at certain intervals the kids would all sneak in for free. (laughs) It was so risky. One time, I don't remember the name of the movie, but it looked like a female figure very faint. Mr. Heinbaugh walked up and down and said to the audience the Holland Censor Board will not let us look at this, we have to block this out.

LW: Block it out so you couldn't see it? So, there was a Holland Censor Board that would review films before they were shown?

EP: Yes. They were very strict and this was the theory we all went by. "It stands in the paper" and "the Dominie says." That was it. What the Sentinel said was right and what the Dominie said, you did. So, there wasn't any activity on Sunday. You couldn't play ball, you couldn't get on the tennis courts. You couldn't even roller skate, you got condemned if you let your kids roller skate on Sunday. It was the extreme. Things have changed tremendously.

LW: Were you active in the church here in town at all yourself?

EP: We went to Trinity Church. Nona was raised as a Baptist. Her grandfather was a Baptist preacher. Her father was a tough, old cookie. That is a portrait I painted of him. He was a railroad agent. He bought the Sunday papers in Zeeland and he had them at the depot, and you would be surprised how many people sneaked down and got one. He didn't care. He didn't seem to have any worries about it, but Nona's
mother did.

LW: Did your kids ever get into trouble for Sunday stuff? Or you pretty much went with the rules?

EP: Well, we lived in a Christian Reformed neighborhood--so we tried not to upset them. We spent our weekends hiking in the woods; we were active outdoors. I was active in Boy Scouts as a scoutmaster. I don't know if you want this in or not, but as young kids we had gangs. There was an East end gang, the Pugholers, they were really tough. They would beat you up, and then there was a West end gang and all different gangs. We played football against each other and so forth.

Each ward would have a constable then. Mr. Ross was the constable for our ward, and one time he said, "I want you kids to go by the railroad ditch there and then count how many guys are going into that house. Don't let them see you. The house is the first one past the tracks." We didn't know it, but it was a house of prostitution. There were a couple of women there working. Even I can remember we were all lying in a ditch and they could not see us, and an old man, a real old man who could hardly walk, would walk from 8th Street down the tracks and go in the house. Mr. Ross said when you get a certain number, come and tell us. They had policemen there--Dave Conner, Pete Bontekoe, and Officer Steketee--all the cops were waiting. When we told Mr. Ross the number, the police would pound on the front door, and there were guys trying to run out the back.

LW: Run out the back?

EP: And, they got caught red-handed! (laughs) It didn't mean much to us at that time.
There were three men who owned and managed the Holland Furnace Company, which was located on Columbia and 23rd Street. The three men were Mr. Kola, Mr. Nystrom, and Mr. Landwehr. They lived in two houses on Lincoln and 16th Streets. The two houses and the Furnace building are still there.

Every day Mr. Kola would walk up the railroad tracks to go to the Furnace Company. He would pick up scrap iron and take it to the shop.

Do you remember when the boats came into Holland from Chicago every night?

LW: That was before my time.

EP: They would have these big City of Holland side wheelers. They had big, paddle wheels and they would come in and bring all sorts of people in the summer time—they would dock at Mac. The interurban would come in from Grand Rapids.

LW: Did you used to go out to the resorts and where the boats came in and that sort of thing? Did you spend any time out on Macatawa yourself growing up?

EP: We would always go swimming. The interurban had open sides of the cars in the summer time and you would get on at a street corner and get out to Mac. They had a big, bathhouse there on the Mac side. And, you could go swimming for, I don't know, it didn't cost very much, but it was money at that time. We would do that. Then they would run to Saugatuck, too. They were very prominent.

LW: How long was the ride out there? Do you remember?

EP: Well, it wasn't very long, through Virginia Park and so forth. It had old, red cables with trolley pulley. All the Holland kids would go down to the boats and they would
load up produce, especially celery—a two-wheel cart they had and hauled it into the
boat. They would give us a quarter after we would help them load the boats. Money
was scarce. Right up in the corner where the cement dock is, there was a great, big
boat livery, Bender’s Boat Livery. People didn’t have motors, they just rode in their
boats. Right in there the lake came almost to 7th Street, and it was all water, all lake.
You could fish right there next to the back of the City Mission where there was the
Scott and Lugers Lumber Co. They had a dock and we would go fishing there and
catch a lot of fish.

LW: You said the lake came up to 7th Street—eventually they back filled all that with dirt,
right?

EP: Yeah, and all the property went to the abutting property. Actually there was supposed
to be a boat launching right next to the power plant, but that went down the drain.
All those people on the turns along the river got the property all the way to the lake.
And, that’s how Padnos bought that all out. They own practically the whole thing
now, you know.

LW: Yeah, they do.

EP: Nellie Churchford was at the City Mission. She would hold a big baptism at Kollen
Park. She would take people out in the lake and dunk them in for baptism. She was
helped by Buck Looman.

Now the kids across the street (on 26th Street), I don’t know what happened to
them. One time they were monkeying around what we called Big Creek down there
on 24th Street. They found a something that turned out to be mastodon bones. I
don't know if I gave you a picture of them or not. They had them across the street laid out. They found the whole skeleton and gave it to Hope College. I don't know what happened after that.

What was interesting about 8th Street, there were some businesses, near 8th and Columbia--one of them was groceries and dry goods owned by H. P. Kleis, he was quite a businessman. His house is still on the corner there, across from the school house. He had a lot of money and if anybody wanted money they could get it with interest from him. Then on what we called Pigtail Alley, that's just off of Lincoln and--

LW: --9th Street there, where 9th runs in past Lincoln?

EP: Do you know where it is?

LW: Yeah, I do.

EP: Al Kleis had his rendering works in there on Pigtail Alley. There was Mr. Dogger who had a junkyard there. He was really preaching Jesus, come to Jesus all the time. When he put the purchase on the scale he would wigger his finger like this and he would lift it up with his foot; it could be a bag of bones or whatever, and our kids all knew that. So, while he was doing that, one of the other kids would go and fill up another bag of his stuff, and sell it back to him. The kids got wise to that.

Peter Vander Meulen had a shoe repair shop behind Mr. Kleis' business; it was kind of a house there. Next to him, in the same building have you ever heard of Sam Wise?

LW: The name is familiar.
EP: He was a Jewish guy. He had a little grocery store behind there. He tried to run a grocery store, and he also worked at the Rusk factory there. There were two Rusk factories and they had great, big conveyers and they would put trays in the ovens and Sam Wise would pick them off or put them on. You could buy a bag of broken rusk there for a nickel and get a great big bag. People just bought that like mad.

LW: Now, did Wise not do very well with his grocery store?

EP: Yes. He ran ads in the Sentinel--one ad said "No matter how many times I've fooled you before, this time I mean business." The ads didn't help much. He was competing against all the other guys, and so he didn't do very well.

LW: Where did you shop for your groceries when you were growing up?

EP: We lived on 17th and Columbia and our grocery store, Westing & Warner, was on Lincoln between 13th and 14th. There was a tradition that was very good. Westing and Warner would come in the morning and take your order, and in the afternoon they would deliver them. You didn't have to go to the store.

LW: So, they home delivered groceries.

EP: Yeah, and at the end of the month you went and paid your grocery bill. It would be nice if we had that now!

LW: They don't do that anymore unfortunately.

EP: You spent a lot of time in a grocery store. It was very traditional to come into the store Westing & Warner had a horse and wagon. Of course, there weren't any motor cars at all.

Another interesting thing, there was two livery stables. One right next to the
Sentinel lot.

LW: Next to the Sentinel building?

EP: Yes, that was owned by Nibbelinks. The other one on the northwest corner of 7th and Central was a great big livery owned by the Boones. If you wanted to go out, like say, if we wanted to go out in the country and get apples or so, we would rent a horse and buggy. It would be a lot of fun with the kids, and then we would ride out in the country, and they would buy apples and eat around the wagon. All the funerals, too, were drawn by horse drawn carriages. Those kind of looked like Cinderella--each with a driver and a team of horses.

LW: You probably remember the first people who had autos then?

EP: I remember just the first trucks. Where Brouwers Furniture, you remember, Mr. Brouwer, old man Brouwer? He was a very dignified guy. He wore those, what do we call them? Wing-tip collars or a bow tie. He and Mrs. Kollen had electric cars and they were just like a coupe, but they were driven by electricity. Mrs. Kollen was a prominent lady, and the electric cars were steered with a tiller bar.

LW: Quite a sight to see, I would imagine for the time.

EP: There were two of them that I remember. You had to have a lot of battery power. I don't know how long they could run. They were very interesting to see. I just remember the first cars. Bolhuis Lumberyard was still there.

I can tell you gambling was absolutely forbidden, in those days, absolutely. You would get arrested if you were caught playing poker, or put and take. But, I knew that above where the Hope College kids live now, above that old hotel, now a
Hope dormitory, the Kraker people would rent a room there and run a big poker
game, unknown. A lot of the guys would go in the lumberyard and, lumber would
extend out over, the piles of lumber, and they would get in there and some of the
guys would gamble there. The city didn't encourage gambling then, it was wrong.
You just couldn't do that.

LW: Religious attitudes were very strict, as you said before, during that time.

EP: Oh, they were just like I said, "the Dominie says" and "It stands in the paper."

LW: People would believe those two statements?

EP: Yes, maybe it was good if we had restrictions now. Most of our swimming was done
at the stone quarry. It's just across the river and you can go back in there. All the
kids would go there.

LW: Just off of Waverly there, by Chicago Drive?

EP: It's still there, I guess, I haven't seen it for years.

LW: It's back in that land there, I think it's privately owned now.

EP: Van Duren's owned it, I don't know who owns it now. There was a smaller one near
the roundhouse. Do you remember the roundhouse?

LW: No, that was before my time.

EP: They had a big roundhouse there.

LW: In the Waverly area?

EP: Yes. Of course, then they had what they called the jungles. There were always
hobos, who were riding freight trains. They didn't do hitchhiking. There was a
regular jungle in there. The hobos would repair umbrellas, or roof some houses.
They did whatever they wanted to do, or just ask for a handout. They would walk down the railway tracks and we thought they had the houses marked.

LW: Where they knew they could get a handout?

EP: You didn't remember the Beach Milling Company?

LW: No, that was before my time, too.

EP: It was across from the railroad on 8th Street. It was a great, big, black building. Somewhere I have some pictures of it. That was a Beach Milling Company where the farmers would bring their grain and had it ground for feed or whatever they wanted. There were our neighbors, the Ten Brinks, on 15th Street--they kept some horses and cows, too, and they were where the creek runs through Hope College property. We boys like to swim there.

LW: Right by the athletic fields out there?

EP: Yes, all of the kids had to bring a flour bag, and we would fill them up with sand and make a dam. We would have a nice swimming hole. But we had to put a drain in because they complained we would dry the creek all out. We had to let some water flow through for the cows to be watered. But, we could get pretty good deep water.

LW: Made your own swimming hole?

EP: Yes, it was just amazing.

No one had any trucks. But three men had wagons--Mr. Mokma, Mr. Mulder, and Mr. Damson. Mr. Damson had some mules and the other guys had horses and they would go to the freight depot which is gone now on 7th street. They finally took it down. They would go there and load the freight that cam in on the trains on their
wagons and haul it around to the--

LW: To the businesses that had the stuff coming?

EP: There were very few automobiles, very few. Let's see now if I can find some more information. I'll probably think of it when you're gone.

LW: We can always do this again.

EP: When I was a boy, I used to buy the Sentinel for about a penny, and I would sell them for a few cents. I believe it was a penny or two to get the Sentinel. I made up my own route and I had customers. I would go buy the papers and then I would peddle them around and make 15 to 20 cents.

LW: Which was big money then.

EP: Arnold Mulder was the editor of the Sentinel for awhile. Do you know him? Arnold Mulder?

LW: No.

EP: He was an author. He wrote some good books.

LW: Right. We have one in the archives.

EP: Is it "Bram of the Five Corners"? Do you have that one in there?

LW: Yes, and there is another one. I forgot the name of it.

EP: That was supposed to be laid in Drenthe, "Bram and Five Corners." De Hope Publishing Company was on the Hope campus.

LW: On Columbia?

EP: Yes. There was a hill there and that was our sledding hill. All kids would go there and slide down with their sleds.
EP: We didn't have electric refrigerators--they were unknown. We had iceboxes. They would call it, a wooden box. If you wanted ice, you would put a sign out and this guy would come with his--

LW: Horse drawn wagon.

EP: Yeah, and he would chip off a chunk and bring it into your house.

LW: You probably had milk delivered every day?

EP: Yes. Milk was delivered every day. They knew exactly what you wanted or you could leave a note.

LW: And, get some extra if you needed it.

EP: I think it was in the forties that we had a depression and that was really a rough time for us. We were married then and had three children. My wife was a school teacher. I worked at the Sentinel. Only once did we have to accept script. This was like a promise of payment. The Board of Education issued script to the teachers, instead of a check. We could take it to the A & P grocery store, or any store, and cash it in.

LW: Could you? So your wife was paid in this paper money instead of regular cash or check?

EP: And, the Sentinel, too, used script one time. Mr. French always used to give us silver dollars as money until they went to checking.

LW: Do you remember when the first minorities came to town? When the first Hispanic residents came to Holland?

EP: No, I couldn't say exactly. There were so many coming into the city.
LW: They were migrant laborers pretty much?

EP: They were not part of our population. They were just coming and going. They have a good foothold now. Eventually they will be the majority.

LW: I think that they make up about 17% of the population of the city.

EP: They're going to grow more and more. I anticipate that. They have large families. The only black guy that I knew that could live in Holland, they called him one-arm Hank, and he didn't live in Holland. There is a creek that runs into the river there, and he put an old shack up there, and he lived there. So that's the only black guy I knew around here.

LW: They didn't disturb him? They didn't give him a hard time or anything?

EP: He was just way back in there. He would walk along the railroad tracks. I don't know what he did. I don't remember.

LW: But, there were no blacks living in Holland? No African Americans at that time?

EP: No.

LW: I think they have a lot of difficulty living in Holland still today. Were you in the service at all yourself?

EP: No. I had a draft number but I was married and had a family. And, it was considered essential business, the newspaper. They took quite a lot of the young, single guys out of the Sentinel though. But I happened to be in a little older bracket. An interesting thing, Holland was so Republican dominated, that you had to tell which party you wanted for the primaries. But, you'd better not say that you're a Democrat, because you would probably lose your job.
LW: Was it that bad?

EP: You bet. Alex Van Zanten and Abe Stephan were working at the polls and they were right there when we asked for our ballots, so they knew what we chose. They would remember if we asked for a Democratic ballot.

LW: So they really controlled the political machine?

EP: Yeah, they did. I know at one time I thought they assessed the property too high. I went to the Review Board and they said, "Would you sell your house for that assessment?" And, I said, "Go. Goodbye." I thought they were assessing me too high. They just drove me out of there so quick isn't wasn't funny.

LW: So, it sounds like a few people were sort of in control of the politics.

EP: Oh, yeah. It is still Republican, it hasn't rubbed off. Although I think the Democrats are getting a little stronger.

It was so interesting--you remember Phil Hart? He was the one Democrat senator, and he dared to come into the Sentinel in the back room and all the guys kind of leaned towards him. He was the nicest guy. He was married to someone from one of the big automobile companies, and he got to be a senator. We have a daughter living in Maryland, so we visit her quite often. Nona and I were there and that was the time they were impeaching Nixon. So, we went down and got into the House of Representatives just one time, and then they would get everybody out. They wouldn't let me take a camera in, so I had to go back and then they weren't going to let me in. I said, "I have to go in, my wife is in." They let me go in. Afterwards, we took a ride on the railway to the restaurant, a little tram or something, and got some of their
famous bean soup. Riding back who was there but Phil Hart. He remembered me from the Sentinel and we got to talking. We said we would like to visit the Senate chambers. He said, "Come right with me." He put us in his gallery. Then here came Ted Kennedy to the Senate floor, and he waved at Nona and I thought she was going to jump up to the ceiling! (laughs) That was really a trip.

LW: Your wife worked as a teacher right?

EP: Yeah.

LW: She went to school to become a teacher--teaching was a profession that women could go into.

EP: Yeah.

LW: But, women didn't work generally outside of the home.

EP: No. She didn't start teaching until our kids were grown.

LW: I see. So she went back to school after the kids were older?

EP: Well, no. She went to the University of Michigan and had almost enough credits and then she finished up at Hope College. She had to get a few credits at Hope. She graduated at Hope. Then she went on to Michigan State, and that was tough to get a Masters degree then. The reason we did that, we decided that since she didn't have any work background at all, just practically ready to teach, I said, "I don't know how else you're going to teach, you better get something, in case something happens to me, you'll have something to fall back on." It would be the best insurance you could get. She was a very successful teacher.

LW: How many years did she teach? Do you remember?
EP: I think 18 years right over here at Longfellow. So, it was very convenient.

LW: Yeah, close by.

EP: She could go back and forth; we didn't need any cars or anything. I think her first job was out at Washington school. But that was a very short period of time.

LW: How long have you lived in this house?

EP: We built it 50 years ago. It was so interesting--you didn't know Clyde Geerlings did you?

LW: I know who he was.

EP: He was at Hope College a lot and taught aviation. He was our neighbor up here, and I told him we were looking for a house. He said why don't you go to see Ernie Brooks. He's got a lot of lots up here. So we had a choice of one of these lots, but we picked this one kind of on a hill.

LW: There weren't too many houses out here then right?

EP: Yes. It was all open all the way to the next corner. Clyde Geerlings built the first house over there. We financed our house with the help of the Federal Housing Administration. We decided we would spend $4,000 for the house and not put a garage on it yet. A few years after we moved in, the lot next door became available for $400, so we bought that lot and we've got 97 feet of frontage. The lot also had a sort of barn which we could use as a garage.

LW: I was going to say you have a big lot--it's a big piece of land.

EP: It's just a desirable piece of property. Raising kids, right by the school and so forth. I said to Nona, we'll just sit on it. We are reaching a point in our lives where I don't
know how long we can continue. I'll be 90 on August 3.

LW: Did you have your big party or is that coming up yet?

EP: Yes, it is. We rented a cottage out on Lake Michigan; you know where Kouw's Park is?

LW: Yes.

EP: Just past that. We rented a cottage, and we are going to have all of the kids come and just have big, open house for them. They are going to stay there for a week. Some from Maryland and from Texas. I have a granddaughter in Texas. Her husband teaches; they both teach at colleges down there. It's awfully warm there right now.

LW: It's always hot in Texas I think. How has Tulip Time changed over the years, from your perception?

EP: We had tremendous amounts of work at the Sentinel during Tulip Time. It was just kind of a burden. For the first 30 years or more, the Sentinel spent hours and hours composing, organizing, photo collecting, and all sorts of things to make up a special edition of the newspaper, to be printed for Tulip Time. This not only took many hours away from regular work, but cost a great deal of money. But, that is no longer done. The new owners made a big change.

There was one incident I still laugh about. The Dutch Cleanser people got involved in it and they were spreading Dutch Cleanser all over the streets. That idea didn't last. What happened, every time there would be a little breeze the cleanser would blow all over the spectators. Doc Westrate and other men on horseback would lead off the Tulip Time parade. Just that one year. That didn't go over very well
either.

LW: Obviously they didn't want to walk in what was behind them.

EP: You know those doctors, I can remember when Dr. Winter and Dr. Westrate used their saddle horses to make home calls. They would come with their horses and tie them up. They would have that little medical bag. That goes way back. Doctors made house calls then.

LW: They don't do that anymore!

EP: You're lucky if you get to see them.

LW: That's right.

EP: We have a wonderful doctor, David Young. Everybody loves him. He's very concerned. I'm afraid he's going to get a burn out. He's my doctor now, both our ministers have gone over there. David is such a sincere man, he'll call you up.

LW: And just check on you?

EP: Yes.

LW: Well, we spent about an hour together and you told me a lot of stories, and that was great. I appreciate that. Maybe in another few months we can do this again, and we'll have some different stories to tell.

EP: Yeah, I've got a lot of notes.

LW: You make some more notes, and that would be great.