Van Dorp, Evelyn Oral History Interview: Sesquicentennial of Holland, "150 Stories for 150 Years"

Jim Jellison
Oral History Interview with
Evelyn Van Dorp

Conducted January 28, 1997
by Jim Jellison

Sesquicentennial Oral History Project
"150 Stories for 150 Years"
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Interview with Evelyn Van Dorp
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Interviewer: Jim Jellison

JJ: Good morning. We're having an interview with Evelyn Van Dorp this morning. The date is January 28, 1997, and we're here at 530 West Central Avenue in Zeeland, Michigan, the home of Evelyn Van Dorp who generally goes by the name of Evie Van Dorp, known far and wide in the Holland-Zeeland community. Good morning, Evie.

EVD: Good morning, Jim.

JJ: We had a little discussion about what we're going to talk about this morning. As we've discussed, this is the project of the Joint Archives of Holland in observance of the 150th anniversary of the founding of Holland, Michigan, and simultaneously the founding of Zeeland, Michigan. We're having a discussion or chat with Evie Van Dorp this morning to get some insight into her life and her experiences in these communities. Evie, were you born in Zeeland?

EVD: I was born in Zeeland in 1916 which is a long time ago, eighty-one years in fact. My family came over as first settlers. My great grandfather, Robertus DeBruyn, was first school teacher here and the DeBruyn family has always resided in Zeeland.

JJ: Did they come over with Albertus Van Raalte?

EVD: Not with Van Raalte. They came with the Zeeland group.

JJ: Were they from Zeeland in the Netherlands?

EVD: They were from Zeeland, I think, in the Netherlands. They came with the Vande
Luyster group which followed the Van Raalte group by a matter of months. It's a little sketchy as to just when everybody left the Netherlands. But they were all in that same original party as was my grandfather Bosch, my mother's father. He may have come over with Van Raalte, that I don't know, but he came over very early. Once he got here he decided they were a little too strict for him in Holland...

JJ: Oh my! (laughs) That's a switch today, isn't it!

EVD: So he walked over to Grand Haven and settled in Grand Haven and went into the lumber business finally with the Baker family.

JJ: This is the DeBruyn's.

EVD: This is mother's side of the family.

JJ: Oh, this is the Bosches.

EVD: The Bosches. Then grandpa married one of the Bakers, my grandmother's a Baker...

(interruption)

JJ: An interruption with the telephone. Now we're back again with Evie Van Dorp to continue...

EVD: I will continue a little more about my mother's side of the family because there were some interesting little tidbits. Grandpa and Grandma Bosch ran the halfway house between Holland and Grand Haven, I think at about Port Sheldon. It said in the account that they lived in the hotel in Port Sheldon at one time. Port Sheldon was to be the Chicago of the West. Then the country went off the gold standard and the Biddle family from Philadelphia, who were sponsoring the development, ran out of money apparently and so they withdrew their support leaving a lovely big hotel.
Later, some prospectors came through and they stayed at the hotel, which probably really wasn’t in operation at that time, but they got into the wine supply and they burned the place that night. I believe the pillars of that hotel were saved and taken to Grand Rapids where they were, I believe, used on the art museum at one time.

JJ: Now this is the Bosches, your mother’s side...

EVD: This is my mother’s side. They then moved to Bass River in time and grandpa ran the ferry across the river.

JJ: Now, where’s Bass River?

EVD: Near the bayou outside of Grand Haven. Grandpa must have purchased a large parcel of land which turned out to be valuable gravel and it was later sold to the Grand Rapids Gravel Company. Because of mismanagement, I think my uncles spent my fortune before I came along. But Uncle Chris Den Herder filled me in on some of this history because he married one of the Bosch girls, my mother’s sister. He told how he would take the horse and buggy on Saturday night after closing the shoe store and riding all the way to Bass River to spend the weekend with Aunt Jo. Sometimes he had to lead the horse through the woods, according to his tale.

JJ: Aunt Jo was your grandma?

EVD: No, she was my aunt. When the Den Herders married and settled in Zeeland and Uncle Chris then went into the bank with Jacob Den Herder, his father, who established the bank…

JJ: What bank was that?

EVD: FMB.

EVD: Yes. Then my mother went to stay with them. None of the girls liked Bass River...

JJ: How many children were there?

EVD: I think there were seven. Let’s see, at least five girls and two boys. I think a few more. I have to go back and count. They were kind of an adventurous group. One of the sisters married a man from Missouri who had a gold mine in Colorado and in latter years we visited that site. My brother Bob had a ring made from that gold that was given to him at Mr. Stewart’s death. It is said that grandma walked to Holland from Port Sheldon and then skated up Black Lake to go to church.

JJ: My goodness sakes. What a way to go to church!

EVD: Another interesting little tidbit told to me was that they lived in the now funeral home right at the foot of the hill near the County Building in Grand Haven. Those Bosch girls would go to the upstairs window and as the train came down the street they would wave to the trainmen. One day those trainmen came to the door to meet the girls. But they met Grandma Bosch! It wasn’t long and they had moved out of Grand Haven and were living in a more secluded area. Grandpa Bosch then gave land for a school and a church on this property. Bass River. I never knew my grandparents because they died before I was born. But grandma used to ride the buggy into Zeeland. She was afraid to cross the railroad track so one of the DeBruyn’s, my father’s brother, as a young boy would go to the railroad track, meet grandma Bosch and take the team across the tracks.

JJ: Now was this your grandpa then, Grandpa DeBruyn?
EVD: I'll go into the DeBruyn side of the family. The DeBruyn's, as I said, always stayed here. They were very interested in education and...

JJ: How many of those were there? How many DeBruyn's?

EVD: There were four in that family and one girl. Great Grandpa, well Robertus DeBruyn, was married to a Leenhouts and she died fairly young. Robertus DeBruyn died at the age of forty-seven in Holland. He had moved to Holland by then. But he believed in education and two of his sons graduated from college.

JJ: Which was unusual at that time.

EVD: It was. One became a minister and there's a most interesting account of his life. His first church was in New York, not in the city of New York, but the state of New York. He was much loved, the account says. Then, not too many years after that his wife died and he moved back here to this area finally to Grand Haven and married one of the Cappon girls.

JJ: Isaac Cappon's children?

EVD: Helen Cappon.

JJ: For goodness sakes. Isn't that remarkable? Now this man was a DeBruyn, he was your great uncle probably.

EVD: Great uncle. He also was president of the Board at Hope College.

JJ: He was? What was his first name?

EVD: All these stories are mixed up. (looks at documents)

JJ: We're looking in a family account here for the DeBruyn family.

EVD: It was Peter.
JJ: Oh, then Peter DeBruyn was the minister that went to New York and then returned. He was a widower then and married a daughter, Helen Cappon, who was a daughter of Isaac Cappon.

EVD: To go back, Robertus, who was the first settler...

JJ: Was he born here? Oh he came from the old country.

EVD: Robertus was the first settler and he stayed in this area except for a short period when he moved to Holland and lived there. I'm just reading a little of the history as I go...

JJ: Is this the DeBruyn family account?

EVD: This is the DeBruyn family. Robertus was twenty-six when he came over.

JJ: So that was in 1847 approximately.

EVD: Yes. Then, one of the other sons of that family, John DeBruyn, also had a college education at Hope College and Kalamazoo College.

JJ: Was that Peter's brother?

EVD: Yes.

JJ: He went to Hope as well as Kalamazoo. Did Peter go to Hope?

EVD: He went to Hope as far as I know. When Peter DeBruyn, who was much revered says the account, died quite early in life in Grand Haven, they brought his body back to Holland for burial. Half of Grand Haven must have come with him from his congregation. They came by train and the surreys met them at the station and took them over probably to the college for the funeral, the memorial service.

(Recording interrupted)

JJ: That's the 1989 supplement of the DeBruyn family account. You say that's on the
Internet now?

EVD: Yes. Written by Bob Donia in Kalamazoo.

JJ: He is a member of HASP.

EVD: He was. One of the originators.

JJ: He lives in Kalamazoo.

EVD: Right.

JJ: So we were talking about the death of Peter DeBruyn, the minister, and how when he died the funeral was held in Holland. And as you say, about half the population... half the members of his congregation there in Grand Haven came down to attend the funeral at Hope College.

EVD: Then John DeBruyn...

JJ: His brother...

EVD: His brother... went to the West coast to Seattle for Ferry Seed Company and he established the whole western operation of Ferry Seed Company. I am still in touch with his son, Frank DeBruyn, who had established a large business in Seattle--large equipment like road equipment and had a very interesting life supplying a lot of this equipment to be used in Alaska and so on.

JJ: On the Pipeline and the Alcan Highway and that sort of thing.

EVD: Not only that, but when I went to Hong Kong, Frank DeBruyn said, "Oh look for our barge with our equipment." They were working on the harbor in Hong Kong.

JJ: To get this straight... how was this related to John?

EVD: This is John's son.
JJ: Okay. So, is he a first cousin then?

EVD: He is my father's cousin.

JJ: So it's your cousin once removed then. He's still living!

EVD: Yes.

JJ: My goodness, how old must he be?

EVD: He must be up there 90 or so, I don't know exactly. Then my mother and father, she was Henrietta Bosch, they called her Trixie, and my father, David DeBruyn...

JJ: Now he was a brother of John and Peter...

EVD: No.

JJ: No? John and Peter were his uncles.

EVD: Yes.

JJ: Now I understand. Now who was David's father then?

EVD: That was Robert DeBruyn.

JJ: ...and Robert was a brother of John and Peter.

EVD: Yes.

JJ: Now I understand.

EVD: Well, Robert DeBruyn...

JJ: That was your grandfather...

EVD: That was my grandfather and he had various jobs. But he worked as a wagon maker and he was foreman in the furniture company for many years.

JJ: Which furniture company was that?

EVD: I guess it was called Michigan Furniture Company, I believe or Zeeland Furniture. I
can’t remember that. He was also marshall.

JJ: This is your grandpa.

EVD: My grandpa. My father told as I was a child the story of the bank robbery in Zeeland. Because grandpa was marshall and the bank robbers had blown up the safe and probably a part of the wall, somebody had to stay in that building at night. Grandpa ordered my father to that assignment.

JJ: This was after the robbery?

EVD: After the robbery. Dad and whoever was guarding the bank with him heard footsteps. It’s raining out and he would dramatize the story you know and finally they thought for sure that the robbers were coming back. It turned out to be one of the local citizens plodding down the street. But it was a frightening experience for a young boy.

JJ: Your father’s name was...

EVD: David. Now my grandfather lived on Main Street and the house is still there. It is now a law office. It has been preserved.

JJ: Is that the building where Randall Dekker’s been?

EVD: Yes.

JJ: Yeah, I’ve been in that building. It’s on the south side of the street.

EVD: Right across from the Museum.

JJ: That’s the old DeBruyn house then.

EVD: Yes. Next to that lived Albert La Huis. Now Albert La Huis owned a big general store right next to the First Michigan Bank...
JJ: On the north side of Main Place...

EVD: My father went in to work for Mr. La Huis at age fifteen and had to get the balance of his education at night school. But he stayed in that business most of his life...

JJ: The furniture business...

EVD: No, in the store! And...

JJ: What was that store?

EVD: That was the La Huis Company.

JJ: Was that like a department store?

EVD: Yes! It had everything in it.

JJ: Oh yes. A general store then.

EVD: It was a marvelous store. As I grew up, I had the advantage of many, many things from that store that other children did not have. My father would go into Chicago on buying trips and on Christmas would come back with marvelous articles from the big city as gifts for us. They had a grocery department, they sold rugs and linoleum and women's ready to wear and dry goods. Down in the basement they aged cheese and...

JJ: How do you spell this Luys...?

EVD: L-A-H-U-I-S. The La Huises then built a beautiful home on Central Avenue right next to the little park on Central, right near Church Street. It was indeed a mansion.

JJ: Is it still standing?

EVD: No, unfortunately one of the churches bought the property and took the house down. It was just a tragedy and we all tried to save it but...
JJ: This was the La Huis family. Well, let us get to Evie. You were born here in Zeeland, as you say, in 1916 and what are your earliest members of Zeeland? Where were you living then? That was on Central?

EVD: I was living on Central Avenue and the Den Herders lived on one side and my aunt, Mrs. Doctor Huizenga, live across the street. Another aunt, another house...

JJ: So it was a kind of family complex.

EVD: One of my first memories is going to the Den Herder house for tea in the afternoon. The sisters would get together. I was a little tiny girl and Margaret Den Herder Vander Velde was about to be married and they were making her dress. I lost a little tiny snap and Margaret was very angry at me. I never forgot it. (laughs) She frightened me so badly. I was later ring bearer at that wedding.

JJ: Well, might you have been three or four years old, somewhere there?

EVD: I was younger than that! And I do recall that and I recall the wedding to some degree.

JJ: Was that in the Second Church?

EVD: No, no. It was in the Den Herder home, which was just a lovely home and it’s still standing. Then, because I was sort of the youngest of the clan and my mother also was the youngest of the Bosch family...

JJ: This was Trixie Bosch...?

EVD: DeBruyn.

JJ: DeBruyn. Okay.

EVD: I was the flower girl at all the weddings and all that kind of thing. We had a
wonderful early childhood for some of my cousins were taken in by the relatives at the death of their mother. So we also had a group of cousins that played together and grew up together for a few years.

JJ: Sounds like a wonderful childhood.

EVD: Yeah, it was. Then when I was about eleven years old...Oh, we had a cottage also in connection with the Den Herders first and then they built a cottage and my father, too, and we had a few wonderful summers at Lake Michigan. One memory I have is Alice De Pree, who at the time was married to Ed De Pree living in St. Louis, but because of the hot weather there they would come up in the summer. Alice, who is now almost 100 years old, would take the whole group of neighbor children over to Getz Farm, which was maybe a mile down the road, and we’d all trail along. They had the zoo there, the wonderful animals...

JJ: Getz was associated with Holland Furnace, I think. Wasn’t that true?

EVD: No. He was not associated with Holland Furnace. No, he was not. He was a coal dealer, a very wealthy coal dealer out of Chicago and he built this tremendous estate on the lake.

JJ: I recall hearing about that zoo.

EVD: Not only did we have the privilege of having a little more personal attention at Getz because we were there so often, now and then the monkey would ride on our shoulder and one time we rode the elephant. Another memory I have is the beautiful flowers in the greenhouses and that sweet aroma from those flowers is still alive in my memory. It was wonderful fragrance. They grew wonderful berries. One time
somebody gave us one of the great big strawberries. We were always very respectful of the farm and never overstepped our limits. We behaved, I'm surprised to say. But we spent our summers swimming and just having a marvelous time. Finally, when I was nine years old, my father sold the cottage. I thought the end of the world had come. He was going to build a new home in Zeeland but he also was tired of making that trip.

JJ: Was this cottage north of Lake Mac?

EVD: It was near Lakewood Farm, near Lakewood Blvd. My parents were friends then of John Arendshorst from Holland and the whole Arendshorst family. They, of course, are the family who had the Rusk Company in Holland at one time. When they sold it, the chapel at Hope College was being built, and they gave the beautiful organ at Dimnent Chapel. Then my mother died when I was eleven, and of course, that changed my life entirely. Then the depression came. Also, the La Huis tragedy. Mr. La Huis had turned the store over to my dad long before and just came in on occasion to check the records, I suppose. He had invested in property in California. He made the trip out with his wife to investigate the investment there. The realtor apparently who he was dealing with was fraudulent and he took them out to see the property and drove them over the cliff.

JJ: He murdered them?

EVD: He murdered them! And committed suicide himself!

JJ: Who got murdered then? This was...

EVD: This was my father's employer and his wife. The children were grown and married
by then. It was national news. It was awhile before they found the bodies and a long, long story. The daughter and son had to go to California to identify the bodies, and so they left their families here in the big house. Some of those children were about my age and so I would go over and play. This was in 1928-29. I was about thirteen.

JJ: Your father continued with the store then?

EVD: My father had owned 49% of the stock and Mr. La Huis would never let him have a majority of the ownership so at his death dad purchased the store, the balance.

JJ: Did he continue with the name then?

EVD: No, he changed it to the DeBruyn Company. And out of that purchase, in time during the depression, came the DeBruyn Produce Company, which at one time was about the biggest shipper of onions in the United States. This all developed sort of out a barter system because the farmers in Vriesland and so on would bring their crops and their eggs into the store, the La Huis, the DeBruyn Store and then trade, you see, for the supplies they needed. But dad also went out in the country and bought onions and shipped by the carload...

JJ: Most of this was east of Holland and Zeeland, over around Vriesland.

EVD: Yeah, because that’s the swamp area and that’s where they were grown and celery and so on.

JJ: They call it muck land I think.

EVD: So then came the depression. It was a very difficult time for the family because dad had purchased the building, my mother had died.
JJ: You were about 16 then...in 1932.

EVD: Younger...

JJ: Well then 1930. You were 14.

EVD: I was...no I was younger. Well, whatever...And dad got tired of running the store. It was a very difficult situation because he was stuck with the high priced inventory when the '29 crash came and then '30 the depression. So we all worked with dad to help him through this period.

JJ: So that's the beginning of your lifelong involvement in the retail business.

EVD: As a brat I spent it behind the counter in the store doing little jobs. My father was generous about sharing some of his knowledge. It was just as natural as eating to me because we had been involved in the retail so very long.

JJ: You went to Zeeland Public Schools then?

EVD: Yes.

JJ: And did you go to Zeeland High School?

EVD: Right, and then I worked for a year in the store and then saved up enough money to go to junior college in Grand Rapids because they had a course in retail and merchandising. I just didn't feel that I could ask my father for any money at that time. My brothers had both gone to Hope College, but I don't think they even saw the necessity for a girl to be educated. So I went to junior college and while I was there my professor wanted me to go to Prince School of Retailing affiliated with Sims College in Boston. And, oh, how I wanted to do that! She felt I had so much knowledge of the retail that even though it was a graduate program she could get me
in. But it meant borrowing money. Dad had sent me out as a child collecting money during the depression, and I vowed right then and there I would never borrow a dime. And truly I didn’t either! But it was just a mindset that the depression inflicted upon us. Then my father and brothers established the DeBruyn Produce and Seed Company. When I finished junior college at age about nineteen, dad turned it over to me and said, "You run it."

JJ: The whole store?

EVD: They had divided off by then. When they established the produce company, they sold off the groceries department, they had either leased or something the rug department and what was left was the women’s ready to wear, the dry goods, millinery and so on. And that’s what he turned over to me.

JJ: That must have been a real assignment to get that.

EVD: Well, it was a pretty heavy responsibility! An things were really tight money-wise. We would drive into to Chicago on buying trips. My sister-in-law, Martha DeBruyn, my brother Bob’s wife, worked in the store too. She was a teacher but she worked in the store. So Martha and I, while I was in high school, would start out very, very early in the morning, drive to Chicago, do the buying, load the merchandise we could carry in the little old car and drive home again.

JJ: Well, where did you do this then. There was no Merchandise Mart at that time, was there?

EVD: Oh yes...Well there was finally, Jim, but there were established wholesale districts. Adams Street and so on and then yes the Merchandise Mart was built, I think about
1930. Marshall Field was one of our suppliers. Now Marshall Field had a wholesale
division as well as retail and we dealt with the wholesale division. They sent
salesmen out to the various stores in the districts. And at the time of the depression
some of those salesmen, who were then released, committed suicide. And that made
us feel just terrible because my father used to take those men home at noon for lunch.
We had a personal relationship with them. He also had a connection with a Mr.
Hexter. Mr. Hexter was a coat manufacturer who became friendly with the family
and always sent us wonderful gifts at Christmas. I can recall going into Chicago as a
child with my father and mother attending a style show at the Congress Hotel. I was
so little they let me sit on the steps so I could see. It was just marvelous, you know,
all this grandeur. Then the next day Mr. Hexter had me model the children’s coats
up in his showroom.

JJ: And he was a wholesaler then?

EVD: He was a wholesaler. I met up with him again in New York many years later…

JJ: Isn’t that remarkable! How long did you maintain your activity with the DeBruyn
Company?

EVD: Well, then along the way, the Poest family came along and wanted to buy…(tape
ends)

JJ: (This is a continuation of the interview with Evie Van Dorp.) And you were just
telling about the DeBruyn Store and the interest of the Poest family in acquiring that.

EVD: My father really left the decision to me but the responsibility of running the store and
staying in Zeeland seemed a little heavy.
JJ: Were you married by then?

EVD: Oh no. Many years later I was married. So I agreed to sell. In the meantime I had made a profit for my father in the store. So we were pulling our of our depression and we sold the store and...

JJ: Did they rename it the Poest Store then?

EVD: Yeah, they moved it, in fact, and they called it the Bon Ton. They moved it across the street. Well, I worked in La Porte, Indiana, for a time in a dress shop. The Lilly family, they’re connection with history was the developing of the power company down south, down in Tennessee.

Well, I think Mr. Lilly was one of the... not the owner of the store but his brother, and I remember having dinner with him one time. TVA! Tennessee Valley Authority. Then I came back to Zeeland and worked in the office of the DeBruyn Produce Company. They were on Washington Street then. And along came World War II. In the meantime, I went to New York and worked there for a little while. I worked on Fifth Avenue at the Chase National Bank and had some marvelous experiences in connection with New York. I was there during the "brown out" when the lights of the city were somewhat extinguished because the lights outlined the ships at sea. I had connections with some of the servicemen who were going overseas that I knew from here. One was Dick Van Eden, who a pilot, and his sister-in-law lived in New York. Margi called and asked if I’d have dinner with him and then Dick was waiting for his assignment. Later he told me that he led the squadron across the Atlantic that landed in North Africa and he said the young pilots were so
inexperienced that the wings of the plane iced over, and he would see part of his squadron drop and those boys were lost at sea because of their inexperience. Dick stayed on and became a Colonel...

JJ: Now, he was just another Zeeland friend.

EVD: Yes. He was married to a friend of mine and I knew the family as you would in a small town. Then I continued to work at the DeBruyn Company most of the war years. We had prisoners of war working for us because we were in the food business. Not only that, but we supplied produce to the camps, the different army camps, all over the United States. A lot of onions! I also remember the government sending in eggs to be stored because we had cold storage and it was such a mixed-up terrible deal with a lot of red tape. They finally pulled the eggs out and threw them away, so that was another story of government waste.

JJ: Well, how did you meet your husband?

EVD: Well, I knew Dick because he was friend of the family, he was a friend of my brother.

JJ: A Zeeland man.

EVD: He lived on the edge of Zeeland on a farm. They were very poor. He attended Hope College as my brothers were doing at the time. So Dick used to spend time at our house. He had a very hard time. He had to work his way through college. Dick was very bright and did part of it on scholarships. On graduation he wanted to become an M.D. but didn’t have the money to go on so he was given a fellowship to the University of Michigan where he then worked in the biology department. Then,
again, did not have enough money to go on to med school. However, he was
accepted at University of Michigan Med School and a school in Wisconsin. Then he
got on to do another job and was drafted and went into the army early, was about to
be discharged, he had turned in all his gear, when Pearl Harbor happened and they
were all called back. He was then sent to the Pacific. His unit followed the Red
Arrow Division so he was there early in the game. Finally contracted malaria and was
sent back to Australia.

JJ: I recall the Red Arrow went to New Guinea.

EVD: Yeah, he was in New Guinea, that’s right. He was commissioned. He went
to officer’s training in Australia and was commissioned and taught there for some time
in the officer’s training school. Then he was in chemical warfare and he went around
training the usage of the flamethrower. Then after about five years came back home.
That’s when the romance started. He came in to see my brother and I meant to be
very nice and I invited him for dinner. After dinner we decided to go to Saugatuck.
We got to Saugatuck and Dick was dancing with me every dance and my brother was
getting very angry at me. It was his friend and I was monopolizing him. I remember
the tense situation. And that started our romance.

JJ: What year did you marry?

EVD: We married in ’45. November 27 of ’45. Dick was on terminal leave. Then we
stayed pretty much in Zeeland. We lived in Holland for a short time. He worked for
DeBruyns, he worked for Heidema Apple Company, and because of my past
experience I always worked with him.
EVD: We have four children. My oldest is Ann Query, who's now executive secretary of the Chamber of Commerce here in Zeeland. My daughter, Gwen, who is superintendent of schools in Connecticut. Richard, who finally took over his father's position with Michigan West Shore Nursery, and then Mary, who's living up north at Onekema, is a psychologist.

JJ: I know you continued in the retailing business. You had the Duchess Shop in Holland and also in Zeeland.

EVD: Well, yes. My husband died at age 60 and I was somewhat younger than he, that is six years, and so I was then left with...

JJ: That was about 1971 then...

EVD: Right. The two girls were married. Dick was in college and Mary was in high school. So I had to have some way to support the family. I first went in and took over my husband Dick's position. We were in the middle of the shipping season and I was working in the office for him at Michigan West Shore Nursery. So I took over his position and finished the shipping season...

JJ: What were you shipping? Was that Christmas trees or...?

EVD: That was bedding plants and shrubbery at that time. It was a cooperative so there were different farmers supplying. Then I went out to sell Christmas trees and I sold 100,000...booked 100,000!

JJ: Oh my. That's a big amount!

EVD: For the next year. Then they offered me my husband's job, but I knew it really...
wouldn’t work at that point for a woman to be over a group of growers in a cooperative. Fortunately, Bob Den Herder from the bank came to me and he said, “Evie, would you be interested in managing the Duchess Shop?” The Duchess Shop was established by a group of interested citizens who each put in a thousand dollars to get an original business going on the street of Zeeland. They had run into difficulty with their management. The bank was involved because they had loaned them money. So we looked it over and I said if they would retain Mr. Harsoll from Holland, who had been a manager at Penney Company and had been retained by a couple of businesses here as an advisor, if you would retain him for a while to straighten out the mess in the Duchess Shop, I would take the job. Because, I said, I never have been in a financial mess in my life and don’t really want to start at this point. So they did maintain Lou and we worked through some of the problems. I went in as manager with a contract and an option to buy. It wasn’t long and Lou said, "You can do it." So he stepped out. That was in ’71. I had worked a little in the Duchess Shop. It was like providence. I asked Dick one time, "Do you mind if I go in part time?" They needed some help. This was before Dick passed away and I said, "I’ve always wanted to know if I could still sell" and I said, "I’d love to do it." "Nah", he said, "I’ll put up with that." So I went in and worked part time so I had the confidence and a little knowledge, renewed knowledge of the retail...

JJ: How the market was at that time.

EVD: They hired me as manager and I worked very hard, put in long hours, and I pulled them out of debt to the bank. Then after a while I said, "If I’m going to work all
these hours I might as well be in it for myself." So I tendered the stock and offered them seventy-five cents on the dollar and they all agreed. I bought them out and...well, in the meantime I had sold stock along the way so I had a little bit of knowledge about how all this worked. I took my insurance money, which wasn't a lot, and out of profits and insurance money I paid them off, all except my brothers who extended their payment for another year until I could pay them off. So then I was in business for myself and I began to do a lot of experimenting and I sold career clothes...

JJ: You got into uniforms too...

EVD: That was it. That's another long story, but I did supply the bank with the career clothes, First Michigan, and I was learning all as I went along. That was a very difficult operation because you had to clothe all the people, all the employees. To fit all of those people was more than a problem. Plus all the record keeping and everything and I had no help, you see. Finally I said if I'm going to do this I have to have a good line. I will not sell anything that's not top quality. So I connected up with David Crystal out of New York City on the career line and I had confidence in them because they made a high quality item and they had established a career department at that time...

JJ: Did this include nurses and all those...?

EVD: No, no. These were career clothes for offices and banks and that kind of thing. Finally I sold an order to the Ford Credit Union in Dearborn and went in and did a hundred people or more there and then another in Ohio. David Crystal made me a
three-state representative. However, I was too spread out. I just couldn’t do it all. I had the store in Zeeland. So finally the career business dwindled and David Crystal went out and they sold the division and from that point on it wasn’t working well. We just felt we didn’t have the good supply anymore and so we kind of dropped that. But before that happened, I saw a need for uniforms in the area. So I went to New York and established my connections there with the uniform business and established the uniform shop. At one point my son-in-law, John Query, decided to get out of the Army...

JJ: He’d been a career officer...

EVD: Yes, and he had been in about eight years and they decided to come home. So I said, "Well, John, you can always work with me," and he then did take over some of that uniform operation. He was a fine detail man and that’s what I needed. He, then, in time went in business with my son, the Michigan West Shore, where they are still working together. And then Ann came in, my daughter, and worked with me many years and we established a shop in Holland for a little while in the Warm Friend Tavern. The Jean Shop had gone out of business there. And when I did that I knew I wasn’t staying there. But it was a good way to establish some clientele I felt.

JJ: That would follow you back over to Zeeland...

EVD: I probably should tell you about meeting up with the prisoner of war. Ann and John moved to Germany for a year assignment. I went over to visit them and we walked into this shoe store one day and the man said, "Where are you from?" "Well, I’m from Michigan." "Oh", he said, "I’ve been to Michigan." I said, "You have?
Where in Michigan? Were you in Allegan by any chance? Did you happen to work at DeBruyns in Zeeland?" "Yes!" And he had recognized me because all during those war years I was working and I would go out to the warehouse to call someone to the phone and of course those prisoners of war were looking me over and I didn’t look at them. And the man recognized me! Then for many years I operated the store and we developed two or three stores...

JJ: Did you say you went down to Saugatuck with a store too?

EVD: No. Out at the lake one time I had a branch.

JJ: Out on the lake, you mean on Lake Michigan or?

EVD: No, on the north side near the marina. That building is gone now.

JJ: Was that Easter? Or was that Bay Haven?

EVD: I guess it was Easter, I don’t quite remember and...

JJ: So, anyway, you had another shop there. When did you sell out or drop those?

EVD: I sold out in ’89.

JJ: Well, it was the time to take it a little easier.

EVD: That’s right. That is the story.

JJ: I know that you spend winters down in Mexico now. You have a condo down there.

EVD: Well, I did that along the way with a purpose. We bought time shares so that I thought the family will always be assured of a vacation. I also thought I would take my clerks down for a treat...

JJ: This was in Puerto Vallarta on the West Coast.

EVD: Yes. And that never worked out because then I sold my business soon afterwards.
But I had intended that I would give them the benefit of that too.

JJ: Well, you benefit your friends then.

EVD: (Laughs) Well, we try.

JJ: Well Evie, it's been a great morning chatting with you and we've certainly enjoyed this conversation. It was a lot of fun. I hope it was fun for you too.

EVD: Well, it was.

JJ: That's good. Well, thank you very much. I think we'll just say, "Adios" at this point.

EVD: Okay.