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Gebben, Linda Oral History Interview: Polio Survivors in Holland

Matthew Nickel

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Oral History Project 2003
Joint Archives of Holland
Polio

Interviewee:
Linda Gebben
(edited)

Conducted by:
Matthew Nickel
29 May 2003

2003 Oral History Interview: Polio
Interview with Linda Gebben
Interviewer: Matthew Nickel
29 May 2003

Index
(Chronological Order)

- p. 1 Her family life in the early 1940s
Many recollections a result of stories she was told
Diagnosis
- p. 2 City Pond
Doctor's unusual prescription
Quarantined House (sign on house)
- p. 3 Mother and sisters
Father visits by climbing ladder to her bedroom
- p. 4 Mother's use of the Sister Kenny treatment
- p. 5 Sister's recollection of Linda's pain and limp
School: going to and from
- p. 6 Pressure of World War II on family
Family togetherness
Family support
Family gatherings (reunions)
- p. 7 Grandfather's casket factory
War's effect on factory (results in closing business)
Tough economically—but evenly distributed in community
- p. 8 Economics of health care
Diagnosis and decision to receive care in the home
- p. 9 History of the Zeeland Park
Memories of the Zeeland City Park
Medical History and polio vaccine
- p. 10 No recollection of physical problems
Difference in social structure from then till now
- p. 11 Strong family structure provided support
- p. 12 Connection of extended family and neighbors

Dr. Kemme, affects of his mannerisms
Imagined scenario of the discussion between the doctor and her parents

- p. 13 Positive in others
The Doctor's voice
Positive Attitude and effect on health
- p. 14 Positive responses to polio
Awareness of preventative care
Salk Vaccine
- p. 15 Nature of giving out the vaccines
Polio as a big topic of discussion, in the news
- p. 16 Warnings
Encouraged to read
Children eavesdrop
Impression of the iron lung
- p. 17 Fear
Sister Kenny
- p. 18 LG's Mom and her care
- p.19 Her mother's strength in character
Family history and influence on mother
- p. 20 Mother's character
Mother's resourcefulness
- p. 21 Fundraising
Precautions
- p. 22 Boil LG's dishes and laundry
Moving about not permissible while recovering from polio
Being outside
Coloring books
- p. 23 Symptoms
- p. 24 Impression of the Iron Lung
Fear of Polio (personal fears)
- p. 25 Family Traditions and Polio
Summer as polio season

Worries about polio

- p. 26 Polio's toughest years
Positive attitude of society (bottom)

- p. 27 No insurance
Exercises

- p. 28 Occupation
Vaccinating grandchildren and anxiety
Husband's occupation

- p. 29 LG's education and family life
Connections to Netherlands Heritage

- p. 30 Vande Luyster
DePutter

- p. 31 Husband's family

- p. 32 Retiring
Conclusion

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MN: You were, at what age were you stricken with polio.

LG: I was almost five years old.

MN: So what was your family life like at that time.

LG: There were four of us children, my mother and father. I had a younger brother, two years younger and two older sisters who were eight and nine years older than I was. My father went to work everyday and my mother stayed home. A pretty typical family for that time. We lived in Zeeland and as a child, I feel like I had an idyllic childhood, because we had a lot of space around our house and we spent a lot of time running around and doing things that kids can't really do today for a lot of different reasons. It was just a very typical family I think for that time period. Do you want me to just continue on?

MN: Yes, please do.

LG: Okay. As far as our family goes. I was the baby of the family for quite a long time, after my two sisters were born. I am not sure they appreciated my being on the scene. Two and a half years later, my brother was born. When I was diagnosed with polio, I relied more, frankly on what my family and friends have told me, because there were only a few things that stay in my mind that I can visualize. I am a visual person, so that is kind of the way it works for me. I believe according to what I have been told, that I just had typical flu-like symptoms. What was the cause of this final diagnosis, how it happened, I really don't know. Except that I

do know that one of my best friends that lived right across the street. The day after I was diagnosed, the families recalled that we'd shared a lollypop. So they were nervous, very very nervous about that. We lived next to a city park in Zeeland. There was a little pond in that park. I know for a long time there was a lot of talk about the fact that probably that's where anybody in Zeeland that got polio got it from this little pond. I do recall during that timeframe that, they really didn't want people to go swimming. I remember that.

MN: Did people used to swim in the pond?

LG: Well, it was a wading pond more than anything else. Probably, by today's standards, the hygiene and taking care of that little pond, probably wasn't the best, and whether that had anything to do with anything, is pretty beside the point. This is what I do remember in my mind, is the doctor would come up to my room, which was pretty normal in those days. He told me what I had. He said, "Here is what you have to do. You have to chew one piece of Dentyne gum every day, and have half a peanut butter sandwich and you will get better."

MN: Wow.

LG: So I did and I did! So his prescription worked didn't it. Now as far as my family is concerned, my father and my younger brother were in quarantine. They were quarantined to my grandparents house who lived in Zeeland.

MN: Because they did not have polio?

LG: They did not have polio. The interesting thing is that my mother and my two older sisters remained in the house. But there was a quarantine sign on the house.

MN: Really?

LG: That was quite common for those days.

MN: Was that by your family's doing?

LG: Health Department. Either the doctor or the health department, I am not sure who had the jurisdiction. It must have been the health department though, that would do that.

MN: So there was a sign actually on your door?

LG: A red sign, tacked on the house.

MN: It said quarantine, polio?

LG: Exactly.

MN: Do you know why you sisters and your mother were the ones who stayed?

LG: We have talked about that, one of my sisters has died, but the other I talked to not too long ago about that, and she said that it was even a puzzle to us. She said it must be because we were older, or I don't know. There is no real logical explanation for that. So they stayed in the house and for the length of time, and you know, I wish I could tell you how long it was. She said that she remembers the thing they did, they could go outside in our yard but could not play with anybody or anything like that. She said that either my grandfather or somebody had a pony and they would ride that pony around and around and around the house and there was this path around the house that didn't go away for a long time. My father, who, I think this is kind of cool. I do not remember this, but my sister tells me that there was a ladder against the house. I was on the second floor bedroom, he would climb this ladder so that he could talk to me through the window.

MN: While you were quarantined?

LG: While I was sick.

MN: Do you remember how often he would come by?

LG: She said everyday. He'd come every day. That was kind of neat. Getting this picture, it was a pretty overwhelming thing to have that kind of a disease going on. But I do remember other quarantines happening during my childhood. Not just polio, measles, scarlet fever, whooping cough, and chicken pox. I believe all of those had quarantine signs on the house.

MN: What kind of effect did that have on your family, maybe your social life?

LG: It was just ordinary procedure. Our house was not the only one that had a sign on it. I can remember seeing these signs around town. I guess today it would be a terrible thing wouldn't it. But that was it, I hadn't thought about that for a long time, but that was something that happened quite regularly. I never thought a thing about it, I don't think anybody else did either. So as far as the effects, the aftereffects of it, and I can find out from my sister how long I was actually in bed, she told me that during that time, was when the Sister Kenny thing was just emerging. My mother, by listening to the radio and the newspapers would wrap my legs in hot cloths or warm cloths because that was a new form of treatment. And nobody told her to do that, she just did it. That was my mother, ahead of her time in many ways.

MN: What year was that roughly?

LG: Around 1940. So she would do that. My sister said the bed just shook because of the pain, but I remember none of that. I have no recollection of that whatsoever, but clearly that was a visual that stood out in her mind.

MN: That you were in that much pain that—

LG: Apparently so. But hey, I was going to chew my Dentyne Gum and eat my peanut butter sandwich. An interesting after effect of all that is that to this day, I have to have a jar of peanut butter in my cupboard. For the longest time I could not figure this out. All of a sudden it came to me, that was it, that was the connection. Whether or not I ever eat any is beside the point. I am just positive that is the reason this is so important. We never know when our early childhood is going to leave with us. How long this went on, I just really have no clue. I am guessing a couple of months. It might be longer than that because I did start kindergarten that fall. My sister tells me that I was not allowed to walk to kindergarten. I was able to walk, but she tells me that for a long time, for quite a few years afterwards, I would limp when I got tired. Again, I don't remember any of that. I wasn't allowed to walk back and forth to school. Those were the days when you walked. Nobody took you. But for the first couple of months of school, somehow they arranged that my mother would drive me to school and pick me up again. I am not sure how all that worked because that would have been during the war, and there were rations, gas rationing was going on.

MN: What kinds of effects do you think the war had on—

LG: All of this?

MN: Your family and polio?

LG: When I think back on this, I am trying to put myself in my mother's position for instance, and looking back on what I now know about my family, the makeup of the personality of our family and so on, it was probably a real stresser. Because two of my father's brothers were drafted, shortly or during about the time I was sick. There was a lot of pressure on preserving energy and preserving food and the fact that we might not be able to get any. I do remember that. Now that is my recollection of the war. I can't say that is what was happening right in 1940 but that was certainly the beginning of it. I do remember the rationing and so on. I do remember that we had a garden, a victory garden. And we were all part of that. It was our patriotic thing that we did, plus, I am sure it was economic also. Because we continued to have gardens and raise chickens and things, for a long time. I know now that my dad was very conscientious and wanted to do everything right and worried a lot. He was a worrier. How this didn't put him over the edge I don't know. Four young children and earning a living and all that. We were just fortunate as most people in those times to have family. People weren't mobile, like they are now. Your relatives were pretty much in town so, they probably got a lot of support that I was unaware of. Growing up this was one of my most cherished memories was of how all of our many relatives would get together on a regular basis. Holidays and in-between time. We would go to my grandfather's house every Sunday after Sunday School. This was a ritual for us. I am guessing that in this kind of a crisis situation, everybody probably just moved into place and did what they thought was the right thing to do.

MN: So how would you describe the economic situation around your family, in your family, in the neighborhood, in town, at that time with polio?

LG: In terms of being in sick or in general?

MN: Kind of in general, what was the economic situation of Zeeland like, that you can remember or that you know of while you had polio?

LG: They were hard working, they had to work hard for everything they did and they had. My grandfather had a factory in Zeeland, so his four sons worked for him in the factory. During the war because their industry was making caskets, so during the war because they were dealing with steel, the government put restrictions on my grandfather as to how much steel he could have and how much it would cost. But there would be a little proviso in there that should he make something that helped the war, I mean I'm presuming guns or who knows what, some of those restrictions might be lifted. He said, "No, you have two of my boys you are not having any part of my business." So they closed the factory for the remainder of the war. I think that was the last two or three years of the war. So, during that time, it had to be tough. It had to be really tough to think of, for my father having to think of how to support his family and exactly how was that going to happen? Because he was not treated as the favorite son or anything like that, he had to pull his own weight. He had to earn money and it was a tough situation for all of the boys that worked there. So everybody from an economic standpoint, I would say it was a fairly level playing field, Zeeland was kind of like that. Everybody was pretty much on the same playing field. Everybody had a garden. Everybody collected old hot water bottles and tires and brought them to school. I think as an

after the fact. Those things never really did any good, but it was certainly something that from all of us, had something we could do for the effort, for the patriotic—. How that effected our family, while I was sick, I just, I don't know. I don't know what the doctor, because the doctor came to the house regularly. That I remember, I am not sure what it cost, I have no idea about that. It would be an interesting thing to find out. I think a lot of the doctors, a lot of the health services at that time probably did things on kind of a barter basis, this is my sense, I don't really know this. That I just would have no clue how it would have affected us.

MN: Do you have any idea why, know of any reasons why you were treated in the home rather than taken to a hospital?

LG: Probably because they just didn't feel that I was sick enough to go to a hospital. I don't know this, but that is what I am guessing. I know of some other cases where they were, and they had to be there in the hospital and so on, I think it was interesting that they could even diagnose it. I don't know what the diagnostic methods were. But I do know that I never did go to a hospital. I don't remember thinking that that was never an issue, which is probably good, when you are five years old.

MN: Do you know the location of the house? Where it was roughly in Zeeland?

LG: Positively.

MN: Is it still there?

LG: It is still there. My parents built the house and lived there for about 55 years until they moved into a condominium because they couldn't take care of it anymore. Every once in a while I'll drive around it, it looks the same, as it did. All the

grounds have changed, and they have made some really pretty improvements to it, but yeah, it is still there.

MN: Do you know the name of the park?

LG: It was the Zeeland City Park.

MN: Is it still the Zeeland City Park?

LG: It is still the Zeeland City Park.

MN: There it is.

LG: Wonderful, wonderful childhood memories there. We would have picnics.

Churches, those were the days when churches would have church picnics, family reunions of hundreds, and as kids we just had a great time because part of the reunion stuff was playing games. Things like penny scrambles, balloon tosses and things. If we were bored we would just join in. There were so many people they never knew the difference. That was part of our fun growing up time. The park is still there, the rest of the open area is now the whole Zeeland Hospital complex. That whole area is now the hospital. It has changed it a whole lot, but you know, but in our heads, those of us who lived there, it is still there. It is still the same thing. I asked my brother recently if he remembered anything about this time, when I was sick. He has no memory of it whatsoever. But he was only three. From time to time we would go to stay at my grandparents house if there was some crisis or some reason why that needed to happen so, it wasn't that unusual, but he remembers nothing of this. In fact he said, I guess I better put this down in my record book. I know that over the years when I go to see the doctor and they take your medical history, it always takes them back when I put polio down there,

because it is really unusual to have anyone who is still up on their two feet who hasn't come through it without some physical disability or something. So for that reason, when the polio vaccine became available and so on, I could remember asking should I, should I in particular do this? And they had no clue. They really didn't know. They said, "No, you probably have a natural immunity." So I never did participate in that at all. I can remember wanting to. So I have never, as far as I know, have never had any lasting effects, and a lot of people seem to be having a recurrence of it in later life. But that has not happened to me.

MN: So you didn't have any physical problems in school, or anything that you can think of?

LG: Not that I am aware of. As my sister said, I would limp when I got tired or when I got too active, but I have no recollection of that, but I was always a very active kid.

MN: So there weren't any, you don't think any, no social problems or emotional things that came out of polio?

LG: That is an interesting question. You know, I am just thinking that anything that happened to anybody. I think it was part of the social structure. Because, every family had something, and, there was no social stigma that I can think of, not at all. As far as I know, there were no social effects.

MN: Were there other people that you knew of who had polio growing up?

LG: I know now of other people who were going through it at the same time. One of them is Bill Bloemendaal, who you may be going to be interviewing. Another one is my cousin's husband who lives here in Holland. He has a really interesting

story. He was affected, he still is affected. If you could talk to him, he would really, it is really interesting information.

MN: Kind of thinking back, it sounds like there was not a lot of social stigma, it sounds like there was a lot of support. Do you imagine that your family was working together with another family or neighbors or what not when polio struck? Not just with your family but maybe with other families as well?

LG: I am sure that is why I am not traumatized by the whole thing. I am positive that's why. Because things, as I recall, from the way our family structure operated, everybody was just part of the whole system. I mean it was a system. There was a lot of support. As there is in any kind of social environment. I think it was a matter of consistency. I always knew my grandfather had been there because I could smell the cigar. And aunts and uncles and cousins would come in and out and same thing, we would go in and out in all of their homes, so it was a real extended family in every sense of the word. We could be comfortable with each other. And same with our neighbors, we knew all of our neighbors, and it would not be unusual for somebody to knock at the door and have a plate of cookies or something to help out. It was an unusual and good system. Good system. Something that is really missing today, but mobility does that, it changes everything.

MN: What about the doctor? You said he came back regularly a lot, do you remember at the experience of what it was like—him coming in? Maybe the feel of his presence or even actual procedures that he might have done?

LG: I remember it was Dr. Kemme. He lived in Drenthe which was outside of Zeeland, but he was, there were like two or three doctors in town and he was one of them. I can remember hearing his voice at the door; when my mother would open the door. I can remember hearing him. And he would call my name. Which, because I am an early childhood specialist, I think was so good. He probably didn't even know what he was doing from a psychological standpoint. He was preparing me for the fact that he was there. There was somebody new coming into the house, and I knew then that he would be coming up the steps. I actually anticipated it. I haven't thought about this for a really long time, but he always had a smile, and as far as I can remember, the only thing he would ever do, he would listen to my heart, look in my throat, and then he would, he would manipulate my legs, but that's not really the thing I remember most, I think it was just his presence. It was a reassuring presence. What was he giving me to do? He was giving me something to do to control—chew that gum, eat that sandwich. Clever. [Laughter]

MN: What do you think of that cure? [Laughter]

LG: Hey, it worked! [Laughter] I am sure there was nothing else, aside from, if I had to write a scenario, a conversation between he and my parents, my mother and dad probably said “what can we do?” And he said, “Well, we can go to the hospital or we can stay here. This is my scenario now. He probably said, “She's better off staying here until we come across some other big symptom that you can't take care of.” Now when I think of my mother, she was just, I can just remember her as being a continuous presence. Now today we have moms that say

“I can’t take it, I am stressed out.” She had all this other stuff to take care of as well, so. She was quite something. I mean it is pretty amazing, now I think I look at myself as having pretty good mental health today, and I credit my parents as a big contributor to that. It could be a hard thing.

MN: What do you remember his voice being like, can you describe it?

LG: The doctor’s voice?

MN: Yes, the doctor’s voice.

LG: Fairly loud, jovial. Positively, that stands out. That was it, jovial, confident “Oh, this won’t take long, you’ll be better soon.” From a mental perspective, if somebody gives you permission to be better and be normal again, then aside from all kinds of other things, they are finding that now in their research, which I think is so interesting. And he was a big man. He may not have been a big man, but that is my perspective. He was sturdy, I know he was sturdy. He wasn’t fat or anything like that. He was sturdy. And smiling. [End of Tape 1 Side A]

MN: You weren’t ever self-conscious when you were younger, were you, of your polio?

LG: No. What I do remember, is people making a big fuss over my curly hair, especially adults. It could be that if there was something about “poor you” I was not hearing that, I was hearing this “what marvelous curly hair you have.” It could be, I don’t know. But I never remember this as being a stigma at all. I don’t really remember aside from my friend across the street. I am sure their family went through a lot of anxiety watching her and wondering if she was going to have it.

Any symptoms. I don't remember anything negative, I don't remember anything negative about this at all.

MN: Did the friend across the street even catch polio.

LG: Nothing. Nothing.

MN: That's great.

LG: Yes it it.

MN: Were there any lifestyle changes that had to be made because of polio, do you think?

LG: Not that I am aware of at all. We had a two-story house. There were not bedrooms on the ground floor. Certainly would have been more helpful to my mother, had that been. Isn't that interesting that they didn't think about putting a bed on the ground floor. As far as I know, there were no changes made because of that.

MN: Has it had any impact on you now in the sense of your children and husband?

LG: In terms of looking at their health?

MN: In attitude.

LG: I don't believe so. It made me certainly very aware of preventative care. I can really remember cheering when the Salk vaccine came. That was just, that was a really wonderful miracle. That was really great. So my children were, they came, lets see, they were close to being the first part of the, I think it had been developed by the time my children had it, took the vaccine. Because it was first in a sugar cube and then when they did boosters, I feel like it was a drop on the tongue, or something like that seems to be in my mind. Maybe they drank something. But I also remember being in lines with them. Huge lines of people getting the vaccine.

MN: Where was this?

LG: This would have been in either California or Ohio. That must have been when it was first available. Nobody signed a release form. You just stood in line and they just wanted to be sure that everybody got the vaccine.

MN: Was that at a gymnasium or a hospital or—where did they do this?

LG: I am thinking, it must have been in a gymnasium, yes because I can remember, I mean I was one of many many moms standing with their kids in this line. It must have been in a school. But, my husband and I were talking about this recently. As children we would line up at school and we would get shots for whooping cough and so on or whatever. They gave them in school. You are going to get you whatever shot it is today, and so we would all line up and get our diphtheria shot or what ever it was that they were giving out at the time. So this was then, a whole new way of history repeating itself. But I do remember that it was such a welcome thing and I remember standing in line with my own children.

MN: It sounds like it was a big topic in town when the vaccine came out. Was polio, like that just in general? Did people talk, was it the big topic?

LG: Oh, huge. This was amazing, this was an amazing breakthrough. And yes this was something that people wanted to participate in, we wanted this for our children. I can still remember saying, how soon and where and how much. I honestly don't remember paying anything for the shots. We must have paid something nominal to have those shots. Or to have that vaccine for the children. But it was a remarkable thing. It was a huge breakthrough.

MN: What about earlier, before the vaccine, just when the epidemics would come, did people talk a lot about that then too, or was it in the news?

LG: Now are we talking when—

MN: When you were younger.

LG: Yes, there was a lot about it in the news. I can remember warnings in the summertime. Don't go swimming. Now my mind said that meant don't go swimming anywhere, including in Lake Michigan or any place. Probably they were talking about swimming pools. But my mind tells me, they said "Do not go swimming." "Do not go into crowded places." And there was no television then, it was radio, it must have been radio and my parents always had a newspaper in the house. I was encouraged to read anything, so I probably did. And of course children eavesdrop. They hear everything that adults talk about, and, I got good at that. [Laughter] Just like most kids do. But it was an important part of it. There were a lot of warnings during that time. They even made a movie about it. I think it was called the Sister Kenny Story or something like that, I probably have got it wrong, but it must have been during that time because there was so much about iron lungs and that was an after effect that, I can remember thinking to myself, that could have been me in an iron lung. I can remember that. You go to the movies and then of course they would have little news clips. You would have the news of the world in there and that was a great communicator. I do remember thinking, wasn't I lucky that I didn't have to do that.

MN: Were people afraid?

LG: They were afraid, yeah were they were afraid, of getting polio? Yeah they were afraid of getting polio. But I am not sure that aside from these warnings we got, that anyone felt that there was anything that they could do. That it was just a matter of fate. You either got it or you didn't. And I am not sure that medical science and health procedures were such that it would probably be handled completely different now than it did but I think they certainly did a good job with what they knew.

MN: Do you remember any other warnings or what those warnings were like? Don't go swimming, don't go to crowded places. Is there anything else that stands out in your memory?

LG: I don't remember there being signs, I don't remember that. Those are the things that I remember the best.

MN: With this sister Kenny too, this kind of movie, it seems that there was a lot of hype. Was she a really popular figure?

LG: Oh, my child-like mind tells me that this was like an angel. I can't remember what her treatment was, I don't know, I can't tell you anything about the woman, other than she, in retrospect, probably what she did, she was a pioneer probably in saying we have got to look at what polio is and so on. I think that would be a nice little research project for me to do. But that is positively all I, that is all I can really remember about that.

MN: Your mom, she read about this in the newspaper?

LG: She did. She was the one who assimilated all that information, she was hearing. She was the one that probably said, "I can do this myself." She was tough. She probably said, "you tell me what to do and I will do it."

MN: Do you remember at all the feeling of you Mom treating the ailments?

LG: She was always there. She was just always there. I don't know how she did it. There I had two other sisters, of course they were old enough, pretty much to take care of themselves, but she was there and she never, she was not the kind of person who said "poor you, awww." She didn't do that at all. She would be pretty matter-of-fact. I mean she would be very affectionate, but pretty matter-of-fact like, we are going to do this. And I might have objected or whined or cried or whatever. But if there was something that I needed to be doing, then she would see to it that I did it. But in a gentle insistent way. Because that is the way she was.

MN: What was your Mom like then? Could you tell me more about her personality?

LG: Well, yes, I certainly could. Well, as we get older, we look back at our own mothers and we say "I see, oh now I get it. And that is the way it is with all children, they look at their parents differently at different times of life. I can remember, one thing, first of all, that everybody loved her. Everybody loved her. She was the kind of person that would just go an extra mile and when nobody else would visit you, she would. For instance, and particularly in her later life, when a lot of her friends were in nursing homes and so on and so forth, and it is not fun to go to those places and visit, she would. She would bring a little Christmas tree or something like that. As a Mom, she always expected the best from us. And that

kind of explains the way my mother was with all of her children. She expected you to do your best and that you would have an obligation to give to those around you in terms of whatever your gifts might be. Those are my words, but, for instance one of the things she did was to start the Girls Scout day camping program in Zeeland. She saw scouting as a good thing for girls. She was the one who just stepped up to the plate and said what can we do. Now if you would have met here, you would say, she's not a pusher, she is a gentle person. And she got it done. And I think that is something that all of her daughters and all of our children, our grown children have inherited that same strong woman sort of thing, but in various ways we are strong. But we are Dutch and we are determined and if we get something in our minds [laughter] we'll keep going until it happens. So she was that kind of a person. Her father was a florist, so she was very tuned into nature and she instilled in all of her children a pride of their heritage, their Dutch heritage. Her father came from England, and he was a florist. His father, his family in England were bulb growers. And they did some of the gardening for the summer castle that the royalty used in their area. He emigrated here to America when he was 18, and he started this greenhouse in Grand Rapids. He really didn't plan where he would settle. This is one of the great family history stories. He just got on the boat and he didn't really know where he was coming, so when they went through, I am presuming it was Ellis Island, I don't know this for sure. The people ahead of him were going to go to Grand Rapids Michigan so he said that was where he was going to go. And this has gotten really embellished by my children, [laughter] they have written this in their work as they went through

school; he jumped off the boat and swam in past the Statue of Liberty and all these good things. [laughter] But anyway, it is a great family story. So my mother was tuned into nature and to me that was one of the greatest gifts that she gave us. She was really tuned into nature. She always had a beautiful garden. That was always important to her and she passed that on to us. Having a real clear right and wrong ethic. She just had a real strong feeling about what was right and what was wrong. Something that is very difficult for young moms today to say “its wrong, just plain wrong.” And so that is a change. Society has changed also. It doesn’t make it as easy to do that today, but she was resourceful. One of the fondest memories that all of us have during the Second World War: my mother and her friends had to figure out how to make do and get some of the things that they needed to have for their families. And I can remember a marathon canning session at our house. They would can vegetables, they canned meat. Oh a lot of my cousins still remember this, “remember they canned meat?” And one of our greatest, funniest memories is they were churning butter in the upstairs bathtub, [laughter] I can remember this. It was hilarious.

MN: That’s great!

LG: All these women, there were probably four or five of them I am thinking. That I can remember. Oh my goodness, that was hilarious.

MN: That is fabulous.

LG: Yeah it is, it was great. She was resourceful, she could sew, I don’t know how she learned to sew. But she did. I mean even up to when I went to college and money was tight. I remember her making me a coat. She was really good at it. So she

was, she was kind of a renaissance woman is what she was. She was a forward thinking kind of person. Ahead of her time, way ahead of her time. She'd fit in today really well. So her influence, I think on all of us, was very profound, very profound. I am sure she befuddled my dad from time to time. She got married when she was 19. I could go on and on about her.

MN: Thinking about her resourcefulness, it kind of makes me think of what kinds of activities were going on in the community, were there any kinds of fundraising activities for polio or any kinds of activist or charitable work going on in the community? Revolving around polio? That you can remember?

LG: I honestly can't remember that. I do remember that she was really active in the red cross, maybe fundraising for Red Cross and that sort of thing. They did fundraising for those different diseases, I just couldn't truthfully say that I remember when she did that.

MN: What about precautions? You said that there was the quarantine, was there anything else in particular?

LG: During the time that I was ill?

MN: Yes.

LG: I really do not remember. I don't remember having an aspirin for pain, I don't remember any of that. It is probably nature's way of helping you forget some of that I guess. I do remember her presence, but other precautions... surely there had to be some precautions with my sisters and herself. There must have been. I do remember hearing that she would boil the dishes that I used. Okay, that I remember. I wish I knew now how she took care of herself, or if she was

convinced that she was not going to get it. [pause] I don't know that laundry, okay lets think about that. My sister said that they boiled, that they had big tubs in the basement and that they would boil all my nightclothes and sheets. Which may have been normal for that timeframe. I don't know. I do remember that I could not, I myself could not get into a bathtub, that I had to stay in the bed. Okay, maybe some other little things are starting to come in here. Whether that was because I couldn't or because that they determined that it was not a good thing to do, I don't know. My sisters could not come into my room. But they could come to the doorway. [Pause] I really don't remember any other precautions.

MN: What about things like diet. Did your diet change at all during that?

LG: I remember a lot of eggs. I am blanking on that.

MN: Do you remember being allowed to move around at all, even short term?

LG: I don't remember that at all, I don't remember that as being [pause] no because I remember coloring, that it was in the bed. I was not sitting in a chair. I was in bed. I do have some recollection of being carried outside. I must have been pretty much on the mend then, but clearly I was not allowed to go down steps. But I do remember sitting outside on a chair. You know, when I think about this, I just cant imagine how my mother managed this family. How my father managed his end of it also. I just don't recall any more of that. I should pick my sister's brain some more on that.

MN: This might be kind of a funny question, but do you remember the coloring books, do you remember what they might have been of?

LG: I don't remember the coloring books, that may be because I didn't have many coloring books. My mother, believed in a blank sheet of paper. So that may have been it. I don't remember the coloring books. I am sure little gifts came in, they probably did. I just don't remember, I blank on that.

MN: So if you had to somewhere it probably meant you were carried then?

LG: Right.

MN: Either to the bathtub or outside or wherever?

LG: Right.

MN: Do you remember the symptoms, the ailments, what kinds of things pained you?

LG: Before the diagnosis you mean?

MN: Before and after.

LG: I remember having a stiff neck, which was quite a common symptom, and I am sure that that just scared the wits out of them, out of my parents. I remember having a stiff neck and, that is what I remember the most prior to diagnosis. I could write some scenarios about that now couldn't I? Afterwards, I only remember being cautioned about too much running, so this must have been when I was on my feet again. It must just be that they said, you can do this, so I did it. Those are really the only precautions that I can recollect.

MN: Do you remember any kind of folklore or urban legend kinds of things about polio? Things that you might have been told as a child that "if you do this, there will be this result"? [End Tape 1] Maybe under certain circumstances things that some children might have done, it would have this effect. Do you remember any stories like that being told or anything like that?

LG: I don't, I don't remember that at all. I remember being mightily impressed by the iron lung. And as a child in the grade school, I remember being extremely interested in those people who were in iron lungs and in wheel chairs. I was very interested in that. What was the process, what would that be like? Being in an iron lung, what would that be like? I don't remember any kind of social stigma any kind of negative sayings or anything like that, I don't remember that. That doesn't mean it didn't happen. I certainly—

MN: There's no recollection—

LG: There's no recollection of it.

MN: What about the iron lung, did you ever have any contact with someone in an iron lung?

LG: No. But I do remember, it is probably because I read the newspaper. My parents got the Grand Rapids Press and they would almost daily have pictures of people in iron lungs that were in Mary Freebed Hospital in Grand Rapids. And there would be stories from time to time, there would be children in these iron lungs, there would be mothers in these iron lungs, and fathers. That along with the news reels on the occasional movies we would go to.

MN: Do you think those stories might affect fears of polio?

LG: Oh, I think so. I probably thought, can I get this again. And I am sure that I asked that question, and I am sure they said no. But they didn't know. But it was a good thing to do for a child. That has been a reoccurring thought, not enough to even raise, to the conscious level. But, it was kind of an unknown then, and I think there is a still a lot they don't know. So every so often I'll think, could this come

back in another kind of a form. Which in a lot of these secondary symptoms they are now saying that that it is another form of polio, people that had polio, got better supposedly, that the symptoms came back and all of a sudden they are in a wheelchair again. And that did happen on numerous cases when we were, I would say in the last five years, we lived in Oklahoma where there were several people to whom that happened. I can't say that that didn't raise a few little moments of anxiety in my own mind.

MN: Were there any kinds of family traditions that your family had when you were young with polio, anything that might have been altered because of your family's situation?

LG: No. In my recollection, this happened in the spring. When I was diagnosed it was in the spring, and of course spring and summer, especially summer, was polio season. Summer was polio season. I think when I was ill, it was in the spring and since I did go to school in the fall our family traditions would have been more in the holidays in the fall in terms of all of our relatives getting together. As far as our family and our own home, I don't remember that anything was changed there at all, not that I can recall.

MN: With summer being polio season do you remember, did the town get worried?

LG: Yes. It got worried. I can really remember being worried. I was kind of a worrier anyway. But I can really remember all during grade school, even though this was something that was behind me. I can remember being worried about it. I can remember those messages about "don't go swimming in the summertime." And then those people said "Oh that doesn't mean anything." Which was an easier way

to think about it. My head didn't tell me that. And I can also remember that the same little pond in Zeeland City Park was closed down for quite some years. And so maybe the city got a little worried about it too, who knows? And maybe that was just my fertile imagination. But it was a worrisome thing.

MN: How long do you remember polio being a topic like this, did it last through the war, into the '50s and the '60s, was it a long time that, or did it have its moments each year?

LG: I would say, that I think it was a topic I think through, up until the early '50s. Sometimes it was more urgent, but in the early '50s I can still remember it, not as much as during the war.

MN: Do you remember any particular time period when it was really hyped, either fear, or the perception of polio was, the fear was most dominant or perhaps a time when the number of polio cases got to be really bad?

LG: Yes, I would say during the, up until, it was about 1940 when I got it or '41, I would say certainly through the second World War, certainly through then, and probably beyond that. That is when I can recall that it was the most heightened.

MN: Were there any kinds of phobias that came out of these worries? Maybe public phobias?

LG: No. Not from my perception.

MN: It sounds like really positive attitudes of the people, people's perception when they go to polio was not one of, it was of concern, but it was of a helpful concern?

LG: Correct. It was, I think the whole attitude of society was, that it was something to be dealt with, and so you did. You just went ahead and did it and dealt with it and did your best.

MN: This is something you probably would have been told rather than remembering but, do you remember there ever being anything with medical insurance back then?

LG: No. I don't remember any talk of any kind of insurance at all. No, because I can remember on rare occasions, maybe because I took the mail out of the mailbox, just the normal bills coming in, and sometimes there would be a bill from the doctor, but what that was, no idea. There was never a little blue cross thing in there or anything. No insurance, that I am aware of at all.

MN: What about the recovery process, do you remember any particular exercises or anything that your mother had you doing?

LG: I think she did exercises on my legs. We'd probably call that physical therapy today, but those kinds of bending and so on.

MN: Like stretching?

LG: Yes, stretching and doing that sort of thing. I do not remember when I was, I don't remember the process of getting out of bed and doing the chair thing, what that timeframe was. How long was I confined to bed so to speak, either because of necessity or, you know, I don't know what the timeframe was on that at all. And if there were continuing kinds of exercises, once I was allowed to be out of the bedroom, I don't know. See, now you have given me all these research questions.

[Laughter]

MN: What about your work, are you still working now?

LG: I retired a year ago.

MN: So what was your field of work?

LG: My field of work was early childhood education. I was both a teacher, but mostly an administrator. So in that whole realm, I dealt with families and parents and children. It was interesting because as time went along, I found my real gift was starting up new programs. So I started up numerous things involving children, I started up a day care center, and I started numerous pre-school programs, and after school programs. I dealt with a lot of different parents and children and all kinds ethnic backgrounds, and financial backgrounds and everything. The one thing, that probably was a carryover here, which I hadn't thought of until this instant, was that when the health department came with regulations for licensing, and my peers who were also directors of programs would say, here they come again with more, I would always say, that is okay. You can never be too careful when it comes to health. There is so much they don't know. They require inoculations and what have you. Before they go to school or whenever it is.

MN: And what about your husband, what did he do?

LG: In terms of...

MN: Occupation.

LG: My husband is an engineer, a mad scientist. He attended Hope for two years and then he went to the University of Michigan and got his engineering degree and then got his masters and, he has just had the most interesting career. He worked for NASA for 17 years, he was one of the first people that worked on the space

capsule. It's cool for our kids too to see their Dad doing something really good. He was co-opted to do some medical research while he was there with some hospitals and so on, so he has worked with everything from heart valves to his latest career was in Oklahoma with the oil and gas industry. He did a light of designing of instrumentation and so on. So he always has a research project going. That is why he spends so much time here in the Hope library.

MN: So was he also from Holland or Zeeland?

LG: Yes, from Zeeland. Although we didn't really know each other until we both went off to different colleges and so on.

MN: And so where did you go to school?

LG: I went to Michigan State. And then when we graduated, we were married and graduated and then our first job was in South Bend, Indiana which is where our twins were born. Surprise, surprise. We've moved all over the country. Everyplace, was a really interesting and fun time, and always different kind of a culture. Wherever you live in the United States is a different culture.

MN: So how many children did you have?

LG: Three. We have six grandchildren. That has really been another wonderful experience. It is like getting a second chance at raising kids. So much more fun this time around. It really is. So then we found that coming back here, both my husband and I have a special bond with all of our families coming from the Netherlands that we have been doing this genealogy study, and that was something that my mother was very proud of her direct heritage. And so we all did a roots trip to the Netherlands. My brother and sister and our spouses, in 1995.

It was so much fun, oh my goodness, it was just great! It was just really great! My daughter in fact took her teenage son to the Netherlands last summer to see what that was all about and they enjoyed it a lot. So it is something that we are kind of continuing in our genealogy.

MN: So what about your family history, this kind of famous—

LG: You mean our ancestors?

MN: Yes.

LG: My four greats, anyway Vande Luyster was one of the leaders of the ship, he came over on the Hanover I believe. It was about the same time as VanRaalte came to Holland. He was a little later in the year I think, and they came over because of, because the state church in the Netherlands, it was the Dutch Reformed church, but they didn't think it was strict enough. They were part of the group that said, we are going to secede from the Netherlands, and he was quite a wealthy land owner in the province of Zeeland. They held their own worship services in his barn and were fined by the government just like VanRaalte was. So they sort of all together decided to come here. He basically financed about, probably about half of the people who decided to come, there were about 400 that decided to come to Zeeland. So they came here and settled there. There was another family that came on the same boat called the DePutter. My great-grandmother was a DePutter. Her mother was a Vande Luyster and anyway, it went down the line like that. She (my great-grandmother) was strong, I know where my mother got it from, she was tough. I can remember her, she lived to be 96. I can remember just listening to her senile ramblings going on and on, "we

took the horse and buggy to Beaver Dam to bring butter,” and whatever, it was wonderful. And also, her father Cornelius DePutter was a surveyor. So he did most of the surveying of all the plats and everything in Zeeland and a lot of what we contributed to the archives turned out to be the things he did to establish the streets and the plaats in this whole area. So, we are pretty proud of all that too. And then my great grandmother and great grandfather were married. He was, he came from Friesland. I am not sure how he got here. I do not know where, how, or whatever. But he was a businessman, and he was a cheese maker right in Zeeland. This is our family history, this is our claim to fame in our family history. He developed cream cheese in this cheese making business, which is now Mead Johnson in Zeeland. And then he sold the cream cheese rights to the Phoenix Cheese Company which is now Kraft Cheese. You got your Kraft cream cheese and that was out great-grandpa.

MN: Wow.

LG: Its been really fun finding out all these things, and one of the things I did this past Tulip Time was to be a guide on the Tulip Time trolley. That was really a lot of fun too. I found out through the script they gave us, I have been able to fill in some of the blanks historically speaking from what was happening where and when in Holland. You are never too old to learn new things.

MN: Of course not.

LG: And continuing to do that. My husband’s family all came too. They came in the 1880s when there was a whole huge wave of immigrants. He found out that several of his relatives came basically as draft dodgers from the Boer War. They

were going to conscript the people of the Netherlands to fight the war in Africa. Things always remain the same, they change but remain the same. When we decided to retire, we knew that we were going to come up here. We live on Lake Michigan. My parents had a cottage there, so we made all these changes and that is where we live. It is that nature connection. We have been involved in a lot of things since we have been here, we have found more and more things to learn and be involved. It is a very friendly place for retired people.

[Discussion of Oral History process removed from transcript]

MN: Is there anything that I have missed? Is there anything that that I don't know that you might remember? Is there anything that you remember that you know, that needs to be said?

LG: No, I think I have probably digressed quite a lot.

MN: That's great though.

LG: I would say from my perspective, especially having verbalizing this whole thing, really family support and the whole social support [End Tape 2 Side A] was what got me through. Not everyone has been as lucky with experiences like mine.

[From notes]

[End of Interview]