

Interview with Dr. Jan Bosch
Holland Resident - Immigrant from the Netherlands
Interviewed by Chanda Wenger
April 21, 1999

*Note : Dr. Bosch and I spoke in detail before the interview began. He wished to know exactly what the questions would entail and to what extent I wanted him to give his personal opinions. This is due in large part because he was originally a student to Detroit. His relations within the community of Holland are limited because he first stayed in Northville and Grandville. In some ways this interview is informal due to the above stated reasons, and we talked for a time before the interview was recorded due to technical difficulties.

CW: This is an interview with Dr. Jan Bosch. It is the 21st of April 1999, my name is Chanda Wenger, and I am a student of Larry Wagenaar. This is for Michigan History 201. And I think we're ready! Your full name?

JB: My full name is Jan Kier Bosch.

CW: And your date of birth?

JB: [date removed], 1912.

CW: And your place of birth?

JB: Wilderoank in the Netherlands.

CW: And the year that you came to the United States?

JB: It was 1948.

CW: Your current address is 186 Tiffany Ridge, Holland, Michigan, 49423.

JB: That is correct.

CW: You are retired, right?

JB: Yes, I am a retired surgeon.

CW: Can you describe what your life was like in the Netherlands and what it was like to live there?

JB: Well, briefly I can say I was born on a farm, and I consider myself very lucky that way

because it was a wonderful youth we had there. I went to grade school in the Netherlands and at the age of twelve I went to a high school in Groningen. The high school in those days was six years because we did not have any colleges in the Netherlands as we have here in the United States. After graduating from the high school, I went to the University of Medical School in Groningen, the Netherlands. From there I graduated October the 20th, 1938, and went to The Hague in the Netherlands in the city hospital for a residency in surgery. I stayed there all during the war. Do you want me to tell anything about that special time or not?

CW: Yes, tell me about your two years as chief resident there. With the German Gestapo that you were telling me about earlier.

JB: Well, my encounter with the German Gestapo was quite an incident because, and I will make it short, they wanted me to perform surgery for them in their hospital. Now, in the first days of the war in 1940, several of the German casualties were treated in our city hospital and I took care of them there. Then later on during the war the German got their own hospital in The Hague. Then the war with Russia came and a lot of the army went to Russia including most of the medical care too. So for a while they wanted a surgeon there. I got called there by the German commander, the Gestapo commander, to do the surgery in their hospital. Actually they are not allowed to do that. I got quite a problem involved with that and I went there once or twice and I simply refused to look at any further more. That is the whole treaty that was earlier decided on during the First World War, I won't go all into that. So, after the war, I came in 1948 to the United States. The hospital had sent me there for post-graduate study with a particular interest in the surgery

of the chest. While I worked there I met a lady whom I married. Then of course one of the big discussions was is she going back with me or if I was going to stay here.

CW: And her name was Kathleen?

JB: Kathleen Rinck. She was at the time a graduate of the University School of Music and was teaching piano. When we discussed what to do with the future we decided that we were going to stay here, and I let the hospital know that I was not coming back. They didn't like that too well! I started out in the general practice after I had taken all of my exams over to become licensed here, and that is in itself quite a story in the enrollment there. I started out in general practice in the outskirts of Detroit in the Lavonia area there. There had been a new hospital that had been built where we had admission, privileges as doctors in a facility. There was a complicated story there with the hospital because they called in a lot of specialists from the Detroit area too. That created problems particularly with the emergency department there, so I got an opportunity to start out in emergency services here in Grand Rapids with a doctor I know. We had been living in Grandville for a while. We moved to...I must make a correction here. We were at the time that I was practicing general surgery living in Northville, a city not too far from Detroit. But then from Northville I moved to Grandville, and there I was connected with the emergency department of Butterworth Hospital and also the Holland Hospital here. They had set up the whole department here and that was a nice way of moving back and forth from the two hospitals. I practiced there for about seventeen years in emergency medicine and saw all the changes come in there. Then we had plans to retire. Shortly before that, my wife developed cancer and

she passed away. We had bought property in Holland and we had made plans, so I went ahead and built the house, by myself, that I am living in right now. For two years after I retired from the emergency service, I was the plant physician of the Bil Mar Food Corporation. So I've been living here all by myself all these years and I found myself a companion again--a lovely lady and I hope to marry her on June the 26th of this year.

CW: That is very exciting!

JB: Together we are going to build a new home. She has a lot of ideas and I have a lot of ideas, and we are going to put those together. So that's the reason I have my house for sale.

CW: Do you have any children?

JB: I got two children--I got a boy and a girl. My boy is 39 and the girl is 37. I've got two grandchildren.

CW: What are their names?

JB: My son's name is Jan, just like me. And my girl, her first name is Lisa. You wait a minute and I'll show you the pictures of my grandchildren.

CW: How old are your grandchildren?

JB: They are three years and two years.

CW: And what are their names?

JB: The oldest is Kiera and the youngest one is Bethany.

CW: They're very cute!

JB: Yeah.

CW: Do they come to visit often?

JB: Oh yeah! Very often. They were here at Easter.

CW: Do they live in Holland too?

JB: They live in Grand Rapids. Both of them.

CW: Not too far.

JB: Not too far away. And they're taking good care of me.

CW: So what did you think of Holland when you first came here from Detroit?

JB: The city of Holland?

CW: Yes, the city of Holland.

JB: Well, in the first place, I think it's a wonderful town to live in. When I first came to the United States, there was at a university there a professor of history who was also from the Netherlands. He took me around and he introduced me to the Holland area here and I made quite quick a few friend here. Living so close by the lake and having a great love for the water, while we were still living in Northville we first rented a cottage for the summer here on Lake Michigan and later on we bought a cottage there so we spent every summer there. I must say I really like the town. Of course, in the past fifty years the population here has changed. There are a lot of people that are not Dutch. That has always given me a little bit of a feeling of a lost heritage. The Dutch tradition is still here there's no question about that. But I sort of think it is fading away a little bit and I'm so sorry about that. I'm all Dutch myself. So that is one aspect of it. The other aspect of it of course is that it was at the time, and that is changing too, a very religious community. My first impression was that there's practically on every corner of the city a church.

CW: Yes, there is!

JB: I am myself a member of the Christian Reformed denomination. A member of Harderwyk Church here in which I like very much.

CW: Which church do you go to?

JB: Harderwyk. That is named after a city in the Netherlands. The other reason that I was attracted and connected to the city of Holland was that my wife was born here. Her parents lived here too at the time so we quite frequently for that reason came back here.

CW: Was she Dutch as well? Did your wife's parents come from the Netherlands?

JB: Kathleen was born here in Holland, Michigan. But her parents were both from the Netherlands.

CW: So she did not want you to go back to the Netherlands when you were married?

JB: No, there were two reasons for this. Number one, there is the difficulty that she didn't know the language. And then, of course, we would be leaving all of her family behind here. It was a rather close knit family and that had something to do with it too.

CW: How did your family feel about you staying here and not returning to the Netherlands?

JB: They were not very happy about that. It was a great disappointment for my Dad. He really suffered from that I did not come back. Well I've been back to visit, but he had real grief over that. I got still two sisters living there. I visit them regularly every year in September.

CW: Have things changed in the Netherlands?

JB: Things have changed yeah. I cannot say too much about it because I have not experienced so much because if I go there it is only for two weeks, once or twice a year.

But from what I hear their social structure has changed, and the Netherlands, in itself, they are not very religious of a country anymore and they used to be. There is quite a political struggle there.

CW: How do you feel about the religious traditions that are in Holland, Michigan?

JB: In what way?

CW: Religiously, with the church.

JB: It depends on the area, where you are. If you sit here on the West Coast and Grand Rapids, Holland area there is a large denomination of Reformed and Christian Reformed churches here. If you go further up north or you go more toward Detroit then there is a lot of Catholics. The whole Polish community is Catholic in Detroit. Part of it, too, I think in Flint and so on though I've never been there.

CW: Did you have any problems adjusting to life here?

JB: In the beginning I did.

CW: You spoke English, I'm assuming, when you came to the University.

JB: Yes. But European English is quite different than American English. I had to learn to study all over again.

CW: When did you learn European English?

JB: High school. We spoke four languages there. Dutch, German, French and some Spanish too, but mostly English and French and German.

CW: Can you tell me about your children--do they speak Dutch?

JB: My children, yes. Jan went to the regular high school, and he went a couple years to the college and didn't finish it. He was more interested in throwing the football than

studying. He is right now in charge of a store for selling chemicals--General Nutrition stores--and he likes it very much there. He is a good talker and he knows something about medicine and so on, so he can tell the people what is good for them and the best nutrition supplements for them are. My daughter is a mother of two, she's married and works for Blue Cross/Blue Shield in Grand Rapids. She's been doing that for the past six or seven years already.

CW: Are there any Dutch traditions that your family had in the Netherlands that you carry on with your children?

JB: I have two sisters yet in the Netherlands and they are elderly ladies both in their eighties. My older sister is a widow, her husband passed away, and they had no children. My younger sister never married. They both have their own apartments, their own homes, and they still like to live there.

CW: How do you feel about Tulip Time?

JB: I think Tulip Time is great. The tulip is one of my favorite flowers and I love the way they put all those flowers around the city--it's great. When the kids were small, we took them to the tulip parades and so on. Right now I particularly enjoy the concerts of the Holland Chorale during Tulip Time. I must frankly admit I have not seen any parades lately, but that [the Holland Chorale] is a section that I really enjoy. Then you also have the organ recitals at Hope College. They put on a good display of the art here in Holland in every respect. You really will know it's a college town. So that's all for Tulip Time--I like it, I love it.

CW: How do you feel about the Hispanic population in Holland?

JB: That's an interesting question because I have seen this in a very special way. When I was working as the emergency physician at the hospital particularly on weekends we had a lot of casualties from fights. At that time my impression was they were a very rude, raw people--knifing--I saw so many knifings there. That impression has always stayed with me a little bit. The very fast talk they do and the yelling and the screaming for no reason whatsoever. I mean the excited talking--I don't know. It makes me feel uneasy. This is not a type of people that I would like to say to join or to judge myself to--or choose. That's the best I can say about that. I know there are good ones and I know there are bad ones.

CW: Do you have any friends in the Netherlands that have come to the States since you've been here?

JB: Not anymore, no. Well, there have been some friends, some other doctors from the Netherlands who came here to study. But they were here for a couple months and they went back and I never saw them again. My younger sister has been here three times visiting from the Netherlands.

CW: Does she like it?

JB: Oh yeah. She would like to stay here, but that was more than ten or fifteen years ago that she was here the last time. She is a little bit disabled on account of a hip problem so she does not move too easy.

CW: Your fiancée, where is she from?

JB: She is from the area here from Grand Haven. She's been there for a long time.

CW: Is she Dutch at all?

JB: No, she's Norwegian. From Scandanavia country. There's not one drop of Dutch blood in her!

CW: Do you plan to go back to the Netherlands? You'll go in September right?

JB: Yeah, we'll go together back. We were together last fall too. My family wanted to meet her so we went over. Now we hope to go back in September when we are married and make a little honeymoon of it.

CW: That will be good, exciting. Thank you very much. Those are all of my questions.

JB: I answered all of the questions huh? Good.