

7-9-2003

Sjoerdsma, Edward Oral History Interview: Polio Survivors in Holland

Matthew Nickel

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.hope.edu/holland_polio



Part of the [Archival Science Commons](#), and the [Oral History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Repository citation: Nickel, Matthew, "Sjoerdsma, Edward Oral History Interview: Polio Survivors in Holland" (2003). *Polio Survivors in Holland*. Paper 13.

http://digitalcommons.hope.edu/holland_polio/13

Published in: 2003 - *Polio Survivors in Holland (H88-0234)* - Hope College Living Heritage Oral History Project, July 9, 2003. Copyright © 2003 Hope College, Holland, MI.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Oral History Interviews at Digital Commons @ Hope College. It has been accepted for inclusion in Polio Survivors in Holland by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Hope College. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@hope.edu.

Oral History Project 2003
Joint Archives of Holland
Polio

Interviewee:
Edward Sjoerdsma
(edited)

Conducted by:
Matthew Nickel
9 July 2003

2003 Oral History Interview: Polio
Interview with Edward Sjoerdsma (with wife Angelyn)
Interviewer: Matthew Nickel
9 July 2003
(edited)

Index
(Chronological Order)

- p. 1 Discovery and Diagnosis
- p. 2 Hot wool
Iron Lung
- p. 3 Rocking bed
Loss of weight
- p. 4 17th street home
Awareness of self and surroundings
- p. 5 Chris-Craft job
Injections given to Angelyn and daughter
- p. 6 Dr. Westrate
Polio Epidemics
Marriage
Work situation
Kidney stones
- p. 7 Tracheotomy
Ambulance
- p. 8 Hospital stay
- p. 9 Back brace / corset
- p. 10 Swimming and exercise
Thinking about career
- p. 11 Post-polio
Physical ailments
Possible places of contracting the virus
- p. 12 Suctioning the lungs
Iron lung scare

- p. 13 Construction of the iron lung
Movement in the iron lung
- p. 14 Eating
- p. 15 Could have been worse situation
Environment and medical staff of hospital
- p. 16 Other people with polio
- p. 17 Other people with polio
- p. 18 Polio foundation
Financial situation
- p. 19 Build a house
Church
- p. 20 Aid to Dependant children
H and B Standard's charity
- p. 21 Going to Davenport College
- p. 22 Aid to Dependant Children
Description of recovery process
- p. 23 Learning to do things differently
- p. 24 Role of families
People helping out
- p. 25 Trouble with bank
Difficulty renting
Doctors and nurses in GR
- p. 26 Doctors
Physical Therapy
Paralyzed throat
- p. 27 Treatments: nourishment and shots
Typical day in the iron lung
- p. 28 Iron lung
- p. 29 Iron lung

- p. 30 Try to strengthen what you have left
Therapy
- p. 31 Friends
- p. 32 Fear in people
vaccine
- p. 33 Personality change with polio?
- p. 34 Frustration of physical limitations
- p. 35 Problems eating
- p. 36 Spirituality
Isolation
- p. 37 Community support
- p. 38 Conclusion

2003 Oral History Interview: Polio
Interview with Edward Sjoerdsma (with wife Angelyn)
Interviewer: Matthew Nickel
9 July 2003
(edited)

MN: Maybe if I could ask you how, how was it discovered that you had had polio?

ES: It was in March, what year was that? 1955, I believe. I woke up one morning and I didn't feel good so I went to work and when I got to work I just didn't feel good at all and I didn't do much work that day. I went to nurses station. I felt bad, I felt terrible sick. So I made it through the working day and went home. That night I called the doctor and the doctor was open, he had Wednesday night that he had office hours, so I went there. He checked me all over and he says, "I think you have got high blood pressure." So he gave me some pills, or he sent me for a prescription to get some pills, so I never did take any because I just turned so ill. And it was a Thursday and I got delirious. My fever went up, it was way high.

AS: That was Sunday that that happened.

ES: Yeah, and so then on Sunday morning called the doctor right away, you'd better come, we're going to pick you up in an ambulance. We lived up stairs, and they carried me down.

AS: They thought it was flu.

ES: I got to the hospital and the got a spinal tap on me. That was really something, because they had to put me in a ball, in a curve, so they could get into my spine.

AS: But he had already started to stiffen up.

ES: Then they, the doctor, one doctor, he couldn't do it, so he got another doctor there. They finally did it and then they thought it was spinal meningitis. Then they

decided to put me in a private room because they thought something was up. So then that afternoon, my whole side went paralyzed. I couldn't do anything so then they said, well, you are going to the Grand Rapids, St. Mary's. So they put me in the ambulance and rushed me over there. And that is where they determined that I had polio.

AS: You were paralyzed by that time.

ES: I was paralyzed

AS: From the waist on up. You had both bulbar and spinal.

ES: So then, they just kept me there because there was nothing you could really do to stop anything, it is just going to take its course.

AS: They put hot rags on it, just to ease the pain.

MN: Wool rags?

AS: Yeah, they kept putting hot rags just to ease the pain he was in.

ES: I was having muscle spasms. Just wrapped that up real hot and leave it on for, I don't know how long.

AS: Well, until they'd cool down, then they'd put some more on again.

ES: So then I was admitted on Sunday, and I believe it was on Thursday, and then they put me in the iron lung.

AS: And the trachea.

ES: I couldn't breathe anymore so they put me in an iron lung. And then they also performed a tracheotomy on me at that time. So I stayed in the iron lung for—

AS: Six weeks.

ES: Six or seven weeks. They want to wean you away from that.

AS: Then they put you on a rocking bed.

MN: A rocking bed?

AS: That rocks so that your diaphragm, and pushes air out. They also had a bubble that they would put on him at times that would suction his lungs and make him breathe. We took the bubble home when we went home.

ES: That was later on. That rocking bed just kept on rocking. And that would make you breathe. When I was in the lung, I couldn't swallow, I couldn't eat nothing, so they would, they kept me in there, put an IV in my arm and they would take that down, and I couldn't move that arm for about a week and then they would pull it out and put it in the other one just to keep me alive. They would give me water and then a bottle of vitamins or something.

AS: He lost about, what was it a hundred pounds?

ES: About a hundred pounds I went down in weight.

MN: About how much did you weight when you went in?

ES: I probably went in about 210. I went down to about 110 or 120, somewhere in there. So I stayed in the iron lung, and they kept, I had just a terrible fever all the time. I just begged them to give me a bath in ice water, which they would not do. I was burning up. My fever was probably, what would you say. I don't remember, but it was high, I know that.

AS: I stayed there for how many nights.

ES: The doctor said they gave up almost. You know, they are not going to make it, you know, but where there is life there is always hope.

AS: That is what the doctor told me, as long as there is life, there's hope, but he didn't really think he'd make it. And we had a little girl of a year old.

MN: So you you'd been married how long?

AS: About two years.

ES: I didn't really know what was going on because I was—

AS: On Sunday you'd want me to go home and get your razor because you had not shaved for a day or two days and he wanted to date the gal that was his nurse. Of course they could not keep him in bed because he was just wild.

ES: I don't remember all of that.

AS: I know you don't.

MN: How aware were you when you were brought into the hospital, into St. Mary's. How aware of your surroundings were you?

ES: Not too good.

AS: Well you mean? He was at Holland Hospital.

ES: First.

AS: We took him from our home, our apartment, we lived on 17th street upstairs, and then I called the ambulance and they picked him up and then from there they took him to Holland Hospital, he spent the day there. Then they call me because I was with my parents with our little girl for supper. They said get over immediately we are transferring him. So by about six o'clock at night. It was about nine in the morning that they took him, by six o'clock they were transferring him to St. Mary's hospital.

MN: So at St. Mary's, were you fully aware of what was going on around you?

AS: No.

ES: No, not really.

AS: He was delirious already on Saturday, or Sunday morning. Then you had pheasants and birds and everything in the bed with him he thought. And the lady downstairs heard him, of course we didn't have a telephone. In those days everybody didn't have telephones so we had to go to the lady downstairs because he wanted me to call the doctor during the night, but you just don't go running down stairs. It is not like now a days where you just get on your cell phone.

MN: Were you working at Herman Miller at the time?

ES: I was working at Chris-Craft. I got out of service in '53 and then I went to work at Chris-Craft. So I was working there and that's when—

AS: You had just gotten back from being on strike, or being laid off. Something.

ES: Laid off or something.

AS: You were just back to work.

ES: Its like then it hit me.

AS: People were scared of him because they thought it was really contagious. Which I don't think it is because I slept with him and I didn't get it.

ES: But then you had to have a shot.

AS: Well, our little girl, well, she was a year old and she wasn't that big and they gave her a shot, but the thing was that big around, that long and full of whatever the stuff was. I says doctor how much am I going to have, being this heavy compared to her. I got two of them. But I didn't get anything out of it.

MN: So was it a vaccine that they gave you?

AS: No it was not a vaccine. It was something that was supposed to keep you from getting it. Or build up your body or something, I don't know what it was exactly. See, we went to Dr. Westrate at that time. I guess it was Warren that I went to. It was Bill that he went to the first time.

MN: Bill?

AS: Bill Westrate. They were the two brothers.

ES: I had to take a tremendous—

AS: And I said to them the night we went in, "I don't know why, but I have a feeling of polio?" He says, "Why do you think that?" I don't know why but I just had this feeling that there was.

ES: Because there was an epidemic at that time, but mostly in the summertime, you know that is when it was—

AS: It is usually in the summer where his was in March, the months with the R's is when you didn't see much polio. But his was March so it was unusual.

MN: So how old were you guys?

ES: I was twenty—

AS: Five.

ES: I got out of the service in—

AS: Because we got married when we were twenty-three, so you were twenty-five.

ES: So—

AS: And he was off from work for five years.

ES: So I stayed in the hospital until about—

AS: Five months.

ES: Five, six months. And I got out—

AS: A month.

ES: They took the tracheotomy out before I left.

AS: Because you wanted it.

ES: And it is a nuisance. I don't know if you are familiar with a tracheotomy.

AS: You came home with it Ed.

ES: They put that in here. [Motions to area around his Adam's Apple] And you have to take it out every day—

AS: To suction out.

ES: It is an insert and then you have to take out, I used put something in there so I could talk, otherwise you get a lot of air you know because you were open you see. Then they took that out before I went home, before I left the hospital, and they thought it would be okay. I went home for just a little bit and bang I was back in the hospital.

AS: With pneumonia.

ES: I had pneumonia, and we left Holland—

AS: In half an hours we were just about by St. Mary's with the ambulance. Vic Kleinkeksel, I remember Vic Kleinkeksel drove the ambulance. Well, in those days we used the hearse. We didn't have ambulances like you do now. And we hit ice on the way down, I remember that too.

ES: No, that was in March.

AS: Okay.

ES: I think it was mid-September when I went there. So I spent a miserable night there.

AS: Well, they wanted to send him back home, but I said he's not going home, because I knew I could not take care of him.

ES: With my lungs, I could not bring anything up, see. What I did all night long, I would hang—

AS: I would hold your legs all night long so he could bring this stuff up. All this green mucus.

ES: Then I had an oxygen tent and the night daily said, we are not fooling around, so they put the tracheotomy in again, and now we are going to leave it.

AS: One of your old nurses was there who happened to be on private duty, and I said I would stay with him, then she would watch too, take special care of him. But we were so tired we both fell asleep that night.

ES: But they put the tracheotomy in and I think I was there about—

AS: A week?

ES: Two weeks. It was two weeks there in the hospital to get everything cleared up again. Then I think I had another one where I got something caught in my throat.

AS: Hamburger.

ES: So then I had to go to the hospital again, St. Mary's. And we went down and they did something and got that cleared up. They took it out.

AS: I took you to Holland Hospital too, the Ambulance did. Then Dr. Warren Westrate brought us home too. You had hamburger caught that time too. After that you started getting kidney stones.

ES: So I had some kidney stones and they had to cut me open. That was about a two week stay in the hospital. A year later, we did the same thing again, they cut me open, and took the kidney stone away.

AS: Of course now they can do things different where they wouldn't have to cut you open like they did then. Because they would cut you from here all the way around to the back and they would open you up just like a watermelon. Totally different.

ES: They had to break your bottom rib, that was kind of painful. Then I had to wear a brace. When they first tried to get me up walking in the hospital, boy I was just like a drunk. It was terrible. I walked a little bit, they put me right back in bed and said you can't do that because now you spine is, you have curvature of the spine so got the weak side, the strong side is pulling the weak side over. So I had that. So then they say, "You have got to stay in bed until we can get a corset made. They made one with steel stays in. I would have to put that on every day. So when I did get up and around. They had with a steal hand, they had an overhead brace, not in their hand,

AS: Just because he couldn't move his arms.

ES: They would have to put them in there and at least I could have my hands and arms lifting. I still have that on all the time. I still have that.

AS: I always said we were going to donate it to the Museum or Archives. Because not too many people have that.

ES: I had to wear that corset, that brace for a long time. Very uncomfortable. By losing that balance I couldn't control myself. It took a long time for, I had to go

every three, three days a week for therapy at St. Mary's hospital. Once I got out of that, I used to go swimming with a group.

AS: At Mary Freebed.

ES: I went swimming there and we did exercises in the water. That is good because the water kind of holds your self.

MN: What kinds of exercises did they have you try?

ES: Just work my arms.

AS: Because in water there is—

MN: Using the buoyancy.

ES: Right, because there is less resistance. Then I was doing exercises at home too. I had pulley with a rope on with a weight and I would pull that up and down all the time to do the exercise. I went to a physical therapist.

AS: Simon Dykstra came from St. Mary's. He started up a business here.

ES: Then I had to go there for treatment so, but it was a long, the doctor said, you have got to start thinking about what you are going to do with your future. They were not easy on you. They didn't give you any sympathy.

AS: Which was good. I had the same thing with him, I had to get on him.

ES: So then I finally worked with the state, and I went back to Davenport College, so I had to go through there.

AS: But he had quit school in the 10th grade so it was hard to pick that up.

ES: So I finally got a degree. It took a while because of the operations, but I finally did graduate. After I graduated I did get a job, with big Dutchman. Office work so I spent about 20 years there in the office. Then they moved out of town and I lost

my job so, then I went searching for a job and I finally got one at Herman Miller. I was there, well, I got thirteen years in or something like that. Thirteen, fourteen, I don't know. I retired out of there. So it has been a, now I am getting post-polio Syndrom. My muscles are getting weak, I can't eat good. I can't eat nothing but liquid, I have got to force it down.

AS: And you are getting deterioration of your vertebrae.

ES: My vertebrae are deteriorating now. I just found that out. They did a test, so now he has got me on a pill once a week that I have to take and hopefully, I don't know what that will do, I don't know if it will stop it or what. A pain in my back, my lower back. Other than that, I do a lot of things. I try to do a lot of things. I can't do nothing with this arm. I can't pick that arm up. [Right Arm] I usually get a, I haven't had it lately but for a while there my hands would just, oh man they would just tighten right up on me. I couldn't, I'd be driving the car and I would almost have to stop because it hurt so terrible. Now I have not had that for a little bit. I have a lot of funny things going on.

AS: And then you had heart surgery since then too.

ES: I had open heart surgery.

AS: Of course that didn't come from the polio necessarily.

ES: It was a long, a long recovery.

MN: Did anyone, or did doctors or you guys ever discover or have any idea where you had contracted polio from?

ES: A lot of times they said, like when in the summertime the people who were swimming, with kids, that is usually when it hit see. Usually, it was very unusual

for adults to get it. It was mostly young kids, and that is what they figured like in the summertime when they had the epidemic. I can remember before I went to service that this epidemic was on, you read about it in the paper.

AS: And you were not run down either when this happened.

ES: But they did a, they figured that I must have had a cold or something. So what they did when I was at St. Mary's in the lung, they put a tent over me over my head, over the whole thing and then they put steam in there to try to break up that mucus. What they would go down in my tracheotomy with a catheter that was about that long, and they would suction it out. It hurt terribly because it irritated in there. They would pull up these big things that were hanging on the end.

AS: I even had that, because we took the suction machine home too then. I had several times, big long mucus that long that would just come out of there.

ES: And it really hurt when it way down and you know because it irritated down in there but it did pull the stuff out. I had three nurses right around the clock that worked, the three of them that worked the shifts. There was nothing that you could really do you know. They gave be shots every day.

AS: One time the iron lung though, one of the doors, see they had little port holes that they could work through. One time one of them fell open and of course they had this big tent over it and he started, he couldn't breathe, and they couldn't figure out what was wrong. They had a thing that you could pump manually, but that didn't help any because those port hole was open. Finally they figured out, I thought he was just about dead then, they finally figured out that the port hole was open.

ES: With port holes you could go in so they could work on you.

AS: That is how they bathed him.

ES: They had sponge rubber around and then when they went in there that kind of, they could work.

AS: There was sponge around your neck too so that everything was air tight.

ES: Then you get sores on your neck because it was around your neck all the time. Very uncomfortable laying on your back for weeks.

AS: I know they had one here a while back. We were going to go see it but we never did get to go. Because I never did take too many pictures, I didn't want any memories of that whole thing.

MN: Could you move much in the iron lung?

ES: No. You don't move at all. You could maybe move your legs a little bit but otherwise no.

AS: Because your legs weren't paralyzed. They were a little affected but not much. But other than that you couldn't move because she was paralyzed. When he went to the bathroom they just had things laying there so they could just clean it up under him. They had him naked in the lung so they could just work on him, whatever they had to do.

ES: I don't remember all that. My lungs today though, I don't have full capacity of them. That is when I get. You see, I get pneumonia quite frequently.

AS: Not like you would get.

ES: It is aspiration pneumonia. When I eat or something like that, you get, and it sucks it down into your lung, that food. The food stays there and it begins to, the bacteria starts to work and that creates pneumonia.

AS: Or if he gets a cold Dr. Bonzelaar immediately says call me.

ES: I take anti-biotics because I can't cough. So I just have to try to bring it up. I had about four years ago, I went to the throat doctor in Grand Haven and he says I can't swallow. He said we'll do a cookie x-ray on you. So they went to the hospital and they would take, and they give you something to eat and you have got to chew and they take x-rays of that they whole time and then if you drink they can follow that too. I said to the nurse, whoever was doing it, how is it? She mightn't have said nothing to me. I said, "How is it?" She says, "You will have a stomach pump within a year or so." But she didn't realize that you had had all these things. She says the way it looks now, you are going to have a stomach pump put in, which is not good.

AS: That's four years ago.

ES: So I told my doctor, he said they shouldn't have said that, and this and that.

AS: But you still don't have it.

ES: But liquids, liquids are good. I can take soup and thin stuff. I don't eat no steak. Any dry meat I cannot eat. But you have to chew, chew, and chew good to get it really fine so I can swallow. Then I have to force it down with water.

AS: And then four weeks ago he fell of the ladder too because he loses his balance. So I had an ambulance pick him up because he didn't know what he was doing but I guess he hit his head and was knocked unconscious for a few minutes.

ES: I don't have much, I can lose my balance in a hurry. But all in all, we have been fortunate too. That was a number of years ago so. I can do a lot of things, I can still mow the lawn and I get very tired you know when I do physical work. Then the next day my arms, I can hardly do anything with them. It just tires out. Other than that, I am just fortunate that it went as good as it did. I have seen a lot of polio patients and they were not good.

AS: Because when I was with him I would help out at St. Mary's, work with other ones because I was there all day everyday, so I was working with a lot of the other ones.

ES: St. Mary's, that was were all the polio patients were going.

AS: At that time polio patients went there. Not all, there were a few who went other places.

ES: They pretty much had it set up so they could take care of everyone.

AS: The sisters were very good.

ES: It was a very good hospital, they took good care of you.

MN: Could you describe the hospital environment? Maybe the attitude of the place, what the general attitude was like?

ES: Oh it was tremendous—

AS: The sisters were terrific you know and anything they could do for you they did. And the doctor too you know, you had I don't know how many doctors because of course over there the doctors were interning and you had a doctor for everything. There was never a want.

ES: I probably had eight to ten doctors. They would have certain things to do. One would take care of the tracheotomy, another would take care of the muscles, and another would take care of—

AS: You had a neurologist and then you had physical therapists, all kinds of them. They would come up there all day long. Then you would start going down to them.

ES: The care there, you just could not believe it in there.

AS: Didn't have to be catholic to be there. They just treated like we were part of there.

ES: They really did good there.

AS: It was a terrific hospital. It was a clean hospital. Very clean.

ES: It was small, at that time, years ago.

AS: It wasn't compared to Holland. It was big. Of course now they are building on because of cancer research I think. So the part that you were in is going to be torn down.

ES: It was good. A lot of suffering, but I made it.

AS: That one whole side of the building was almost all polio. Because there was this one little girl from what was it, Six Lakes? I used to take her out a lot riding, Take her and help her.

ES: She used to frog breath.

MN: Frog breath?

AS: With your tongue, you would... [Demonstrates sticking tongue out, then breathing and bringing tongue in with air] I don't know how she did it exactly, but they called it frog breathing at that time.

ES: She died.

[End of Tape 1 Side A]

AS: Bernie Hoekstra, he had polio too.

ES: He had it in his leg. I don't know if is still living.

AS: I don't know either. We used to go see him, now we have not talked to him for ages.

ES: He had it in his legs.

AS: One time he was there to have surgery and he had it hanging up on a pulley and the pulley went down. I happened to be there. Oh he screamed. I lifted up his leg, held his leg for him until the nurse got there. I would take him for a ride in the wheelchair too sometimes. Sometime I would help people too.

ES: There is a Mike Boeve, he is in the Holland area too. He had polio.

AS: He works for Myering Insurance Agency

ES: In Hamilton. He was a young kid when he had it. I can still remember even neighbors of his folks and I can still remember him dragging that leg.

AS: He still doesn't walk very good. He is getting it back again I think.

ES: Now, they said he's having problems with Post-Polio Syndrom, that is what I heard anyway.

AS: We haven't talked to him either lately.

ES: There's, I have quite a bit of literature on that post polio Syndrom. There is an organization, we never really got involved in that thing, but I had a lot of literature on it.

AS: I put on 10,000 miles just driving back and forth in those few months. Plus, other people would, if they would go at night, I would come home and they would take me back again. Fortunately I had parents here that would take care of our daughter.

MN: Did you guys ever work with the Polio Foundation or the March of Dimes?

AS: Oh yeah, I collected for years.

ES: They were very good.

AS: They paid for everything of his. We had insurance and that would pick it up first. But anything the insurance... we had blue cross at that time wasn't it?

ES: Yes, I believe it was. They paid up to 120 days or something then they stopped.

AS: But the March of Dimes at that time picked up everything. In those days what was it, about 30 or 40 thousand?

ES: I forget. I think we still got some of that information someplace.

AS: And then from then on, everything, they picked up the extra that, because we had no income. They needed somebody, a nurse to take care of him. They would prefer that I did it rather than bring in a private nurse, because they said that I could do what they did anyway, so I couldn't go to work. That made it kind of difficult financially.

MN: Did you work at the time?

AS: No. Because I had quit working because we had a child. I did work before that. I worked in a doctor's office. But then when we had her, then when he got sick. I couldn't work because they wanted me to take care of him.

ES: We had no money.

AS: We had a little, we were going to build a house the day we found out that he had polio.

ES: Well, we were trying to get a loan.

AS: We were going to try and talk to the builders that Saturday morning when you got sick. I called them and said, just forget it, I don't think we will be building right away.

ES: So we never did.

AS: My folks owned Lifesavers (land). So the place where there was that big Blue Tower, that was our lot. My parents had given that to us and we were going to live there but we didn't start anything.

ES: That was a good thing.

AS: It was a good thing we weren't started.

ES: We had no money, and there were times when we didn't have any food on the table and our daughter had all hand-me-downs. People had given, even kids who would give us used clothing.

AS: We went to Graafscaap Christian Reformed at that time. They were good to us too, that church.

MN: What was the community like that you were a part of at that time?

AS: They were helpful. That is one thing.

MN: Neighbors or...

AS: Well, see, we lived on, when we came back we first rented a house from a guy you knew (looking at Edward). Of course we were there just how long and he sold

it. And the neighbors were good there and then we moved to 16th and Columbia.

And those neighbors were good to us too. Anything they could do for you.

MN: People really stuck together?

AS: Oh yeah. It was more neighbors than it is now. They were good to you. Then we moved to 25th Street, right by the hospital.

ES: I applied for veterans, so I had to go to Detroit for a physical every so often so I had to have a doctor. That gave us a little bit of money, it wasn't that much but it was something.

AS: I applied for ADC, Aid to Dependent Children. I had to. And of course, what did we get \$75? Our rent was \$65. So you don't go to far on that. So fortunately the church we were going to was really good. Graafscaap Christian Reformed. They were terrific.

ES: A lot of times if you would go to the gas station—

AS: We had this, across from the Civic Center there was this gas station that had just been torn down, those two guys, I would go there, he didn't go there because I would go there and they wouldn't take any money for gas.

MN: Where was that located?

ES: Hartgerink and Block. H and B Standard. It is gone now.

AS: The one that stayed there to the last. Of course it was not those guys that were in there. But the older guys that were in there, and of course you knew them because you lived in the same neighborhood they lived in. They would put gas in my car. There were a lot of people that did help. Then there was the one who had the milk business, he came down and gave us some sometimes you know.

ES: People were really good.

AS: ADC wasn't like now-a-days with the food stamps and everything because a lady would come and check on you, near every month, a gal, and if you had a dollar left, that month you would probably get a dollar less the next month. It was not like they do now where you can get away with things. And like at Christmas time, one of the exchange club or something took our daughter out Christmas shopping. Of course too, I think they do that now too yet sometimes. They took her out and had a little party and took her out Christmas presents for us.

ES: It wasn't much but it was something.

AS: It was Ray Helder and his wife that took her, I remember that. I had worked uptown so I knew Ray from the bank.

ES: I started working back in 1960. And I got my job, and it was tough. Then when I commuted back and forth to Davenport I had to drive. We carpooled.

AS: You had it so you only had to drive one day a week.

ES: It was tough going back to school once college your out.

AS: Especially at that age.

ES: It was tough but we made it.

AS: Fortunately he went into the business field so I could help him when he first started, the first few years because I had taken all those courses in high school and everything, so helped so he got his first.

MN: What was the church like, Graafscaap?

AS: It was a farm church. They were terrific. It was the old church that they tore down, were you here when they tore it down?

MN: No.

AS: It is a brand new one there now. Anything, in fact I did go sometimes, some of the ladies would work in castle park cleaning homes so I could drop him off at his mom and dad with our daughter and I would go clean some houses and that would give us a little extra money. I would do that. That helped a little too. They tried to find this thing too.

MN: They helped you find work and?

AS: It just gave us a little extra money, plus it helps you feel a little better when you are earning your own money rather than somebody giving it to you. I remember the first week you got your paycheck at Big Dutchman, I called the state or the ADC and I said we have our own check now, so you can keep yours, I don't want yours anymore. I hated taking that check every month, I hated it. Everybody, if you would buy something they would say look at there, she is on help and she is buying something new. And of course our car wore out after a while so we had to buy a new car. And that guy was good to us too that you bought it from.

ES: We survived. We are thankful, the Lord has been good.

MN: What was your general recovery like, going from being in an iron lung to being able to walk around, can you describe the process?

ES: It was good to get out of the iron lung, I'll tell you that. Being on your back, you couldn't hardly move. You can move your legs a little bit. Not being able to eat. What really hurt me the most was when they put that, they would keep that needle in there for a week and then they would close out and then they would switch over

to the other arm and tape that arm down. Oh, after a week of that, boy my arm felt like it was going to fall off.

AS: But you did a lot of walking yet when you got out again started walking because different people say, I remember you walking down the street with this thing, we wondered what in the world is that guys doing? He had these thing hanging. But you'd always be out walking, and once in a while you would take our little daughter out for a walk, and so you did a lot of walking.

ES: I am used to being doing hard work and everything you know, you just knocked out of the job market. Hard work.

AS: He built boats over at Chris-Craft, that is what he worked on.

ES: There are so many things that I like to do, but I can't. When I have to work above my head I can't do it because I just can't even hold it, I can't get my arms up there to drive anything in, driving nails or something.

AS: He was told immediately that he would never work at that job again. So he knew that he had to be rehabilitated to do something else. At first you looked into repairing TVs or something but that was not your thing. You didn't like that at all.

ES: But you subsidize a lot. You do things different. I do a lot of things different. I do a lot with my left hand and when I worked I would use my left hand for the calculators and write with my right hand, see. You do a lot of that thing. I do a lot of things with my left hand.

AS: But you were fast with it, he learned. But now he does start to shake a little bit more too. The nerves probably.

ES: The swallowing is not getting any better. I know that. I usually have a lump in my throat. Mucus. I take some medicine for, to get rid of that mucus but I don't know if it helps or not. I usually try to get liquid, anything that I can take liquid other than pills.

AS: Didn't you say it takes you twice to swallow? He has to swallow twice to get the same thing down or more.

ES: I get pills caught in my throat now and I can't take big pills, if I do I have to cut them up or even crush them to get them down.

MN: What about your family's, what kind of role did they play?

AS: His parents were quite old, so they couldn't drive a car or anything. His dad was at the point where because it was only how long after you got out that he died? And your mom was not that good either. Because you were the youngest and your parents were older when they got married.

ES: My brother helped quite a bit. He did carpenter work and anything that we needed he always tried to help.

AS: We stored all our furniture there when we—

ES: People were good when I needed somebody to haul the furniture around they would do it. We would rent a truck or something and then they would move it or something. Then they would move it and so forth.

AS: Then my parents of course took care of our daughter a lot. And I stayed there till he got out of the hospital again so that we would not have to pay any rent or anything and then when he got out of course the doctor said that we had to have our own place and then we rented a place for a few years until we bought this

house and then we have been here ever since. We have been here 43 years. We bought this in 1960.

ES: I knew a guy that built a house and he did me a favor. We had no money.

AS: We had a little.

ES: Not much. Then he says I will loan you the money for the down payment and then you can get a loan. So we went to the bank and then bank says, no we don't do nothing of that sort. So then this guy was really nice and he took on the land contract and gave me a land contract. So the bank said after a year or two, he said we'll come in and assess the house again and if you can, and we will put you on a conventional loan and that is what we did. He got his money but he really helped us out, otherwise we probably would never been able to buy a house so. Moving around from one house to the next.

AS: Everytime we moved into a house they'd sell it. We were renting homes and so, and of course we usually tried to, we fixed then and lived in them like they were our own, so we would be fixing them up literally for them. Their yards and inside. So then they would sell them again. And then the last one he wanted us to do his, he had homes that he rented out so he kind wanted us to be there to live there. He wanted us to live in that house and take care of it. I said I don't want to do that. I don't want to be living with people. Because he was selling the house. That was when he, I think the neighbor next door bought it. The Oonk's that had the beer business.

ES: The doctors we had in Grand Rapids, they were good. Nurses were good, I really got excellent care there. They went out of their way to take care of me.

- AS: You have Dr. Bonzelaar now, and that is the young Bill. Alvin's or his dad, you had his twin brother as a doctor in St. Mary's. He has just kind of stayed right in the family. It has been kind of neat really.
- MN: What were the medical people like? Can you describe them, maybe their attitudes, their helpfulness?
- AS: They were very good, but they got on you if you did any thing.
- ES: They didn't give you any sympathy. So many times these doctors, especially with the young kids. The parents would spoil them. They would say you can't do this and you can't do that. With an adult, I mean they really got on you. Boy I know he chewed me out a few times about you have got to think about work, and you better get to going and doing things. You can' lay around.
- AS: The guy that was interning, he said, you always, after you learned, they learned to walk their fingers up their body. Because he couldn't scratch his nose or anything. I remember him saying to you, you can do it to yourself but don't ever do that to one of the nurses, he says.
- ES: I remember when I got to the hospital they put a tube in my nose, into my stomach so they could give me liquid. I got delirious and I pulled that out. So, then they were going to put that back in again. So he came in and said I am going to put that tube in your nose again. So he stuck it in and it came right out of my mouth.
- AS: His throat was paralyzed so he was not swallowing.
- ES: They put it into your nose and then it goes through to your stomach.
- AS: Normal people would swallow, but you were not swallowing.

ES: He says, "I'll fix you." So then he comes back and he sprayed my throat to deaden it, stuck it in and it came right back out again. They never did get it in again. If they could have kept that tube in there I probably would not have lost so much weight because they could have fed me better food rather than just the IVs.

Because you didn't really get much as far as, nothing solid. They would give you your sugar water then they give you a bottle of vitamins, and then this went on for 24 hours a day. They would come in everyday and I don't know how many times they would give me a shot. I don't know what that was for.

MN: They would give you a shot?

ES: I don't know what it was, but I know my rear end looked like a pin cushion, it was all black and blue. They shot me every day, I don't know how many times a day.

AS: You were in a private room at that time and finally you got to be in a room with other people, because there was that one kid from where is it again that we still get Christmas cards from. Last year we didn't, but he was in there. You also had Billy Growanbowski the bowler, and he was so scared of needles, he'd go, if they walked in the room with a needle he would fly to the other side of the bed and finally they would just have to give him it. He was scared of needles, I can still see him flying across that bed.

ES: But we made it so.

MN: What was a typical day in the iron lung like?

ES: Long, no sleep. Didn't sleep good at all.

AS: The morning nurse would come up and give you a bath with a washcloth. What time did Ms. Alt come on?

ES: Three o'clock.

AS: And then she would give him another bath. She was a typical little old maid. She was terrific. Ed would say, "I don't need a bath, I had one this morning." Well we are going to do it again anyway. She was always cleaning in the room too, she'd clean your iron lung, she was always wiping that. Mrs. Monroe sat more on her fanny. She was good. The third shift, they didn't keep her on. You were six weeks in the iron lung and I thing after that then the third shift went off. But they had the two day shift ones on all the time. They had to teach you how to eat too, again.

MN: So at the time did you know you were being put in an iron lung, were you conscious of this?

ES: No, I don't remember.

AS: You were conscious but you didn't know it. Because my mom brought me that day and we came up the elevator and the iron lung stood right by the elevator and we walked off the elevator and I said to my mom "uh-oh, the iron lung is gone, I am sure Ed is gone." We walk in that they were just putting the trachea in and of course there was blood all over the place and he was in the iron lung. But I mean, you did talk to me Ed. But you don't remember that at all.

MN: Did you become aware while you were in the iron lung?

ES: Oh yeah, after a while I knew I was in an iron lung. I knew how things were going.

MN: What did you feel when you gained that awareness.

ES: I don't know.

AS: I think you felt a kind of panic at times. Because you'd make me do things, cause I can't do it you'd say. Because you were all enclosed up to your neck.

MN: Confinement seems like it could be scary.

AS: And he could not move so there was nothing that he could do.

ES: They did have a mirror so I could look.

MN: Oh so you could see...

AS: People when he wanted to talk to them, and he could, you had your head back kind of like that. They had the mirror situated so you could see the people's face.

ES: So I could see people in the back of me. They had that. At the time you just take it as it is. You are there, and you have to hope that everything gets better.

AS: You had the whole room to yourself because you had so much equipment in there. Because for a while then they had the iron lung and that rocking bed so that the first day they took you out of the iron lung. See the thing fit, slit, it is a big tube, I don't know if you have ever seen it. Where his body was like a slab laying on that, so it just slid into that tube, so when they, the first time they took him out they took him out for two to three minutes to see if he could handle it. And then the next day it would be four minutes, five minutes.

MN: So it was a gradual...

AS: They weaned him out of the iron lung, then they would put you on the rocking bed, but at night they would put you back into the iron lung again so they would not have to worry about him.

MN: To be certain.

ES: And then the chest respirator, that was not too back. *bad.*

AS: You mean that big bubble? It would just suction you chest, make your lungs.

MN: Use pressure?

AS: Yeah.

ES: But the rocking bed you couldn't sleep on.

AS: That is why they put you back into the iron lung at night so you could sleep. But then towards the last they didn't, but they might stop the bed for a while to see if you could go, and then if you go scared or panicky they would start the bed up again. They tried to wean him out of that too.

MN: Were there other kinds of treatments that you remember?

ES: Nope, just therapy. When I was ready, then they came up there.

AS: At first they started therapy in you room. About the time that you could go down stairs, that was when you left the hospital. I would have to take you down there three times a week because you could not drive of course.

ES: That was the only thing they did was work with what you had to try and strengthen what you had left and that is all they can do. There is not much you can do. Even this arm is not, it is not strong, I can pick it up but it is not strong. When you have got to work at trying to pick stuff up and trying to get it up is awful hard for me to do that.

AS: That is why he has got strong wife.

MN: Could you tell me, did your relationships with people change through all this.

ES: I think they improved, don't you?

AS: And we kept the same friends, some friends come and go but that is a natural thing in life. But there are four of us couples that have hung around together for

over 50 years you guys did. There were four guys that hung around together that long and they came up to the hospital too when he was.

ES: This one guy came up and I was there in the hospital. That was hard. And he went back and he said, “boy he looks like a POW.” He says, “He’s bad, he looks terrible.”

AS: Yeah you were so thin because you lost all that weight.

MN: How did you know these four other couples?

AS: They hung around together at a gas station, the guys did, uptown.

ES: We hung around together when we were kids.

AS: They went to the beach together, probably drink together.

ES: No we didn’t do that.

AS: I don’t mean that you were drunk or anything, but you would have a drink together, socialize together. I mean you guys were not goody two-shoes, lets face it.

ES: But we didn’t happen to do anything bad.

MN: Didn’t cause trouble.

AS: Not like what some of these kids do no a days. Well you used to have fun though. Cause in fact one lived right up here. Your mom said that to me right before she died, “I can see those four kids coming at midnight.” Because at midnight they had to come home. All three of their cars would go zooming by.

MN: Do you remember polio and what people were talking about at the time, what was in the new, what were people at church talking about, just in general?

AS: They were all scared of it, they were afraid that they were going to catch it. When we had our apartment the lady, the two sisters cleaned it out for me because I was at the hospital all the time and they were scared to death to clean. They had, and then it was Lynn Post, I shouldn't be saying this. He was going to rent it and he didn't dare to.

ES: He wanted to fumigated it.

AS: I think they did fumigate our apartment afterwards. Because they were all so afraid of catching this particular disease, but like I said, I slept with him, our girl was in the room, we had a crib in the same room, if anybody would have gotten, I certainly would have and she would have too. And my family and his family, nobody got it.

ES: I don't think anybody really knew. I still don't think to this day know really what caused it. [End of Tape 1]

AS: He even had to have a vaccine, even though he had had polio because there are cases where someone has gotten the second time. Of course I had to have one and our daughter did, but you had to have it also (to ES).

MN: What did you guys think of the vaccine when it hit the news, with people when it was available?

ES: Great!

AS: We were thrilled to think that most likely nobody else would have to go through this again. And I worked for a doctor here who now is going, Dr. Judd went to India and he is trying to, so they won't have it there too. It is a wonderful thing when you see all the people who were crippled with polio. It is wonderful.

ES: You don't hear much of it anymore.

AS: We were scared of it because they said he could get it again even though he had it. There was a case down someplace else that right after you had had it that had gotten it a second time. It is unusual but it is possible. And I suppose you could still get it.

ES: But they say when you become older and you get some symptoms back again. The doctor, he is aware of it. That is why takes pretty interest in it.

AS: Bonzelaar is really watching over quite closely now.

ES: He says anytime you need something now, you just call me. If you run into, if you have a cold or something, that is why we try to stay away from people who have colds, so I don't get one. We have been fortunate this past winter that things went really good.

AS: This is why when he fell off the ladder a few weeks ago the doctor said, when the doctor called him, to tell him he was in the hospital and fallen off the ladder, he says what is a post-polio syndrome person doing on a ladder, he is not supposed to be on a ladder. But then you went in the other day a few weeks ago, he says I understand, but just so somebody is around you while you are on a ladder, so they can watch you.

MN: Did you know other people who had gotten polio?

AS: That Mike Boeve, we knew him. There was this kid Hulst.

MN: Do you think your personality changed through the course of polio?

ES: It is hard to say. I think through a certain, when you can't do things you get upset. You see people doing things and they are working hard and you can't do it. You

kind of get, maybe a little depressed. But I have been able to work, so. I think your personality changes to a certain degree, when you're really healthy, and I was always healthy and then all of a sudden bang you are flat on your back. You say, why is it me? Why did this happen to me? You are not going to be able to do things that you did before. It does change your—

AS: You see him and he really doesn't look like he isn't strong.

MN: You can hardly even notice.

AS: I used to have to do all the work mowing the lawn and everything and people say, why are you doing that, why don't you let your husband. Of course he couldn't do it. And that made him feel bad too.

MN: It must be frustrating to not be able to do that.

ES: It still is, when I have to do something above my head and I can't get it done and I have to call somebody else to help.

AS: Like we wanted this kitchen painted and they said, oh next fall, so he says all next fall, he says oh let us try it. So we did do it. But I did the ceiling. I did it with a stick up here.

ES: We were tired. I think I tire more now, but I am getting older. I will be 73 next week.

MN: Wow, Happy Birthday.

ES: A lot of people don't get that old.

AS: That is how old your dad was when he died.

ES: I know that when I first got polio I got headaches like you would not believe. Just like you hit me over the head with a hammer all time. It went on and on and on. It

was terrible. I just had headaches. Oh. I was so terrible sick over there. And then with the fever I had. I don't know what I had. 106. I know it was high. Felt like was burning up. Then laying there and you see someone drinking water and you say, boy, if I could only have a drop of water. Couldn't get nothing down.

AS: They couldn't give you any, in the iron lung you couldn't get any. She might give you ice chips or something like that.

ES: Not even that.

AS: It seems like she tried that though. Or just a drop of water or something to see if you can swallow.

ES: I have had a few scary moments eating. Didn't know if I would make it or not. But I did manage to get it down.

AS: Down at Bunker Hill, that was a couple of years ago yet, even. He was eating a hamburger and all of a sudden he hit me. I thought uh-oh. I could tell he had something stuck. Well I was going to tell him to get up and then he says, it is finally going down. But the color was starting to change already. That scared me too. Hamburger is usually something he can get down and fish is another thing he can get down and chicken, if it is tender he can get that down. But beyond that that is what—

ES: It takes me a long time to eat.

AS: We sit about an hour. There is no joy in eating anymore.

ES: If we go out to eat, I have to chew so long, I get so terribly tired that I just quit eating.

MN: What about faith? Did this whole experience change your spirituality? Have any effect?

AS: No, we were religious people before that already, it made it probably stronger. Church and faith has always been a part of our family so that was not a problem. We knew whatever happened happened.

MN: Was there anything in particular that motivated you through all this?

ES: I think you wanted to get better, to improve what you had left. So you worked on that. Exercising and everything to strengthen what you had left so at least you could go out and do things that you, you know, but there were a lot of things that I couldn't do, but there are a lot of things that I can do. I have quite a few pills that I have to take; I am a diabetic. As you get older a lot of times this happens anyway. And now this calcium pill I am taking.

AS: That is part of the polio.

ES: He showed me what was happening and he said you are going to get pain from that. I have to see him in a couple of weeks and see what he is going to do, or what he wants to do.

MN: Were there any moments going through the hospital, or going through the recovery that you felt any kind of isolation?

ES: I don't think that was anything because I had a lot of people that would come in and nurses that would be there, I don't think I was isolated.

AS: In the hospital they were with you all the time.

MN: A lot of support. So you were allowed to have people come and visit you though.

AS: Yes, once he got out of the isolation.

MN: Isolation as in he was in his own room.

AS: If I went in had to wear a gown and a mask and I had to wash my hands and everything for, I don't even know how long that was. So people could not come up at first. That was one thing. We would, as a family we would take turns, I would be there all time but a lot of them would come up and stay with me, they couldn't go in the room to see him. It was close enough to the door so that you could talk to him from the doorway. But like if I went in, because they did let me go in sometimes, I would have to put on a gown and stuff and I had to wash up afterwards. Yeah, he was in isolation. Cause they didn't know what it would do to anybody or how catching it was. And the nurses and the doctors were in gowns at all times and the doctors too. I would say for six weeks.

ES: For a while there but then after that then—

AS: Then people could start coming up and they did then. And a lot of people from our church and from work where you worked. And you worked at Chris-Craft, there they took a nice big collection, now it doesn't sound big but then it did. What was it, \$350?

ES: I don't know.

AS: They took a collection there. That helped me with the gas.

ES: Even years ago I worked for Barber Ford—

AS: That's right, they took a collection there too.

ES: People would bring food over. And a lot of things that happened. They'd take you out to eat, pay for it. People were very good.

AS: People would offer to take me up sometime and someone would pick me up again at night.

ES: When I did get back and they did let me go home on just Saturday and back on Sunday again just to try it, to see how I would feel.

AS: We stayed at his brother's.

ES: Then I would have to go back to the hospital again. They thought that would be good therapy you know. Do that just to see how things went. That went pretty good. I would have to take all the apparatus along with me you know, something.

MN: Back to something a little more familiar.

ES: Right.

AS: At first our little girl couldn't go up there. Then they would let me have downstairs my myself with you so that she could be with you on Sundays for a few hours. Of course you couldn't take children into the hospital in those days like you do now. That was not allowed.

ES: But then when I did get up and around in the summertime then we would go and sit outside for a little while and get some fresh air. They were good to me there. That is about it.

MN: I guess, is there anything else maybe that I have not asked about that you can think of, or that you remember?

ES: Dr. Westrate says you ought to write a book on polio. I don't remember half the things that went on or what they did and so forth. They did so many things.