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Tapia, Maria Oral History Interview: Sesquicentennial of Holland, "150 Stories for 150 Years"

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Sesquicentennial Oral History Project
Interview with Maria Tapia
June 10, 1997
Interviewer: Ann Paeth

AP: The first thing we’ll start with is if you could state your name and where you were born.

MT: My name is Maria Tapia. I’m originally from Lerrato, Texas.

AP: When did you come to Holland?

MT: Well, we came with my mother and five other brothers and sisters, from Lerrato, to Michigan, not to Holland, in 1950. We came to work, to make some money. My father had died when I was only five years old, and my mother was ___ but she could do it. So she came here to make some money with all of us. I was about eight or nine years old. My oldest sister was 19. My second brother was left in Lerrato, because he had just gotten married. We came to DeWitt, Michigan, which is by St. John. We were working on the fields. Well, I wasn’t. I was too young and so was my other brother and sister who are two years older than I am. All three of us weren’t working. We stayed home, we kind of helped clean the house, cook, whatever we could do. My mother and my brothers and sisters worked in the field on the sugar beets. They were working and I guess we weren’t there for that long, because the equipment that was given to my family wasn’t that great, and they had a hard time doing the work. Some time during the day, there was a trucker who went by, and saw my brothers and my mother working so hard, that he suggested that we go somewhere else to get paid more money and better working conditions. My
mother was afraid to do that, because we had signed a contract to stay there. But it
was so hard, and we weren't even getting paid as well as we were told we were going
to get paid. So, what we did, this trucker arranged it so that we could sneak out
during the night. Just before that, one of my brothers had a car. Well, we had a car,
the only car we had. He was young, he was 18 or so, and he had had an accident
with the car. He had rolled over, and the car was all smashed up. You could still
drive it, but the front window was all broken. That was the only way of getting
anywhere. So, we took off like that, with all our stuff in the car in the middle of the
night, and we took off. I guess the trucker gave my brothers instructions on how to
get here to Holland. Actually, it was to Hudsonville. We drove all night. I felt
sorry for my brother because there was no glass on the front of the car. His eyes
were just... He was just crying like crazy because of the wind that was hitting his
eyes. I don't know how long it took us to get here. It probably didn't take us too
long. So we got to Hudsonville, and I don't remember exactly, but somehow we
ended up with this very, very nice family. It was a Dutch family. The name was
Menno Styf. Him and his family, he had a wife and a girl and boy, and they were in
charge of a farm. They had pickles. I guess they were under contract with Heinz.
Actually, that's why we were coming here to work, on the pickles. I was still too
young, so was my brother and my sister. All three of us stayed home again to do the
cooking and cleaning. We were staying in this one room. We slept in it, we had
bunk beds, and here's six of us sleeping in this one room, it was kitchen, living
room, everything in one room. It was right there by the field where we used to
work. It was just a few feet away from where the farmer, the owner of the place, lived. They treated us great. They were very, very nice people. Anyway, we worked there through all the season of the pickles. Every once in a while I would work, and I didn’t like it, because I had to get up early, and the leaves of the pickles were all wet, and they had little thorny things on the leaves that would stick in your fingers. But anyway, so I didn’t work that often. But after the season was over…

My mother had a business in Texas which was she would make corn meal for making tortillas. Which is, being Mexican, that’s what they had in Loretto, Texas. But, my mother was in so much of a debt because of the business had been turned over to my brothers. They were young, they didn’t know what they were doing. What they did, they would let people buy what we were selling at credit, and they would never pay. That’s one of the reasons why my mother left, we were in so much debt that we weren’t getting any money in. That’s why we left Loretto. While we were here, she heard that a lot of the people that we owed money to were taking over the equipment that was at the house. So she figured we had nothing to go back to. All of her equipment was gone, she didn’t have anything to make a living with. So, I guess we had to look for another job. This farmer, Meno, offered to help my brothers and sisters find a job, so we could stay here. Which he did. He found a job for them at some kind of a lumberyard, Grassman’s. It used to be in Hudsonville. He got them a job there. We ended up staying there, living there. But, of course, the working conditions weren’t that great. Besides, it was owned by Heinz, and he couldn’t really let us stay there. So he said he would help us find a house, and that’s when we came
to Holland. So he helped us find a house, and then we moved to Seventh Street, by Riverview Park. Now, all those houses are gone now, of course. After that, my brothers, they ran out of work at that lumberyard, and that’s when they started working at Heinz. When we were in Hudsonville, we started going to school in Beaver Dam, which is a little tiny town or village, and they had all twelve grades in one room, because it was a farm school. Which was really neat, because it was all together, all the kids. When we came to Holland it was different. We had to go to different schools. The only ones who actually were in school was my brother and my sister. My sister’s three years older and my brother’s four years older. We were the only ones young enough to go to school. But my brother was old enough so that he didn’t have to go to school, he was sixteen. So it was just my sister and I. But at that time, there was hardly any Mexicans. I guess, there was a lot of discrimination, too. They would look at you like you were different. A lot of times they would even tell you, like when it came to houses, if you wanted to rent a house, they would tell you that they had already rented that house, even though it wasn’t true. They just didn’t want other people other than the Dutch people or white people, they’d say.

My sister, we both went to school. I started here in fifth grade, even though I had already finished fifth grade in Texas, but I guess they told me since I didn’t really finish completely in Texas, I had to repeat fifth grade here. I felt pretty comfortable. Even though, like I said, there weren’t very many Mexicans. But my older sister wasn’t. She just felt very, very uncomfortable that there weren’t any other Mexicans. She eventually quit when she turned sixteen. But I kept going.
AP: That must be so hard when you’re an adolescent and you already feel like you’re such an outsider anyway.

MT: Then what made it worse is my mother couldn’t speak English. She learned by the time she passed away, she learned a little bit, but not enough. I was kind of on my own, you could say, I did everything on my own. I had nice teachers that helped me, they tried to get me to go to different churches. One of the music teachers, Ms. VanVyven was her name, she helped me join the bluebirds. So I had some fun. I guess I didn’t feel as uncomfortable as my sister. Eventually, my oldest sister, she met somebody and she got married. Slowly, we all started leaving the house. I was the last one. Well, my brother, the one that was left in Texas, since he didn’t really have a job down there, my mother helped him come to Holland. Then we were all together with him and his wife at that time, he had a little boy. Like I said, all my brothers and sisters worked at Heinz. I started working there during summer vacations. But I wanted to go to college. I wanted to be a teacher, actually, or a translator. I wanted to learn all these different languages. But, when it came down to all of my brothers and sisters starting to get married, then it was left to just me and my brother who was four years older than I am. Then I got done with school, and I wanted to go to college. So I went to Grand Rapids Junior College, which is now Grand Rapids Community, and I went there for a year. I wanted to be a teacher. But then, I started running out of money, my mother couldn’t help me. Her job was, she had boarders, guys who lived there and they would eat there. Some of them would just come over because she was a wonderful cook. That’s the way she was
helping support us when we were young. My brother and I were the only ones left at the house. He wanted to get married, but he didn’t want to get married because I was the only one left. I said, no, you’re getting married. I can help my mom. So, I thought, I’ll join the service. I heard that the service, the army, would help support the family. I joined, but then I found out when I was sworn in, I went to Detroit to get sworn in, and then I was told that women were not allowed to have any dependents. Therefore, my mother wasn’t going to be helped with any money. But at that time it was too late because I had been sworn in, I was in the Service. So then I went in, I stayed in. Then my mother ___ by herself, of course. I went into the service for two years. Then what I did, the pay that I would get, I would send her some money, because I didn’t have anything else. She just kept on working. I was in the service for two years. I loved it.

AP: Where were you stationed?

MT: I was stationed in Anston, Alabama. I had my basic training there, then I went to school there. Then they sent me to New York, to Governor’s Island. I was stationed there for about a year and half. I liked it. I would have reenlisted except for, my mother was all by herself, and she kind of talked me into not going back in, because she was going to be left all by herself. So I didn’t reenlist, I just got out. I was discharged after two years, and I came home. I got a job. While I was in the service, I got involved with computers, because this friend I had, a girl friend, she liked computers, and she helped me take some classes, so I started liking computers. I came to Holland when I was discharged. When I went to the unemployment office,
they said they didn’t have computers in Holland. Now, I think back, I don’t think that was true. But maybe they didn’t have that many at that time. Because, I graduated from high school in ’59, so then I wasn’t in service for one year, ’60-61. So it was like ’64 before I was out and looking for a job. What I did, there was an ad in the paper for something to do with computers. You had to send in a resume, which I did. It didn’t say where or anything, so I just sent it in, and I didn’t hear from them. I thought, well, I guess I have to look for another job. So at that time I got a job with the furniture factory from Zeeland. Hubble Furniture. I worked there, which I didn’t like, because all I was doing was sanding the furniture, the top of the record players, stuff like that. My hair was all white when I’d come out of work. But it was a job. All of a sudden, I got this letter in the mail asking me if I was still interested in working with computers. It was in response to my letter from six months before that. I said sure. It turned out to be Big Dutchmen, which used to be in Zeeland, which was only about four blocks away from where I was working from Hubble’s. I think Herman Miller is in that building now. So I worked there. I started working and I worked there for four years. I became the supervisor of several women, which after a while I didn’t like it because there was constantly arguments with the women. Then I got married. I married one of the guys that used to live at my mom’s house, as a boarder. But anyway, we got married, and then I got pregnant. I had my first son. I remember, I took my absence, five months off. When I got back, I was told that position was no longer open, and that they were going to get rid of the supervisor, and I just didn’t like what was going on. I started
looking for another job. I think, two months after I got back, there was an opening. Besides, it was kind of hard for me, even though Holland and Zeeland aren't that far away. To me, it was too far away to have to drive, since I had to drop off my son to my sister's, my sister then took care of my son. So, I wanted to have a job closer to here in Holland, so I didn't have to drive so far. Besides, I've never really cared for driving, especially in the snow. There was an opening here at Hope. The pay was the same as I was getting at Big Dutchman. At that time, I was getting two weeks of vacation, and they told me here that I could still take that two weeks vacation. The pay was still the same, but I figured it was closer to home, so I took it. At that time, you could almost say they were just starting that department here, the computer center. It was just my boss and me. It was '67. I got married in '66 and it was a year after that I started working here. My son, my baby, you could say, was only five months old when I started working here. Before me, here, the people that used to work in the computer center were two girls, which I had met while I was working at Big Dutchman. They were both working part-time, and then my boss. They were doing the data entry. But the girls didn't want to work full-time, so they were looking for somebody full-time. I told my boss, Ken Vink, well I don't know that much. I just told him what I knew about computers. I said, "I'm willing to learn if you're willing to teach me." And he said he was, so we started working together, and he taught me a lot. He was a nice, great guy. I used to run the sorter and the _____, all the machines. You could say, just him and I were the only ones working there full-time. I would work quite a bit of hours, 50, 60 hours a week. For
instance, the alumni office, they had thousands and thousands of cards that I had to sort, because of all the alumni. So I would work a lot of hours. Eventually, they started adding people. Then he left, and I started getting different bosses, and the department started to grow. They started getting better computers, faster. Eventually they got rid of the key punches, which is what I used to use to do data entry on. In the meanwhile, I was having all these kids. I ended up with four kids, three boys, one girl. My youngest is almost 19. My oldest son, Rex, just turned 30. My next one, Steve, is 27. My daughter, Rose, is pregnant. Steve just graduated from Central Michigan University. He’s working over in Lansing. My youngest, right now, just graduated from high school. I’m not sure what he’s going to do yet, because he’s got a little boy that he has to support. He wants to go to Davenport. I’m not sure. We’ve always helped my kids with money, financially. My husband… Oh, that’s right. I never did mention my husband. My husband’s name is Victor. He used to work at the Western Foundry. He hurt himself. He was a molder, and he would lift 300 pounds or so at a time between him and this other guy. Somehow he messed up his back. He had surgery. The surgery helped him, but not to fix it completely. He had to come disabled because of it. His doctor told him that he waited too long for his surgery, so he lost some of his feeling in his leg. At that time, my daughter was maybe a few months old when he stopped working, and he became disabled. She’s 27 now. He started getting disability and he does yards, but that’s about the extent of his jobs. Now, I’ve been here almost 30 years. I got a second job, as if I didn’t have enough to do. I work at night. I put inserts in the
inserts machine. You know the inserts that come in the paper? I do that. Well, there's several of us. We put the inserts in the machines, and then the machines put them into the main section of the paper. Actually, I started that job as a Christmas type job because I wanted extra money, because at that time they were looking for people to work on the weekends, on Saturday and Sunday. Mainly, Sunday morning early, like midnight to five or six o'clock in the morning on Sunday morning. That's where I started. But then after that, the machine wasn't working too well. So they started handing out more hours to people that were part-timers. Then, also, a lot of people started quitting. I just work like ten hours a week in addition to what I'm doing here.

AP: What does your work here consist of now? I'm sure it's changed a lot.

MT: Right now, I do some data entry, like I do all the postage and xeroxing, copying that the college has from the different departments. Eventually, they want to get some type of equipment that all they have to do is read cards through it and pick up the information that way. Then I set up different jobs, like, for instance, the payroll. I do the payroll for students and for us faculty, staff. Just lately, I've been taking over some of the operations, like setting up the tapes on the computers and doing some of the printing. Now we don't do as much printing as we used to. A lot of the departments have taken over a lot of the printing. Carl has in mind eventually getting rid of all that printing. Most of the stuff we do is for special forms like grade reports and time cards. But the checks, we don't do anymore. They do them over in the business office. But there's always something new that keeps being added to the
department that I can do. I'm willing to learn.

AP: You did a wonderful job of tracing all of that and filling in all those details.

MT: I was hoping I could remember everything.

AP: Do you remember when you first came to Holland, what your impressions were of the city?

MT: Till now, I think it's really a very nice city. Very clean. Now I feel more comfortable. There's still some discrimination, but not as bad. I don't know, maybe it's because I've been... I don't feel uncomfortable. I brought my kids up like we're all the same: I figured God made us all, so we're all the same, it doesn't matter what color skin we are. As a matter of fact, I remember my son Steve, when he went to Central... He won a scholarship because of his grades, he got a scholarship that covered everything, including books. The scholarship went to a lot of Hispanics, from not this area, but from Central Michigan University's area. You know, like Flint and that area. He met a lot of kids from there, and I remember that he told me, he said, "Mom, you know, I never felt different until I started school here at Central, and that was because the other kids made me feel like there was a difference between the whites and us." But he said he never felt like he was different. Because, I felt that way. To me, I don't know, to me there's no discrimination. There shouldn't be, actually. Like I said, God made us all. There's bad in every race. But now, I love the city because I think it's so neat, neat in the sense of clean. Even though sometime we have to pay for it with taxes, I think it's worth it. We've gone to Chicago, there's no comparison there because of the size of the city, but still, there's
a big difference. I come back to Holland, and oh my God, I can breath. I feel like
I'm breathing clean air here. It's so clean. The people, I think, now, are a lot
better. They get along better with us Hispanics. Maybe because there's a lot more of
us here. I'm usually not that much involved with Hispanic stuff. I've never been the
type to get involved with anything. Besides, I'm so busy. Especially now that I've
got a two and a half month grandson, so I've been trying to enjoy him plus
everything else. I know some of the Hispanic people still think there is a lot of
discrimination. But, I think a lot of the people make themselves--because they want
different things for them, and I think, to me, that's discriminating themselves from
the rest of the people. Even though you say, well, you should stay with your culture
and your heritage and all this. But to me, that's just like discriminating. I don't
know. If you want your separate things, the way you used to live, and you want
things like that, to me that's like your causing your own discrimination.

AP: Everybody has to adapt, all around.

MT: Right. My husband talked about moving back to Texas. Maybe because I was so
young when I left Loretto, I don't think I'm going to go back. We've gone down
there because my husband is originally from Mexico. He became a citizen, but we
used to go there. He's from ________, which is way up by Mexico City. We used
to go on a yearly basis, because he was the only one living here from his family. We
would go through Loretto, to go to Mexico across the border. That's about the extent
of the visiting I want to do of Loretto, because I don't want to live out there. Even
though I don't like the weather here, either. (laughs)
AP: Where have your children settled?

MT: They all live here, except for my son who lives in Lansing. My daughter married Roger Mulder, they’re having their first child. He’s a great little guy, her husband, he’s a very nice guy. Actually, she’s the only one who’s married. Then, my youngest, who had a little a boy. It looks like his girlfriend didn’t work out, for now anyway. I think they’re still kind of young, and to start out with a little boy, any child, it’s going to hurt.

AP: How is he handling that?

MT: Well, still young. But I thought, because we always had trouble with him. He used to get into a lot of trouble. I went through a lot with him. I didn’t think he was ever going to graduate from high school. For two years, you could almost say he flunked every class he took, because he would skip school. I think mainly because he was hanging around with the wrong people. I tried to talk to him, but like most young kids, the parents don’t know any better than they do, "you’re just trying to tell me what to do." I couldn’t get him to listen. He’s a very smart kid. Finally, his boss, Rocky H-----, I’ve got a lot to offer to him, because he helped him a lot when he was in trouble. He heard about him because my son has been involved in karate. He’s a black belt. He’s third degree. He started karate when he was seven.

AP: That’s amazing. That takes so much discipline.

MT: Uh huh, I know. He started tutoring the little boy of Rocky, and that’s how Rocky met him. When my son started to get into to trouble, I guess he heard about it and he called me. I remember, he called for him. My son’s name is Gabe, he asked for
him. He wasn't home. He said, I heard that he's gotten in trouble, and I'm willing to help him. If he's looking for a job, because at that time he was looking for a job, tell him that I've got a job for him. When he came home, we told him, and every since then he's been working for him. Right now, he's started working for him full time. He has encouraged him a lot, encouraged him to go farther than high school, because he has talked to him about possibly even taking over one of the stores. He's got three stores right now, two in Holland, one in Zeeland, and one in Hamilton. I guess they're going to open another store here on Chicago Drive. He has talked to my son about possibly taking over one of the stores. I'm so glad. I know my son is a smart kid and he's just got to decide which way he wants to go. I think Rocky has helped him by making him aware of his intelligence, that he can do something with it, other than get into trouble. Like I said, I owe him a lot, for helping me to bring our kid up. Now, hopefully, he might be going to Davenport, because he wants to go into business administration and possibly have his own business. Originally he wanted to have his own business with karate, but he hasn't done that for a while. He still likes it. He's got tons of trophies that he got when he competed. But then, I would say the last four years or so, he hasn't done much competition. For one, he kept getting into trouble. The gentleman who is in charge of that, which is Tom Fabiano, that's where he was taking his classes, there's certain rules that when you get into an organization, you can't control. They've got younger kids they have to teach, and you see this trouble maker, and it gives the kids that ideas about how they're supposed to behave and that. So, he kind of asked him to leave for a while.
Then he went back to just classes here and there. Then he was teaching some of the classes. I think it’s because as he was growing up he was more interested in girls and doing other things than just sticking with the class. But he’s got a lot of trophies in his room. My daughter was in gymnastics. In high school, as a matter of fact, she broke her ankle in one of the tournaments in Grand Haven. I wasn’t there, but they called me and they told me that they were bringing her down in the ambulance and she had broken her ankle. It was horrible. The doctor told us that it was the worse break she could have done. You should have seen that foot, it was turned inside out. The doctor told her that she’d probably would get arthritis quite young because of the break. And when it’s bad weather, it bothers her. But as far as anything else… It’s not deformed or anything, the doctor did a real good job. But she went through a lot to get over it. Even though she was moving around in a cast, I don’t remember how long she was in a cast and then crutches, she was still with the gymnastics team. But she loved it. She loved gymnastics. She was also in soccer. As a matter of fact, she was one of the instigators in Holland, she and a few of her girlfriends went around with a petition to get girls to go into the sports school. Because, they had sports school, but only for boys. The girls weren’t included. So, she and a few other girls went around to houses asking for signatures, so that they would include the girls. She’s something. My oldest, he’s the quiet type. Right now he’s home. He’s the one that helps me with the __. I owe him a lot, too, because he helps me a lot with taking me here. Even though I can drive, it’s always nice to have company to go places. Now, especially with my grandson, he helps me a lot when we have him at
home. Then, my other son, Steven, they’re all great kids. You can’t expect them not to get into trouble. I mean, after all, they’re young only once. I think I probably got into trouble, too, when I was young.

AP: Your daughter just sparked one of the things we typically ask about. How do you think the role of women has changed since you’ve been here?

MT: Here in town? To tell you the truth, I guess I’ve noticed it on my daughter. I don’t know if it holds true throughout, but I know my daughter is quite liberal. I’m not. To a certain extent, I am. I sometimes give her a hard time about it, because, you know, I was brought up more in the Hispanic way, like you obey the husband almost always. My daughter is not like that at all. Sometimes I give her a hard time about it. But, her husband, you now, he goes along with it. I agree with it. I go along with some of the liberalism with women. But sometimes I think some of the women go a little bit overboard.

AP: A lot of people in the retired generation in Holland right now kind of criticize that women work. I find it interesting because a lot of them think that they don’t need to work, that they’re just working for extra money, which often isn’t the case. I was wondering, I don’t know if you’ve experienced that feeling from anybody, or how you would counter somebody that would criticize you for that.

MT: I’ve seen a lot of that. A lot of the women do work just to get out of the house. I would say about 50%. Some of us work because we need the money. It takes two of you to help with the money, especially when you’ve got quite a few kids. But, I’ve met a lot of women who just worked just because, to have a little extra money, or
just to get out of the house, because it’s boring at home. But I told them, boy, I wish I could try a little bit of that free time. But, yes, I think the women are, I would say 50-50%. 50% just work just because, and the other half, I would say, to help with the expenses. The cost of living is expensive, the cost of kids. Especially if you want to bring your kids up the right way, give them an education. Although some parents don’t believe in helping their kids. Their like, you’re 18, you’re out. You do whatever you can. I don’t feel that way. I feel that if I can help my kids, I will. It’s like I keep telling them, all I want from you is good behavior and respect. I don’t want you to pay back any money. I’m just helping them so that they can have a better life than I did, and maybe not work as hard. Although, I’m not sure I work as hard, especially at the office, I don’t think I work hard. Maybe long hours, but I don’t mind. Like I tell Carl, hey, I like to keep busy.

AP: Have you witnessed any controversies in Holland? This might be a stumper.

MT: Yeah. I don’t know. Can you give me an example?

AP: What have people brought up? The issue of keeping the airport, or different church issues, sometimes, of changing doctrines in the church. Nobody’s ever really come up with any controversies. I think the only other one is mentioning when John Yelding almost was going to be hired for the principal position at Holland High, and then somebody else got hired, and they had an investigation.

MT: Yes, I know there was some talk about it. I don’t know how much of it was true. But I was glad when Hope hired him, because I think he’s a good man. I’m not sure I believe what they said about the high school not hiring him, because they have a lot
of non-white people, so I don’t see why they would discriminate. But, like I said, I
don’t know the whole story. Well, there’s some areas… (tape ends) … maybe some
raises and promotions. I guess, every job I’ve worked at, I’ve felt comfortable
enough. But I’ve worked __________________

AP: Describe what it’s been like being at Hope, and how it’s changed over the course of
your being here.

MT: A lot more people. I don’t know. Sometimes people say, you don’t make enough
money there. Even my kids, I tell them, you don’t always look at money. You also
look at the benefits you get. Ever since I got the job here, my hours have been pretty
flexible, all my bosses have been flexible with me as far as taking off from work and
all this. For a while, I did look for another job, because I was thinking that _____
my department and somebody tried to talk me into quitting. So I started looking for
another job. I interviewed, but then the money I was going to get was not as much as
I was getting here, because what I was doing here was more than just data entry, and
where I was going to go probably would have been data entry. Then I started
thinking, that person was trying to talk me into quitting to just to kind of get back at
people here, for what happened, for something that was going on. I figured, as long
as it doesn’t affect me, why leave? If I’m happy, maybe somebody else is not happy,
well, let them leave. But I was happy, and I still am. But, I mean, like when the
building burned down, you probably heard about it, there was a building that burned
here. Was it Van Raalte? It was the administration building.

AP: By the chapel?
MT: Yes. It was quite a shock. We had a lot of work then. It was a good thing we had computers, because we had to run a lot of reports and all this. But it was horrible. I remember when we came in, there’s this building all burned down. It’s a weird feeling. It’s just like our church, I go to St. Francis, the Catholic Church. I cried when I looked at our church. I heard it was on fire just before we got out of work and I went by there and I see this building all smoking. It’s just like it’s part of me. That’s the way I felt with this building that burned down here at Hope. It has changed. I guess maybe not everything you’ll agree with, with the changes. But it’s hard to agree with everything. It’s hard for the management to satisfy everybody. They have to do what they think is best.

AP: Can you talk a bit about the role of the church in your family and your life, and what that’s been like with the fire and how your church has been coping?

MT: Well, I’ve always tried to get my kids into church, tried to get them involved as much as they can. Then, of course, you get to be a certain age, and they start kind of dropping out. But I think they still do pretty good. Like I said, I belong to St. Francis. I’ve always gone there, I got married there, all my kids were baptized there. They all went to Catechism there. Even my youngest one went to the Catholic School there. The other kids went to Lakeview School. I always wanted to get my kids to go to Catholic School, but I could never afford it, until I got to the very youngest one, and then I sent him to Catholic School. Now that it’s burned down, we could go to Our Lady of the Lake, which is the other church on the northside, but I feel, and my family feels the same way, we don’t belong there. We’ll just go where ever they
send us, whatever church we go to. I think the churches who have helped have been
great. They make us feel so at home, like you belong there. It's really great, there's
a lot to appreciate and be thankful for. But we're all looking forward to when we get
our own church. Ever since the fire, all these people we used to see every Sunday in
church, sometimes we don't see them anymore, because we're all spread out. Some
of them don't mind going to early or late for church or services, so we don't see
them anymore. A lot of Hispanic people, I think, they used to go to the Hispanic
services, but now with this going on, where we're all spread out, I think they're
going more to the Hispanic services. I guess the reason I don't go is because, I hate
to admit it, but my kids can't speak Spanish. I brought them up with English. See,
when I first came, we all could speak English, but we didn't speak it because in
Texas, even though we were in school, all the teachers were Hispanic or Mexican, so
whenever you had a problem, you would talk to them in Spanish. So, we really
never practiced our English. When we came here and we had to speak English, it
was very hard. I had some trouble in school, and they had to put me in special
classes, because of my pronunciation and all this. I remember I took a shorthand
class because I wanted to be a secretary for a while. I made it through with a "C"
but the teacher told me it would be better for me to drop out, it was a two year class.
She said I would be better off if I would drop out after the first year. She said,
because what is happening, when I was transcribing, my translating was first in
Spanish, I would translate it into Spanish, so it was delaying. Shorthand is supposed
to be fast, right? It was delaying me because I was doing the translating. Before you
flunk it, she said, I think it would be better if you drop out. So, like I said, I as put into special classes because of my pronunciation. At that time, I said, my kids aren’t going to go through that problem. Even though I know a lot of Hispanic people right now, they kind of look at me like I shouldn’t have done it. My kids, they can understand Spanish, but they can’t speak. Well, then they get into trouble because my husband can’t speak English, only Spanish. So, they communicate, but not as good as I do with them, because I talk only in English most of the time. The one right now that is involved more with Spanish stuff is the one who graduated from Central. I guess maybe because he got involved with the Hispanic groups down there. Otherwise, I don’t know, it’s just whatever I tell you ---- it didn’t matter whether I was Hispanic or not, even though when I was younger I used to, like I said, our family was one of the few that was here that were Hispanic. So we started getting into groups. We had this one lady that was teaching us how to dance the Mexican dances. In the church, we would have programs at night. I guess that was when I maybe because I didn’t have anything else to do. (laughs) As a grown up, I haven’t really been involved with too many Hispanic activities, even though maybe I should have. Maybe then my kids would have been more involved with Hispanic stuff. But I’ll be happy to get that church back up in place. As far as we know, it’s going to be sometime at the end of this year, we’re going to have our new church. Even though the school isn’t going to be there anymore, not that I have any kids there anymore. But still, you get used to seeing all these kids from school right next door to our church. Now that’s not going to be the case, but you can’t have everything.
You just have to make the best of what’s there. But I see now there’s a lot of businesses here now with Hispanics. Some of them make it, some of them don’t. My cousin and I talk about that sometimes, I think what they do is they overcharge things. They charge too much so people can’t afford to buy some of this stuff. I don’t see how they can make it through. I think that’s why they don’t have good businesses, so they have to close up. I know a lot of Hispanics have tried. My mother wanted to get a restaurant going, but like I said, she didn’t know how to read or write. I don’t see how she was able to take all her medication she took. She had tons of them. Especially towards the end before she passed away she had a lot of medications she had to take. She couldn’t read or write. I guess her mother never really got her in school.

AP: Do you think there’s a generation gap in Holland?

MT: Oh yes. There will always be, though. There has to be, because no matter what generation you’re in, your way of thinking is different. When you’re young, sometimes we think that we know better than our parents. I know I used to think that way. But I know some of the kids now a days are kind of wild. (laughs) But I blame it on a lot of the laws. They make it so that parents can not say too much to the kids. They’ve got rights, I know they do, but it just bothers me that the law says you cannot touch the kids, but then when they get in trouble then the parents are responsible for whatever trouble they got into. I’m not saying they shouldn’t set up rules for the kids, because they should be, but there has to be a median. If the law’s making the parents responsible for the actions of those kids, then the law should also
allow certain things for the parents. They get a certain age and I can see beating up
the kid, I can see the protection for that. I don’t know, I think the laws are just too
loose for the kids.

AP: Do you think kids have it generally easier or harder today than when you were a kid?

MT: I think there’s more temptations nowadays, like drugs, drinking, all that stuff. With
my own family, I tried to talk my kids about it. I had two brothers who passed away
already, and it was mostly from their drinking. So I tried to make them see. And
my kids have seen them how they suffered. I tried to make them be aware of that
and remember that, remember how they suffered. Not only did they suffer, but us,
who were related to them. I said, you don’t want to go through that suffering, it’s
not worth it. Like I tell them, I don’t condemn drinking completely, because I like to
drink myself, social drinking, and that’s it. But, not like my brothers used to drink.
They used to drink a lot. By the time they finally stopped, it was too late for them.
Then when they got sick, that was it. So, I think there’s a lot of temptation for the
younger kids now. I think some grown ups, I think the laws, all these people get
cought with drugs and all this, I think the laws aren’t strict enough that they put them
away for a long time, so that they make them pay for what they did. Because, you
know, it’s these people who drag these kids into—I know they don’t force them to use
drugs, but they tempt them. And they’re young, they say, hey, let’s try it.
Sometimes, maybe some kids don’t like it and some kids do like it. But by the time
they want to stop it’s too late. So I think the laws should be stricter. When
somebody gets caught with drugs, I think they should put them in jail for a while so
that they remember, that they know they don’t do this. If they’ve got the money, they get out easy. They can hire good lawyers and all this. But it’s hard for kids nowadays, I know that.

AP: I think it’s hard, too, because lot of people have misconceptions. Typically the kids that have more money get into more trouble, and people don’t think that. The kids that have more money have the money to buy drugs. So many people have that backwards, they think those kids don’t get into trouble. I know when I was high school, those were always the kids that had problems with drugs.

MT: Oh yeah. Sometimes you think that just because they’ve got the money, they’re not going to get into trouble. They’ve got the money, they can get it anytime. But, I guess they’ve got the money and they can buy things easier. But then of course the kids that don’t have it, they find ways of getting the money. So I don’t know which is worse. But I know when I was younger, I don’t remember all these things. Maybe drinking, but the drugs... I think back and I think, what happened? It seems like nowadays there’s so many drugs. It’s the younger kids. I don’t care about the older people, they know what they’re doing, but it’s the younger kids that get involved. But it’s the older people that get the kids involved with these drugs. That’s why I’m saying if they would have stricter rules, maybe this wouldn’t happen.

With all these gangs, for a while when it was pretty bad, they kept talking in the paper about these gang members that were living in these houses. Why didn’t they just get signatures or a petition or something and get them out of town. I don’t see why they need to leave them there. They might not do anything wrong because they
know they’re going to get caught, but still, they’re living right there. So I think you should just get them out of the city. Get rid of them. I think that somebody in the city can do it. Somebody in the government can do it. If they catch enough people... if they know they’re gang members, why don’t you just get rid of them? I just know ___. I never have and I don’t think I’ll ever move into that area. My sister lives in that area.

AP: Are there any other things that we haven’t discussed or important things that you’d like to talk about?

MT: No.

AP: I think we got around to all the basics. I guess, I don’t have anymore questions, we talked about so many different aspects of Holland and for quite a while, so if there’s nothing else, we could just wrap up.

MT: OK, that’s fine.

AP: Thank you very much to take the time out.

MT: You bet.