

Oral History Interview with
Lillian Dalman

Conducted November 3, 1997
by June Reimink

Sesquicentennial Oral History Project
"150 Stories for 150 Years"

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Interviewer: June Reimink

JR: We're going to talk with Lillian Dalman...I'm going to ask you where you were born and tell us a little bit about your childhood.

LD: I was born in Holland and came from a family of six children. We all graduated from high school and all went to college, a couple of them graduated from Western rather than Hope. In my husband's family there were six children. And they all graduated from Hope. There are some sixty some people on the Dalman side who attended Hope. So I thought that was kind of neat. When we came here from Muskegon, my husband was in the furnace business, and I always kept thinking, "How can they sell furnaces and make any money on that! How many more houses will there be that need furnaces?" Well, I soon found out that a lot of people and so that was one thing interesting to me. We rented first and then we moved to Sixteenth Street with the Home Heating Company. Then we moved to Twelfth Street and went to Third Church right across the street. Before that we went to Trinity Reformed Church. I think when we first came to Holland it wasn't as busy of course. There were lots of places to rent. But we rented a little place across from the Longfellow School and then we moved to Eighteenth Street. The house that we rented had a little barn back there and so that's where Andy had his business - right there in the back. So that was kind of nice. Anyway, then we moved to Sixteenth Street where we had this huge building in the back, and from there he went to the main office and to Lear Siegler.

When we lived on Sixteenth Street our kids went to Longfellow School and they had to walk from Sixteenth way up to Longfellow School! Someone said, "Why that's terrible," and I said, "We thought nothing of it!" And sometimes they'd come home for lunch and then go back. Of course, they were in and out and I always had lunch ready for them. But that's one thing that's changed. It's built up so much I just can't believe it. When you said furnaces I thought, "My land, there's all these houses," and then came air conditioning and everybody wanted air conditioning. That's one of the things that's changed a whole lot since we moved here.

JR: How big was Longfellow School when your children went? Do you remember?

LD: First they went to Lincoln School and that was the old Froebel School. A couple of them went to Froebel School. Then when we moved to Sixteenth Street they said the kids had to go Longfellow School. That was from Sixteenth Street to Twenty-sixth, I guess. We didn't think anything of their walking up and back. Hardly ever did we pick them up (Laughs). Now kids have a couple of blocks and the parents come and pick them up. That was a big change to me. But other than that the city has grown so. Where we used to live is all apartments and that type of thing. Then we all went to Hope College. I lived way over on West Seventeenth Street and walked all up and back. Sometimes back at noon. And then back home for lunch and then back to school. But that was just what you had to do, so that's what you did.

JR: What did you do then after you graduated from Hope College?

LD: After I graduated I taught school in Constantine. I taught there for a year. Some of the gals with whom I taught I still keep in touch with them. Then we moved back

here because Andy again was offered a job in the Home Furnace Company in Muskegon. So then we moved to Muskegon. We were there for a little over a year and then we came back to Holland and lived. So from then on we've been in Holland until...We moved here about twenty-five years ago.

JR: Have you been involved in any of the organizations in Holland?

LD: Oh I was, yes! I belonged to the Women's Club and I was president one year and vice-president. We served luncheons at Tulip Time and that was always fun. Lot of work, but it was fun. I belonged to the Cancer Society, and then I had polio so I was involved with that. Just something all the time then. And I've always volunteered my services wherever I had to.

JR: What are some of the qualities that seem to stand out when you think about Holland?

LD: It's always been a real nice community. When people say, "Oh, you're from Holland," I say, "Yes." "Oh, that's that nice little town." I said, "That's it...but it's grown!" But that's something else yet. Every town around Holland has grown tremendously. But it's still a nice town.

JR: Do you see some negative things about Holland that you've sensed over the years?

LD: Oh, there's always a few things about a town probably, but Holland always is a real nice town.

JR: You said you belonged to a couple of churches.

LD: We went to Trinity first. And then we went to Third because we lived right cross the street from Third Church. In Dr. Nichols' house, where he lived at Twelfth and Pine? We lived there until we moved here. That was real nice too. We enjoyed that a lot.

JR: Now do you still attend Third Church?

LD: No, we belong to Community Church here, just down the street from us.

JR: I came past it on the way...

LD: Yes, you did. I wondered if you would have any problem finding it because Seventieth or Lakeshore Drive - some people have a hard time finding it.

JR: What changes do you see in the churches in the area? Do you see any changes when you think back?

LD: Oh well, sure. There were not any mixed...it was mostly the one group and nothing like now. But so many now, people from all over, foreign countries and all over have moved in. We find that in our little church, too. It's nice when you think everybody is welcome they say "Holland is a friendly city," so I think that's good. Sometimes people don't think so, but it's still growing so...

JR: The world is getting smaller.

LD: Oh, yes!

JR: Have you seen the role of women change in the church over the years?

LD: Oh, yeah. Sure.

JR: How do you feel about that?

LD: Oh, I think it's fine! Oh sure! I think that women should play as big a part as the men do. That's my feeling. I know a lot of them don't think so, but I think so!

JR: Have you ever known of any controversy in Holland?

LD: No, I don't know of any really.

JR: Did your children go to Holland High School?

LD: Yes, they went to Holland High. John went to Froebel School until that was torn down and then they went to Washington School and finished there. Then of course junior high and then high school. They all graduated from high school and then all went on to college.

JR: What was Hope College like went you went?

LD: Oh my! (Laughs) You had to go to chapel every morning, and I was one who took roll call. One fellow I'd never forget - he was from Zeeland and I never knew if he was going to be there or not. So I would keep waiting to see if he came and I knew he would come eventually so I thought, "I'll just mark him present because I know he's going to come." And that's one thing. Now, of course, you don't have to go if you don't want to. But I always thought it was a great way to start the day. I never minded going. It was a good chance. Everyone was there together and we sang and always had a little klatch where you were talking before classes started.

JR: How did the public react to the changing of Holland to become more of an industrial city, like in the fifties and the sixties? Do you have any thoughts on that?

LD: No, not really. Like with Home Heating, that expanded. They built a whole new building and then they expanded it and went to other places. I remember Andy was interviewing people to sell furnaces outside of Holland. So that was one thing. But other than that, everything then started to grow.

JR: What do you make of the increasing diversification of the community? All the different people coming in and...

LD: Oh, that's the biggest change in Holland, I think! Yes. All these people coming from

everywhere. One time I was in the post office in Fennville, and a man came up to the counter and another fellow from another country came in and he was ahead of the white man and he said, "Pardon me," and he just barged right up to the front of the counter. And I looked at him. I could not believe it. Just one other time did I ever find that to be true. So that's kind of a shock. But I think most everyone gets along pretty well. Of course when there are so many different nationalities coming. It used to be it was Dutch. You were Dutch and that was all. Just Dutch.

JR: "If you aren't Dutch, you aren't much," huh? (Laughs)

LD: Yeah, we said that too.

JR: Yes, we did, didn't we? How do you feel the Dutch heritage plays a part in the community today? Is that still present?

LD: I would like to say it is, but now with all the different people coming in from everywhere, it has changed. You don't see that many. And I think it's too bad because it was always fun to come from Holland. Everybody knew Holland as...."Oh-h-h! You're from Holland. That's that Dutch community." I always said, "Ja!" (Laughs) But I think they still get along together pretty well. They have to.

JR: Is the crime different today in Holland than it was?

LD: Oh my, yes! We always left our doors open. Never locked them. The funny thing is if you locked the door and I left the thing open for the milkman - anyone could have climbed through there. We just never thought about locking doors. When we lived on Sixteenth street, we never did, and then when we moved to Twelfth street, then we did start to. But that's one thing that now you'd hardly dare leave the house to go to the

mailbox without locking the door.

JR: Do you do that out here too?

LD: No, not as much, but you never know.

JR: No, that's right. What was a day like for you in 1950?

LD: 1950? Let me see.

JR: That would be about 47 years ago.

LD: Well, in 1951 we had four children, and they all went to school, and then I came down with polio that year. I was in the hospital for a couple of weeks and all, so in that period, that stands out in my mind mostly. But, everybody was just great. At first the kids could not go to school, and then they realized that...

JR: Oh, they thought it was catchy?

LD: Yes, but that was a big thing in my life, I think. Scary.

JR: Yes, I'm sure it was. Is the medical profession a lot different today than it was then?

LD: I don't know. They sent me right to the hospital here in Holland, and I had tests, and they sent me right to Grand Rapids to the hospital. I think the medical profession is really pretty good, yes. Of course, my son-in-law is a doctor, so I...(laughs)

JR: So, you have to say that, don't you? (laughs)

LD: Yes, but I really do, I think most of them are really great.

JR: You're probably one that's very appreciative of the Salk vaccine.

LD: Oh yes! My youngest daughter was one of the first to get the shots. Then of course, when I had the polio, they all had to stay out of school, and they all had to have a shot right away. So, that's changed a whole lot too.

JR: It's wonderful that people are not exposed to that anymore.

LD: Oh, yes, I'll say so, yes.

JR: Well, you've made a good recovery.

LD: Oh, yes, very much so. I've always been so thankful.

JR: Have you ever noticed a generation gap between ages in Holland? Between, say younger women and you?

LD: No, I really haven't. Boy, I'm bragging. Some of these kids kind of look at you, and I said, "You wanna run a race? I'll race you." And they all look at me, but some of the young people today think they can do no wrong and that everything is for them, and forget that people before them had a lot to do with what they are now today. But, there are a lot of good kids.

JR: Are you a runner?

LD: (laughs) No, not really, but I could out-run a lot of my _____.

JR: Well, I bet you could. Have you had any particular job since you did that beginning teaching, or not?

LD: I taught, and then I did some practice substituting here, and then I taught kindergarten for a year at Jefferson School. Oh, I love those kindergartners. Then I worked with the Cancer Society and then with the March of Dimes. I always volunteered my services because everyone was so good to us when I was laid up like that.

JR: That was your way to pay them back.

LD: That's right.

JR: How do you think the role of women has changed in Holland over 50 years?

LD: Well, I think that women are a lot more involved now, and they dare to speak up. I think before they were a little hesitant about doing it because I think a lot of them felt, well, that's not a job for women, but they're getting over that, I think. They are more apt to stand up and say, "I believe this" or, "I believe that," and "I'll run for this job," which I think is great.

JR: I think probably your polio was a major change, a turning point in your life, wouldn't you say?

LD: Oh, it really was, yes. I always said, "I will never, ever say anything against anybody. I will always try and help out where ever I can because I was so blessed not to have suffered things like other people have. So I was always so thankful. I've been real good at volunteering, and loved every bit of it too. It's great to give a part of yourself.

JR: Yes, it is. So, what would you like to just summarize by saying about Holland? Anything special you would like somebody to know fifty years from now?

LD: (laughs) Yes, it's a great city. I was glad I was born there and spent that much time in Holland. And I was glad that I had gone to Hope College, even though I stayed at home. When you stay at home like that, when you're from Holland, it's a little bit different, but I've always been real happy that I could just go to college. I worked at the hotel as a waitress, and worked my whole way through and loved every minute of it. Then I was a waitress in California when we moved there for two years, and that's a job I absolutely loved.

JR: Did you?

LD: Oh yes! So I would hurry in at lunch time. I hurried at the hotel, wait tables for a couple of hours or as long as they needed me. Then, I'd hurry back to school (laughs), and take a class. I wasn't always prepared for class, but anyway (laughs)...that's a different story. But, it was fun. I loved being in Holland, it's a great city. I can't say anything bad about it.

JR: Well, that's good.

LD: Yes.

JR: You'll be good advertising for the city.

LD: (laughs) Yes. Of course, I love living here too.

JR: Yes, I bet you do.

LD: It's just great. Sunsets and the sunrises...Oh, some of the sunsets are awesome.

JR: Takes your breath away.

LD: It really does. It's something else.

JR: You have a wonderful attitude.

LD: Well, I said after I had polio, I'm always going to be on the positive side, and so that's what I try to do. It doesn't always work, but...

JR: Do you have grandchildren?

LD: I have five grandchildren one great-grandson. So that's real nice. My one daughter lives in Holland, and she married a doctor, so they live there. The rest of them are in Colorado, California, and near Detroit.

JR: Well, thank you very much.

LD: Well, you're welcome.