Scholten, Eugene Oral History Interview: Sesquicentennial of Holland, "150 Stories for 150 Years"

Ann Paeth
Oral History Interview with Eugene Scholten

(unedited)

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by Ann Paeth

Sesquicentennial Oral History Project
"150 Stories for 150 Years"
AP: The first thing, if you could just state your name and where and when you were born for the tape.

ES: I am Eugene Scholten, and I was born [date removed], 1928, here in Holland, southwest Holland in the Graafschap area, and my wife...

JS: My name is Joyce Scholten. I was Joyce Mulder. I was born here in Holland and raised here in Holland.

AP: Have you lived anywhere else?

ES: Well, I went to California, I was in the army for a couple of years, but other than that, I've always lived in Holland.

AP: What have been some of the major changes you've seen in Holland?

ES: Well, as our kids would say, the bigness of Holland, from when they were born and raised here. To see all the traffic on 31. The diversity in the population, and so on. The biggest changes, I think we both remember Tulip Time in the '30s being a local thing. The churches put on the booths and so on, and it wasn't commercial. As opposed to right now, Tulip Time has become something, I think, very different. We just saw it as a very fun time, where everybody had the week off, at least the afternoon, and kids wore Dutch costumes to school the whole week. Joyce danced...

JS: When I danced in the Dutch dance, every year it was a different dance, and now our daughter is in charge of the Dutch dance for Zeeland, and it's the same dance all the
time. But that doesn’t mean people won’t come to see it, because it’s new to them.

AP: So there are a lot more, different Dutch dances.

JS: It was authentic. They had all the same kinds of costumes to choose from that they now have. So that has not changed.

ES: But I think some of the other things that are very different is the appreciation of history. Maybe that’s my bias, my first masters was in history. As a child, I remember going southwest to Holland, by what is now Holtz Lake, they had the Indian mounds, and all of that’s gone. They’ve been excavated, I think, by the University of Michigan, and all the bones for the burial grounds are gone. The town of Singapore that was near Saugatuck, of course that was gone. But hearing your parents, grandparents talk about these things. I remember the grandparents talking about trying to get along with the Indians and so on. I don’t know what the actual dates are, but I think the Indians were pretty well gone by the turn of the century.

AP: Probably. There doesn’t seem to be that impact. Other than names of places throughout Michigan, there isn’t a lot of connection.

JS: Now we have such a diversity here in Holland.

ES: I think the Indian population is pretty well gone. Eddie Pigeon is still here. I think it was very interesting to me working as a psychologist, I worked for the state a couple of summers and did some testing up north with the Native American population, and to see that the culture has survived there, and I really don’t know why it hasn’t here. But I think the thing that seems to be of so little interest historically. Well, like, as a kid, we played in the tunnels by where the prison was, the seminary. There were
these huge tunnels that went from the hills all the way down to the lake. All of those
have been closed off now. I don’t know if anybody has any pictures, or put much of
that into historical form.

AP: I haven’t heard about those before. It hasn’t been brought up here.

ES: Oh really? Well, supposedly there was this guy, Getz, he was an industrialist from
Chicago, and he was afraid that Chicago was going to be bombed, so he had a
submarine in Lake Michigan. He built the Getz farm, the castle. Not the castle from
Castle Park, but the house that’s still there that Laketown Township is deciding what
to do with. There were these tunnels that went under the hills to the lake, and they
were about, I would say, an eighth or a quarter mile long. We used to play in them
as kids, I don’t think they were really safe.

AP: What were they used for?

ES: It was supposed to be an escape route, because he thought they were going to get
bombed. I think some of these kind of stories, it’s rather tragic that a lot of it is lost
to the kids in the community. It seems like they just tear everything down and it’s
gone.

AP: There’s always been an emphasis, too, as far as history, on international, national
history, whereas local or folklore, we don’t really preserve those, because for some
reason we don’t think...

ES: Well, we either don’t think they’re important, or they don’t have any relevance.

When they built the seminary building there, I think by that time in the ’40s or ’50s,
the Augustinian fathers were there. I think by that time, the tunnels were all closed.
But I guess it was an interest to me because my great, great grandfather was Steven Lucas, who was one of the founders of Graafschap. My uncle and my grandfather, on the Scholten side, they were the township supervisors in Laketown, which sits just south of Holland, so we heard a lot of the history of that area. My uncle from my mother's side, Milton Timmerman, who's still living, was the township supervisor in Fillmore, so you heard a lot of the history of the Allegan Woods. Michigan State had the first greenhouse or forestry planting just south of Holland here ten or fifteen miles. That's still there. I know when we went there with the scout troops, all the cement is still there from that stuff. Again, you've got the Allegan Woods, which is really an interesting, historical piece, as well. As well as some of them that have been written up, like Castle Park and Macatawa and so on.

AP: What are some of the more interesting tidbits that stick out in your mind that you've heard?

ES: I think I remember they were talking about my grandfather when they talked about the Allegan County having a discussion of who owned the Allegan Woods. They got the state, and ultimately the Federal Government, to make that a national forest so people couldn't build in it. Which they were beginning to do, where ______ Farm is, where they have all the ducks, and stuff like that. I think that some of those things must have been written some place. I think the Holland part of it, my wife's part of the Oggel chain. Dr. Van Raalte's daughter, Christina, married an Oggel, and the Oggel was her [Joyce's] great, great, great grandfather. When we closed her mother's house and her great aunt's house, they had a lot of this stuff, and relics in the attic,
and we gave that to Elton Bruins. I've got some more stuff that I should get over there that hasn't been cataloged in terms of history kind of things. Old pictures of the Van Raalte house and stuff like that. I can show you parts of it.

AP: The Van Raalte house was torn down, wasn't it? When did that happen?

ES: I think that was torn down when we were in college, in the '40s. [Eugene gets up to retrieve some old photographs he has kept.] Here are some old pictures. That's taken from Pilgrim Home Cemetery looking east or west toward the Van Raalte Farm. All the ships, Joyce's grandfather on her mother's side was a sailor, and he sailed on a lot of these ships, so he was very much interested in those ships. Again, I think they should go to the Archives eventually. This is the Argo. This is the ship, you can still see the Ottawa Beach Hotel in the background. These are 8th Street, 1900. 1884, the Plugger Mill, which was on 7th Street. There's the depot, 1976. This is what report cards were like in 1884, from Johnny Oggel, Joyce's grandfather.

AP: Deportment, scholarship, days absent, times tardy.

ES: Can you imagine 120 years ago, that's what a report card looked like.

AP: He was never tardy. Deportment, what was that?

ES: That's behavior. They gave a number, and you see how history is turning itself around. They used the Texas system of not having A's, B's, and C's, but everything was put on a 100 point scale.

AP: I guess that's a little more exact.

ES: I don't know the accuracy, like I said, some of the tickets and so on, our probably recorded somewhere in the township, city, council minutes, meetings, archives, these
kinds of things. For somebody from your generation, it's really interesting when we talk about Holland and how severe the winters were, I think the kids always thought that we were not telling the truth. Then they saw some of the pictures one time what some of the snow on South Washington was like.

AP: Wow, it's as tall as the car and the people. When about were these taken?

ES: That was during the depression, those were in the '30s. But, our kids, it was really interesting, they would say things like, gee, you guys really weren't lying about what winters were like, back then when the lake was much lower, I think it affected the weather somewhat differently. It's hard to tell what people are really interested in, in terms of the city of Holland. In fact, right where we're sitting, this house was built in '55 or so, I think. The first swimming pool was right next door in this vacant lot. It was just torn out about four or five years ago. Dr. John Winter, who lived there, he had a _______ race track right here where he ran his horses. That little horse barn is still there. It sits right on the back of that property on their house there. I think that someone will maybe say, well who cares, really? I don't know, I think it's kind of fascinating.

JS: Well, you like history, too. And I think it's important, and I think it's important in all of our lives.

ES: Well, I think it is. One of the things that changed drastically in Holland, and in probably most communities, is that the church was the social center of the community. It very much was, I think, in Holland, and it isn't any longer. I think the social life of everybody, their families and so on, centered around the church.
AP: Do you think there's a social center now, or is the city too large for that?

JS: I think it depends on which church you attend. We belong to the Presbyterian, and it's a very, very warm, friendly church. Everybody expects you to talk to them and greet them, and tell them what's going on in your life at church. We really like that. For me, it was quite a change after we were married in my father's chapel, which is right across from Hope College. We were the first couple married in my father's chapel.

ES: I think what has changed in Holland is that Holland is fragmented in terms of the community. As kids, it's sort of like going to Holland High School, you knew everybody, and everybody worked at Heinz in the summer. You worked in a pickle factory, and by the late '40s, the Hispanic families started coming into the community. I think, right now, what you've really got going is, I think Hope College is one segment of the town, the Christian Reformed Church is probably another segment, and maybe there's the rest of us, and I don't think the three segments don't communicate very much. The Hispanic segments, some of them do, and some of them don't, as well. I think when we first got married, we lived right here on 30th Street, and the front door didn't even lock. You can't imagine living like that now, I don't think, in very many communities. But I think that was very common in those days. We've been married 42 years, so I don't know how all of this changed that much. I think this is why, in some ways, history is important. Our nephew, Tom, works for the Church Herald in Grand Rapids, and he's just writing the history of First Reformed Church, which is right down the street here, so he's digging into a lot
of the history kinds of things we’re talking about, with Elton Bruins. I think he feels that a lot of the answers in terms of understanding what happens to a community, can only come about if it goes back to its roots, and kind of figures out where they were.

AP: How do you see the different denominations and churches relating to each other?

ES: I don’t think they relate very much. I think the town is very much segregated in a lot of ways. Which is, I think, very different. I worked for Head Start in Grand Rapids, I teach at Grand Valley, and I think Grand Rapids is a very different kind of community. It’s frightening in terms of the ethnic racial groups, but I think there’s more of a common bond to it. In many ways, I guess I really don’t know what ties Holland together these days.

AP: Do you think it’s fragmented, not just in terms of ethnicity, but in terms of socio-economic classes, does that have as much to do with it do you think?

ES: I think so. And I think the religious kind of things. When we were kids, this is terrible to say, but the Catholic community was horribly ostracized, teased. For example, our grand kids wouldn’t think of that kind of intolerance. It was pretty accepted, which doesn’t make it right. That was where the teasing was. I don’t know. It’s hard to say. I think interest in any community is dependent on a lot of things. The work I do in Grand Rapids with homeless populations and so on, I think that probably there are a lot of people in Holland who feel very disenfranchised, too. You just feel, and maybe this is true nationally, that there is a significant portion of the population that does not feel connected. I went to China two summers ago, and I think that was a very awakening experience in the sense that a lot of the community is
visible because they have such small homes and everybody lives on top of each other. Beggars and everybody is right out there in the street. When you're confronted with street beggars and people waiting at your door everyday, I suspect that may well happen in towns like Holland as well, one of these years. Things kind of change, and then I think you turn back and look at what happened, and realize that it's already here. I suppose everybody's oral history of a town, what happened in terms of what was unique and fun... If I think back to our childhood, for example, the safety and security that kids felt was very different, to just literally go down town and not worry about getting in trouble.

JS: We were allowed to play kick the can at night until dark. Nobody questioned, and when it got dark, we went home. Or when the porch light went on in the house. But there was no worrying about something happening to you, that didn't happen.

ES: I think the gang thing, and hanging out, was very different then. It might have been at a drug store to get cokes or something, but I don't think it was the kind of thing that we're talking about that we see kids involved in today. But I think part of it, too, in terms of the oral history, which is really what fascinates me about your project, is in terms of our kids as well, we have three kids: how interested are they, really, in terms of what life was like? Our oldest son is an attorney, our daughter is a teacher, our middle son manages Outback restaurants in Lansing and Jackson, they really never ask much about what life was really like in the Depression.

JS: We never bring it up, either.

ES: Well, this is what I'm getting at, partly it's our fault, too. In terms of the stories that
make up our lives, we end up maybe not telling them, or just not talking about it. I’m not sure what today’s kids think about, whether they think that we look back on it as horrendous times. I mean, if I had to think about looking back on the Depression, I didn’t know that we were in a Depression, I guess, until afterward. I guess when I got to high school and people started talking about, well, that was the Depression days. You say, oh, okay. At the time, I don’t think we realized that that’s what it was.

AP: I think to answer maybe part of that, today our sense of history in this generation is often very muddled and very flat. We’ll think of one time period as the Depression. We want those tags on everything. We think, the Depression: everybody was out of work. We will think everybody went through the same thing in every part of the country. Or we’ll think, Prohibition, this is what was going on for everybody. Or then we’ll think, World War II, all the women worked in the factory and all the men went to Europe. So we’ll put these flat characteristics on that. Also, we don’t have a good idea of how recent those events were. We just don’t realize how much the generation or two generations before us were involved in all that. I talked to a woman who was 100 years old, and that’s one person’s life time. When I asked her about big changes in the role of women, she talked about women getting the right to vote. I forget how recent that change is. I think we don’t have as much perspective on it. We don’t have humanity added to it.

ES: The tragedy, and I think this is where teaching college kids today is really neat, because college kids are willing to fight back against a label like Generation X, and
are willing to ask the right questions. Because, they’re saying, wait a minute, we’re not in the same place you are. One day, we were having a discussion and we were talking about where we were when John F. Kennedy was assassinated. Everybody remembers exactly those days because the country came to a stop. Our daughter-in-law looked very blank, and she said, "My gosh, I wasn’t even born." Which is our problem in a sense that it’s hard for me to believe that everybody wasn’t alive and can just pull that out of their memory. I think it’s hard for me, in a sense. I’ll be 69 this fall, which doesn’t seem like very long, but I think we lose that perspective in terms of time just as much as today’s generation does. We have little pockets that we put information in. For example, want to leave behind my army days during the Korean War. I think, really, who cares at this point. That’s fine. It was two years out of my life. But it was an interesting experience.

AP: That’s one of those pockets that’s kind of getting looked over. We go from World War II to Vietnam, and then they’ll skip to now. They really do skip that Korean War.

ES: I think right now it’s sort of coming back a little bit, in the sense of the famine, the people starving in North Korea right now, and realizing that all the remnants of the war were never really won, or gotten back to. This, I think, is what the real issue in history and the role of literature, too, is that we go back and finish the stories. I think we’re slowly going back to the Native American heritage, but why don’t we understand the Ottawa tribe here in west Michigan.

JS: I went to school with some of those kids.
ES: Now I think there’s none left except the Pigeon family. That, again, is a big chapter in our history, and I don’t know why, if that becomes an unspeakable subject.

AP: It’s hard, too, if things don’t fit into a category, because we like to have subjects and headings, and we group things by decades. It’s really just arbitrary, that ten year period, to think that everything was one was for those ten years, and then when that number switched, everything was a different way. We want that convenience. But it doesn’t happen that way.

ES: The sad part of it is, we used to, every spring, we’d take the kids down to Kentucky because it’s so beautiful and warm down in Kentucky. My great, great grandfather from my mother’s side was what they call the cannoneer general in the Civil War. To go to the battle fields of the Civil War, even, in Harrisburg, Kentucky, and see his name on a plaque there, in spite of the fact that’s a hundred and fifty years ago...

JS: That’s history.

ES: ...it’s something old, and to find out who all these people were, because, they were ancestors. To think that people thought in those days that it’s important to have your portrait taken, that your relatives and ancestors would want to see those, and now we don’t even know who they are. They’re just old people. They just wind up in an antique gallery. That was really interesting to me in terms of the heritage in a country like China. They even tell the McDonald’s, you can build a McDonald’s here, but you put it in an old building. You can put your arches out front, if you want, but you’re not tearing anything down, which is much more respectful, I think.

AP: Which is strange, because I think people ar really craving to have some of that
heritage in their lives, but we don't have it. When you mentioned those old photos, you can go to those antique stores right now and buy somebody else's old photos, because people want old photos. It's like they want that part and they don't have it. It's like we're trying to fill in the inadequacy, we want these pictures of people. It's not even somebody in our family we don't know. We just want this old picture, we haven't preserved that for ourselves.

ES: It's kind of bizarre, I think, that we're not too tuned into history. Starting out as a history major and getting my masters in history, it's inconceivable to me that people are not interested in it. Naturally, if you took a history of Europe or the history of Western Civilization, I think you still studied all the kings and queens of England. But nobody says, what was life like in terms of the common person.

AP: Right, I've always been fascinated with the little details and things like that, but you have to get through history survey courses first. I always sat there and had to memorize dates of rulers and wars. That's all it was, politics and war. That seemed so depressing to me to just concentrate on that, to go from war to war to war. That's how we remember our history.

ES: Again, what is very different in China is they have what they call ________. They put all their stories in stone. They have these all around in the community. They have, what they call sometimes ________ forests, where there literally will be blocks of these stories of what went on in the area, sometime a thousand, two thousand years old. The stones are still there, they were carved in stone. Obviously the stories were terribly important. As a psychologist, this concerns me a great deal, in terms of, how
do you build respect for people from one generation to another. I think history is probably a good part of it. When my grandfather Scholten was still alive and we talked about what it was like in pioneer school when he went to the one room country school, and the Indians were still around, and there were gypsies and they were scared, and they stayed in school over night, and watched out of the bell tower in the balcony of the school. I remember him telling that story, and you’d want to hear it again and again and again. I went to that same school. But I think it’s very much tied into a character of a community, and I guess if we talk about what’s really changed in Holland, I think Holland has lost it’s character. I think there are parts that are really bringing it back, for example, the down town, and I think the park and the Van Raalte Statue. I think Hope College is very much written into the character of Holland.

JS: And Van Raalte was a great, great grandfather of mine?

ES: Yes, connected through the Oggel’s. We’ll have to get back with Elton Bruins.

AP: That’s something I can’t believe, that the Van Raalte home was torn down. I’m very surprised that wasn’t preserved, or that somebody didn’t have the foresight.

ES: I think the problem at the time, and I went to Hope in the ’40s when that was going on, was it was flooded all the time. That was at the end of Fairbanks Avenue where the soccer field is now. That was all filled in, because it was very low. It was vandalized, the windows were broken. They thought it was a disgrace, I think, I’m not sure, to Dr. Van Raalte at that time. I think it would have had to been rebuilt totally from the ground up, which would have been happened today. Back then, I’m
not sure it was appreciated as much. One of the things about what some people used
to call the good old days, the idea was that it was different, rather than good/bad.
More time to reflect, perhaps, with a different set of values and character and so on
to a community, is what Holland probably has to find again. Which is a real
challenge.

AP: How has Hope changed?

ES: I'm not sure that Hope has changed that much. I think Hope has always been rather
rigid, academically.

JS: The teachers are primarily very excellent teachers. They're very careful who they
have teach.

ES: I think once you get out of Hope, you’ll appreciate it more. When we were there, it
was being billed as the little Harvard of the midwest. I really got to appreciate Hope
when I went to graduate school at Souther Cal. All of the guys sort of made fun of
Hope College. They had never heard of it, and they wondered if it was related to
Bob Hope. They had gone to Temple, NYU, my roommate was from LSU, one of
the other fellows was from Texas. So, when we got to graduate school, the story,
which is interesting to me, was you’d get accepted into graduate school, but the next
step would be, they’d see what your undergraduate deficiency were. Whether your
major has courses you have to make up on it. They all came back in accounting.
Econ, they all had 6, 8-9 hours that they had to make up. They all had an
undergraduate deficiency, which really irritated them, because they wanted to get
done with their masters in a year and a half or so. I was the last one in the group,
and they couldn’t wait to see what was going to happen to little old Hope College, and how many hours I was going to have to make up. When my day came up, a couple of them sat in for the hearing, where they went over my transcript and made a decision on that. This was six or eight weeks after I started. When I got there, the dean asked the professors there, "Gentleman, have you ever heard of Hope College?" I thought, oh my gosh, he’s going to make fun of it, too. Instead, two of them said, oh yes, we’ve heard of Hope College. These great big books for accreditations studies and all that, he closed the book and he said, well, for the two of you who don’t know, there’s a group of little colleges in the midwest, and they all start with the letter H, and anytime you see anyone from those colleges, everything is in order. Hope, Heidelberg, Hanover… (tape ends) Then they all wanted to know more about Hope College, what was it like, were they rigid?

AP: Did you consider it rigid?

ES: Well, I didn’t think it was hard for me.

AP: Or is it that case, like, I didn’t consider it rigid when I went through it, but when I compare notes with other people from other schools I think, oh, it was really different.

ES: I think the experience for me was, I took Latin and became a Latin major, and half the freshman class dropped out or flunked out by the sophomore year. You turn around a look, and you think, I didn’t think Latin was hard. But it must have been for a lot of students.

JS: I think Hope has always had quality teachers.
ES: As I still say to classes I teach at Grand Valley, this is your money, you deserve a good, quality education. I know a lot of college students, the first question is, what time are we going to get out of here today? But I think they really do want a good education. I think Hope is rather thorough. Of course, when I went came the end of World War II in '46, which was when all the veterans came back. I think at the time, when I graduated in '50, it was one of the largest classes to ever graduate from Hope, I guess. I don't remember. I think there were over 1,000 in the freshman class, so it was a huge change. They had all these army barracks from ROTC from when it was in Holland here. So Hope had to do some upscaling.

AP: That would be a large class today. They wouldn't be able to handle it.

ES: No, I don't think so. There were some large lecture halls. We had Graves Lecture Hall. There was a library in one end of it, and they had a big lecture hall that held about 300, 400 people. I think that was probably the only time in Hope's history that they had big lecture classes going through.

AP: I know in recent years the classes have been pushing the limits, and they just are full. They don't have any extra room.

ES: Grand Valley's getting to be like that, too. Still, here, I don't know if this is what you hear from a lot of people, but things change so fast. World War II was done, you go to college, and then it's the end of the war, and that's all there is to it. You try to forget about it, or put it out of your mind, or something like that, I'm not sure. I think this is why some of the projects like the oral history is, and I haven't thought about this for years, what it was like, but we used go through the air raid drills in
school. I don’t know if you’ve heard anything about that, but everybody had to hide under their seats. We had these nights, at 8:00 at night, for an hour, the town had to be blacked out. You couldn’t have any lights on in the whole town. I think that has a lot to do with scaring kids.

AP: I have had my mom tell me stories a lot, and the things she would tell me about following World War II, about having drills in case of nuclear war and people building bomb shelters in their homes. There’s a Happy Days episode about that, which we think is kind of silly now. When Bush was running for reelection, one of the things he talked about was that he had wiped out the fear of nuclear war, and a lot of kids my age were like, whoop dee do. My mom was like, when I was in grade school, we used to have to hide under our desks for drills in case we were bombed by another country. You don’t do that anymore.

ES: This house has a bomb shelter in it.

AP: Does it? When was this house built?

ES: ’55. It has a cement ceiling and all cement walls. I think that some of those things, I hope one of the projects that you’re able to accomplish would be to be able to pull some of those kinds of stories together, like the bomb scares and the black outs during World War II.

AP: When you would do those, when you would go through a black out drill, did it really scare you thinking, this means we could get bombed, or did it just become old hat?

ES: It didn’t become old hat, I think everybody took it seriously. You thought that if this really might happen, then you needed to know what you were supposed to do. That
might have been a reality. But, like we said a couple of times today, I haven’t thought about that in years.

AP: Did you have a feeling that America was invincible, or the world power? Kids now kind of have this feeling America is this world power and it could never topple from that status. Is that a fairly recent attitude?

JS: I think some of that has gone with who is the president.

ES: I think part of that, and I guess I am biased in terms of my history, because during the Korean War, I worked for the CIA out of Washington and the United Nations, and you get to appreciate a different, inside track, state department briefings and things like that. You get a sense that what used to be called the ultra conservative, this is America, love it or leave it, that America was right, overall. I think your generation is finally asking questions about things like nationalism: Is it right? At what point is it taken to the extreme? I think as your generation gets more sophisticated in terms of travel. Probably when we think about one of the biggest revolutions that has ever taken place, if you think of the migration to the United States in the last two, three generations, has been the biggest migration in the history of mankind. How often do you stop and think about that? With psychological conferences and so on, to wake up in the morning to the Arabic minarets in the Muslim community in the Detroit area, I think, it’s almost kind of frightening. Maybe it isn’t to you, but to think, this is America. It’s mostly in the one high school and parts of Southfield. It’s the same thing, too, for example, I run a national mental health task force for Head Start, so I go to Washington, and when we are
there at the hotels, to realize that there isn’t a single English speaking employee in the hotel. You go to the menu, and you point to the number that you want.

AP: I did spend a semester in New York. It would depend on whether you’d walk north or south or which neighborhood you were in, it was just a totally different group of people.

ES: So I would think your project is really very interesting. I would suspect that it probably, educationally, need to be gotten back to the schools somehow, in terms of the oral history of the stories about what life was like when.

AP: There’s kind of been a reemergence of the importance of storytelling. In literature there really has been, because people are trying to diversify our study of literature, and when we try to add in stories from other cultures, that’s what we have. The African American aspects that we are trying to add to our literature, a lot of them are stories. That’s how they maintained their influence, through storytelling. A lot more people are using that.

ES: I think storytelling pulls together everything: psychology, history, culture. Our associate pastor, Rick Campbell, he’s getting his PhD in storytelling.

AP: It’s an interesting mix of history and myth, also.

ES: But if you stop and think of Robert Bly and all the people who literally say our myths are what we live by, you begin to wonder.

AP: Often, history is not what happened, but how we remember it.

ES: Yes, the distortions and what it was like. As you say, maybe the tidbits are the approach, the perspective we need. Rick Campbell, he’s a master storyteller. He has
a children's sermon every Sunday, and he gets the kids going. He has a lot of fun with what they're doing.

JS: He can get them all focused on what he’s saying. I was glad to see the Van Raalte statue in Centennial.

ES: I think that’s great to have as a gift from Hope to the city.

AP: Are there other big changes that you can think of? I’m curious to hear a little bit more about the seminary and the chapel and your father, the connections you would have with that.

ES: You know that Hope was an academic academy first, it was chartered as an academy. And her great, great grandfather, the Oggel’s, then came from Iowa, where they were ministers. They were brothers who were ministers who went to north Holland, and then came back to Hope College, and one became the president of Hope, and the other one the president of the seminary, and they split at that point. The seminary moved across the street, they became two separate entities in the 1860s, something like that. They built the new seminary in 1952. New Brunswick was the seminary of the Reformed Church on the east coast, and then Western, this was the western part of it. Joyce’s father became president of the seminary in the ’30s, John R. Mulder. So he really expanded the seminary and got some of the chairs endowed, built a new building. He was very much Mr. Reformed Church for a number of years. He’d go out and preach and connect with the Reformed Church. It’s very interesting, I think, that I used to take him, lots of times on Sundays, to the church where he had to preach, like in Chicago or something like that. In a lot of ways, he was so forward
looking, he knew that the day would come when women would be ordained, and he
didn’t have any problem with that kind of thing, which I think was really kind of
interesting to think that someone could see that happening, and that it would be a
good influence on the church. And that the church would have to change it’s goals.
I think he saw that the church wasn’t going to be a social institution as much as it
was, in terms of how it had to change. I think its connection with Hope College, too,
from that perspective, the kinds of persons that would become ministers, and the role
of the ministry, you have to keep asking the questions so that society adapts. That’s
the same thing, I guess I’ve been talking about. Holland needs to find a new
character. Which is really kind of interesting. I don’t know if you’ve seen the
movie, Jerry McGuire. You have to see it. It’s weird. It’s an "R" movie, it takes
you a while to get in it. But here’s this guy who really is talking about the American
scene and how competitive and unindividually honoring it is. So he writes at four
o’clock in the morning after he wakes up and he was drunk one night, he writes this
mission statement about putting heart into professional sports. He changes his life,
loses all his clients, gets fired, falls in love, and really begins to appreciate what
character, and gets into the "black thing." There’s a lot of profanity in it, but it
really hits why it’s important to develop a mission statement every once in a while, in
terms of saying, okay, this is what we’re here for.

AP: My mother taught me that’s the first thing you do every time you’re starting a project
and you get stuck. If you can’t put what you’re doing into one or two sentences, than
you don’t know what you’re doing. If you can put it into one or two sentences, every
time you have a question about what you’re doing, all you have to do is look at that, and you’ll know what choice you need to make.

ES: “This is what you’re here for.” This is why we have such a great time with our minister at the Presbyterian Church. His title of his sermon yesterday was, what to drink when the bucket is empty, kind of. Where do you get soul from, where do you go to get recharged in your life? It’s a real interest of mine, I guess, in psychology in particular, to figure out where we are, and pull it together. Which is really hard to do.

AP: Well, I guess I’ll just ask for any last thoughts.

ES: I think there are some people around who are good friends of Randy Vande Water, and I think he’s put some of these stories together in terms of areas like sports and so on. As you look back on this, I think there are threads that really pull the community together. It was in the paper a couple of days ago about the Flying Dutchman team. I remember going to see Holland’s baseball team, which was really a phenomenal social experience at Riverview Park way back then. You just had a real community feeling. But I think this project, I can sense that it’s kind of a critical thing that needs to be on going here. The next step would probably be to get some of it put into writing and have the historical, primary evidence documented a little bit better.

AP: I think it would be interesting when we’re done to pull together some of the over­arching elements. There are some common threads, and when I look at all these things together, it really is making a statement, and separately, it doesn’t always seem so apparent. I think that’s where one of the real interests come, when you look at the
And you see that these threads really were there, and what they would mean today.

That’s great. It certainly takes time.

AP: Is there anything else?

ES: Not that I can think of.

[The interview concludes with the three of us looking at Dr. Mulder’s portrait on the wall, which hangs in the Scholten’s living room.]