

Oral History Interview with
Trudy Vander Hill

Conducted July 28, 1997
by Carol Haverdink

Sesquicentennial Oral History Project
"150 Stories for 150 Years"

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Interviewer: Carol Haverdink

CH: Today I am interviewing Trudy Vander Hill, the date is July 28, 1997.

TVH: My parents named me Gertrude Catherine Visscher because I was named after my dad's mother. That was the way you did it, and then you named you second child after your mother's mother. I thought I had a happy childhood, we moved a lot. I remember one time I cried a lot because we were moving to a much smaller house and it was only a block away. My favorite grandparent, I suppose, was my Grandpa Burma, because he had a car and he liked to call for me and take me along. He was a real estate man, but see he hadn't always been that, he had been a teamster. I have a picture of him with six or seven teams, and guys sitting on the wagons and so on. But, we moved a lot, because my grandpa was also a real estate man. I remember one time on the fourth of July and he came up, it was on a hill on Lincoln and the house isn't there anymore of course. Anyway, he came up the hill on the fourth of July and he had these paper ruffly things on his horses, he came up like that, he was going to give me a ride. I remember the people used to go by with the brine from the Heinz pickle factory, for their pigs or something on their farm. They'd have horse and they'd be pulling a kind of an oval shaped thing, I guess. I remember when they paved Washington Avenue. That was from 16th to somewhere. We moved a lot because my grandpa turned out to be a real estate man, and he'd own houses and rent them to people. I guess you rented a lot more

in those days. I guess I was my grandpa's favorite. I was the first grandchild on both sides. I remember my childhood. I remember one time on the way to or from school, my parents started me in school when you could start in the middle of the year, in February, in those days. See, they started me in February, I was going to be five in March, but then I guess they thought, oh well, I guess I could read, I don't know, they put me in first grade the following September.

CH: What school was that?

TVH: That was Van Raalte. We lived right behind Fourth Reformed Church. My grandpa, as I said, was a real estate man, and he would give us different places to live, not give us, we'd pay rent, I guess. I was very ignorant, I guess. It wasn't until I was eight years old that I had a sister. They named me after one grandma, so they wanted her after the other grandma, and my other grandma's name was Lomberta...oh I don't know, it was a very Dutchy name, and my mother's name was Wubhini.

CH: So what did they end up naming your sister?

TVH: So, she lived here always, and she wound up being Gene. My dad was Rein. He was the second Rein in his family, Rein Visscher. The first one died and so they named my dad Rein. My grandma had six boys. I guess she had one girl, if she'd ever talk about her, she died when she was about thirteen months, she'd get really sad. That was her only girl.

CH: Was he born here in Holland too?

TVH: No, my dad was born in the Netherlands, and his second brother Henry was born in

the Netherlands, and his third brother, I think it was Neil, Corneil, and I think he was born in the Netherlands too. My dad was only eight years old when he came here, and they didn't have people teaching children how to speak English, but he felt so horrid because they'd say: "Dutchman, dutchman."

CH: Was that in the late 1800s?

TVH: Yes, my dad came here in 1898. He was eight years old. He died, I guess it was about four years ago, but it was in Florida, so we had a funeral in Florida and a funeral up here. He was married to his third wife, but he did get very senile, dementia I guess they call it. He would be very forgetful, and then he'd get so angry!

CH: You moved around a lot.

TVH: Yes, we moved around a lot, because my grandpa was a real estate man and then he'd say well, I can sell that house, so I'll find another house for you.

CH: So you were...

TVH: Pushed out again, yes. I think when I started Junior High, it was on the corner of 19th and Van Raalte, and my best friend was Mildred Walberg. She was Seventh Day Adventist. We were Reformed, you know, as many of the Holland people were those days.

CH: Was that a controversy there then, were there any problems with that?

TVH: Oh, I don't know, no, sometimes I would call for her, and sometimes she would call for me. But then later on, when I was in Junior High, I sort of took up with Dorothy Visscher, and her name was spelled exactly the same as mine. We are still

friends, she lives about two miles down the street here. I was always sort of competing with Mildred Walberg, because she was my best friend. I don't know if she was smarter than I was or not, but we sort of tried to be the best in the class. In those days there was 1.1, 1.2, 2.1, 2.2, and so on and you'd be advanced or not advanced, and your teacher would teach half the room at a time.

CH: So it was like a one-room schoolhouse?

TVH: No, it was all separate rooms, it was Van Raalte School , and I can remember the names of my teachers, but I won't recite them.

CH: Oh, you can do that.

TVH: I think Miss Windish was my kindergarten teacher, and Miss...oh I can see her so well, but I can't remember her name...I won't try to say them all because my memory will fail me. I remember one time, I was a little bit younger than most of the kids in my room because I could read so well I guess, and they thought I was ready for the first grade. So I went in the first grade when I was five, I wasn't going to be six until the following March. I remember one time, and my mom let me wear my red velvet, I guess it was velveteen-like, and in those days you had little pants to match your dress. And I remember I didn't dare ask the teacher to go to the toilet, and so I tinkled down on the floor. Oh! That was really terrible. (laughter) Let's see, I guess I liked most of my teachers, I didn't like my, I think it was third or fourth grade teacher, Miss Veldman. In those days you weren't supposed to talk to your neighbor. You could write little notes, and kind of hope that your neighbor could read them, because you'd be through with your work

before your teacher said you were supposed to be. That was it. My Grandpa Burma, my mother's dad, really, he was the only one who had a car. My other grandparents didn't get a car until, I don't know, they were probably in their sixties or something. My Grandpa Visscher turned the corner, and he didn't think to let the wheel spin back and so he ran right into a tree. (laughter) That was when he was in his sixties. My other grandpa used to take me places, I think on Wednesday afternoon. My dad started out being a machinist.

CH: Where did he work?

TVH: He worked at, oh, it was owned by the man who was the mayor, I can't think of the name of it now, I know it, but I can't think of it.

CH: Nelson Bosman?

TVH: No, it was before Bosman.

CH: Where was it located, do you remember?

TVH: Yes, it was Western Machine Toolworks! See, if I don't think too hard, then I can come up with it.

CH: Okay.

TVH: He was kind of a bold guy, I guess, and he went in and asked them for a raise in wages. I think he was in his teens. The teachers came to my grandparents and asked if couldn't he really go on to school, because he was a really bright boy. He didn't like being teased at all, he learned to speak English without any accent and so on, quite soon, because he didn't like being teased. My dad then...

CH: You said he'd boldly gone into the office...

TVH: Yes, he wanted a higher pay, I guess. I think my grandpa beat him on the back for that ,because you weren't supposed to do that.

CH: Did he get the raise?

TVH: No, I don't think so.

CH: Did he work there many years?

TVH: He didn't work there so long, no. Then he went to work for Chris Reidsma, who had the store on the corner of Van Raalte and Fifteenth, on the southeast corner. It was a grocery store then. My dad just wanted to be, well I say, better than he was. Anyway, I'm talking about my dad more.

CH: That's okay, it's history.

TVH: He learned to cut meat there, then, I think he heard about a job in the Kroger store or something, and so he'd drive back and forth to Grand Rapids everyday. Then the Kroger Store went where the, I think it's art center, or whatever, it's on the north side of Eighth street near River, it's quite a big store. Well, I don't know, I'm mixing things up of course. I think I was fourteen or something, and I guess you can work when you're fourteen. He let me be in charge of the cheese counter then. He had worked in the Kroger store in Grand Rapids, but then they opened this store in Holland. I guess my dad was pretty smart anyway.

CH: So, you worked at the Kroger Store. Was that your first job, then?

TVH: Yes, I think it was. I think he worked in Grand Rapids first, and he'd drive back and forth everyday. In those days, there were little cars, called Willy's, W-i-l-l-y-s or something and Whippet, W-h-i-p-p-e-t, because he had to drive back and forth to

Grand Rapids. But then, I think he was out of work for awhile, I don't know, I can't remember, but he didn't want to be out of work. I liked living on 20th Street because there were a lot of kids in the neighborhood. And they'd play stuff like Seven Steps Around the House, and Run, Sheep, Run, and Stone Teacher.

CH: You know, I'm not familiar with those, can you explain some of those. What is Seven Steps Around the House?

TVH: We were supposed to sneak if you could, and if the person caught you sneaking, you had to go back to goul, or whatever. Goul, that's what we called it.

CH: What was the other game about the teacher?

TVH: Stone Teacher, well, everybody had front steps you know...I'm trying to remember just how that went, I don't remember. You were supposed to guess which hand the stone was in, and if you did, then you could go up a step, you go up and down. We'd make up those games, you know, and hop-scotch of course. Everybody played hop-scotch, sometimes you couldn't find any chalk, but you'd find a stone that would make, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, like that. You had to hop, you know, on one foot. You had to get your stone in the right pocket. You tried to get sort of a flattish stone that would slide easily.

CH: I can remember, when I was younger we played that and we'd use the heels off shoes, for the place markers.

TVH: Oh yes.

CH: So then you worked in the Kroger store when you fourteen?

TVH: Yes.

CH: Did you have any other jobs after that? Were you still going to school then?

TVH: I was still in school, and the thing I hated was the high school football games would be on Saturday afternoon, and I'd say, "I want to go to the football game." "Well, what do you expect me to do for help then?" Well, anyway, that was the way it went.

CH: So, then did you graduate from Holland High School?

TVH: Oh yes, and then my friend was going to go to Hope College, and I don't know, I hadn't even thought about college, but I said to my mom and dad, "I'd like to go to Hope College too." Well, Hope College was pretty little in those days, just one little block.

CH: So, did you go or didn't you go?

TVH: Oh yes, I went to Hope College! My dad said, "Oh sure, she can go to college if she wants to."

CH: So how long did you go?

TVH: I went for four years and graduated. One day you didn't get to wear a gown, you got to wear another kind of dress, you know. I can't think of what it was called, it was called something. Part of graduation. I don't think they have that now.

CH: Different types of gowns for different degrees, or something like that?

TVH: No, you could make any kind of dress you wanted to. I remember I made mine out of white organdy and it had kind of flocked circles of gold. Oh, I can see that dress, it had a kind of flare around the bottom that you sewed on. I started to sew real early and I'd start out maybe, with a pattern, but then I would change the

pattern and so on. I can remember the dresses that I'd made. In those days, Van Puttens, on Central between Fifteenth and Sixteenth, was the best material store.

CH: Did that later become Boven's?

TVH: Oh no, that was one material store, that was Boven's. And there was another one named Van Puttens on River, between Eighth and Ninth. Mr. Van Putten was a really tall, skinny man. He had a connection between the two. They had bolts of fabric on shelves and you could point to one, "see now, it's the second one down there," and so on. I like to sew because that way it seems as if I could get more clothes. I made up my patterns and stuff, because I just like to do that and my mother had a treadle machine.

CH: So, you graduated from Hope College, then?

TVH: Yes.

CH: And what year?

TVH: 1940.

CH: But you didn't go into teaching then?

TVH: No, I didn't want to be a teacher, I thought teaching was so dull, or something. So, I started working at the Holland Furnace Company, and I remember I was pretty proud because I had graduated from college and everything, but I got to earn \$13.50 a week, or something.

CH: And what were you doing?

TVH: Oh, I just filed away things.

CH: More like a secretary.

TVH: Sort of like a secretary, but I can't remember the name of the lady. I can see the lady I worked for, but I can't remember the name.

CH: How long did you work there?

TVH: I worked there after I got out of college, I guess. I must have worked there for a year and a half, and then they wanted me to come back and work again part time, so I guess I did that.

CH: You quit in between there? You said they wanted you to come back?

TVH: Yes, I think I did. I think I must have.

CH: Did you get married in that time?

TVH: Yes.

CH: How did you meet your husband?

TVH: Oh well, see, it's kind of a strange little romance or something, I suppose you'd say, because he was almost three years older than I was. His younger brother wanted to take me out, but his younger brother was a little closer to my age, I guess. But anyway, I didn't get to go out with Paul until, well....then my grandpa died. We moved from Twentieth Street to Sixteenth, and I didn't like that much. I was still in high school. I cried when my grandpa died because he was my favorite grandparent, although I didn't tell the others that. Then my Grandma had a stroke I guess. Then when I was eighteen I got to go to the Netherlands with her for three months, June, July and August, because she wanted to see - she only had, I don't know if she had any brothers or sisters, anyway, it seemed like she was the only one.

CH: Some family that she wanted to go back and see?

TVH: Yes, she and my grandpa had moved here to America, and anyway, I went to the Netherlands with my grandma. I never found out until a long time afterwards that my grandma, I guess she thought they had plenty of money, and I guess they did, and my grandma had asked people in the Netherlands to pay for my trip. Well, we went on a boat. We went over on the New Amsterdam, it had been across from the Netherlands, it had been across and gone back. Somehow or another, it was the third crossing.

CH: You were talking about when you met your husband when you were out of college...

TVH: No, I was in high school. His younger brother, who was little bit younger than I was, he kind of liked me. There were a lot of kids in that neighborhood and we played these games, as I told you. I liked his older brother more. He was Paul and was about three years older than I was. But he couldn't go to college because he didn't have enough money - his parents didn't have much money. They had a nicer house. My father-in-law to be was a nice man. I used to hang around there because I hoped I would see Paul. He had to work a year before he could go to college because he had to earn money. Tuition was a hundred dollars in those days for a year.

CH: How many years did you go?

TVH: I went all four years. I asked my dad then if I could go to Hope College. "Yeah, it's all right to me," he said. I guess he felt pretty good. In those days there were

a lot of grocery stores on Eighth Street and he owned the Downtown IGA and it was right across from People's State Bank. You see Lokker and Rutgers gradually took over the stores to the west of them. But Lokker and Rutgers, my husband's grandfather was one of the people involved in there.

CH: So your husband, did he get to go to Hope for four years too?

TVH: Yes he did, but then he decided that he wanted to go into the Air Corp, because he really liked airplanes. So he got admitted to Randolph Field, which was in Texas. I think that was probably the only place you could go then in those days.

CH: So he went down there?

TVH: Yes. A lot of people washed out in those days. I think he felt very sad about washing out, because he didn't even tell me at first that he had washed out. I didn't even know that he was home. It was about November and he had started in September. They had washed out a lot of people, because they didn't think they were the right material for the Air Corp.

CH: So then he returned back home?

TVH: He returned back home I think in November.

CH: What year?

TVH: It must have been about '37 I suppose.

CH: Was this before you were married then?

TVH: Yes.

CH: When did you get married?

TVH: I think it was 1941, September 9, of 1941.

CH: Was that here in Holland?

TVH: Yes.

CH: Where did you live?

TVH: Mr. Naberhuis owned the house on 12th Street just east of Washington. He had made this house into three apartments and we had the back apartment. He had a basement for each apartment. We had two porches that were glassed in. We lived there for eight or nine years.

CH: Did you have children then?

TVH: After we had been married about two and a half years, we had Rein. He was named after my father. Then we had Coert and Joel. Three kids in that little apartment was quite a lot. So when Joel was about two months, we found this place to rent on 15th. I think it was \$27.50 a month. The place we lived was \$25 or something. It wasn't too long after we moved into that house on 15th - it wasn't such a bad place and 15th wasn't such a bad street then. We had nice neighbors on each side. That is where we lived.

CH: What did your husband do for a living? For most of his life?

TVH: He was always a salesman, but he wasn't a salesman then. I can't remember exactly what he was doing then. It was getting kind of crowded because we had three boys. So he must have had a better job. We bought the house that we lived in for the next 27 or 28 years on 22nd Street in the middle of the block on the south side of the street, east of College.

CH: That is basically where you raised your family.

TVH: Yes. He started to work for the 3M Company and he traveled a lot. He was a traveling salesman. He was a good salesman, because he liked to talk. Salesmen have to like to talk. He got the job shortly before we moved to 22nd Street and it was really good. In those days, the 3M Company sent you a book of prizes. If a salesman sold a certain amount, then he could pick a prize out of there. I remember I got a mixer and various things. It was kind of fun.

CH: So you raised your children there. Is that when you decided to become a teacher?

TVH: Not until I was about 49. I wanted to go back to college. My husband said "Well then, you can't just go and just take courses. You better learn to a teacher." So I would take a course a semester, maybe two courses a semester. By the time I was 49 and Lisa was in the third grade...

CH: When was Lisa born? You talked about the three sons...

TVH: I think she was born in 1959. She told me that she is never going to have any children. She was married first to Jimmy. I could never say to Jimmy "I am so glad you and Lisa found each other," because I didn't like Jimmy at all. They got divorced about five and a half years later.

CH: So Lisa was born when you were living on 22nd Street, then?

TVH: Yes.

CH: You were talking about going back to college, you took a class here and there and finally you graduated when you were 49?

TVH: Yes.

CH: You became a teacher at Holland?

TVH: I became a teacher when I was 49.

CH: Was that at Holland High School or Middle School or.. What did you teach?

TVH: I got a job teaching right away. They said, "Oh, you were really lucky," because so many people were going back to school then.

CH: What did you teach?

TVH: I taught second grade.

CH: Second Grade. And at what school?

TVH: At Lakeview School on 32nd Street. Don Van Ark was the principal.

CH: You taught for 17 years, did you say?

TVH: Yes. I taught second grade for 17 years. I remember one little kid said, "Well, Mrs. Vanderhill doesn't know enough to teach sixth grade, she only knows enough to teach second grade."

CH: Children are like that.

Tape shut off

TVH: (beginning unintelligible)...She [Lisa] was such a chubby little darling. I was very happy that she was a girl. I couldn't believe it. I thought for sure I was going to have five boys. My twelve year old Coert said, "What'd you have to go and ruin it for. I thought we were going to have a basketball team."

CH: Now go through your children again.

TVH: There is Rein, who is named after my dad, Rein John. He was named after both grandpas. Paul's dad's name was John. Only he was always called Shiner Vanderhill. Coert was next. I liked the name Coert, because it seemed more

dutchy. We named all the guys with middle names starting with "J" because my husband's name was Paul Julian. So Rein was Rein John, Coert was Coert Julian, and Joel was Paul Joel. We called him Joel because we thought its going to be too confusing to call him Paul. Hans, I wanted a kind od dutchy name for him, we names him Hans Jores. Nobody found out what you were going to have, a boy or girl, in those days. Lisa was Lisa Marie, not after anybody.

CH: You said you built this cottage here when Lisa was...

TVH: Yes, when Lisa was about one and a half. Paul's brother lived across the street. His house didn't look like that at all. It was a little cottage. I guess it had some kind of heat. We didn't have a basement. We just have a crawl space. We built the porch on right away and should have made it a little bigger. We built the main part of the house. We didn't have carpet or anything. My son Rein, who was 16, was always good at doing things. He was 16, and he laid all of the floor. We had four bedrooms. Lisa had her own bedroom, and then the kids would say, "Golly, we have to have two in a room and she gets to have a room all by herself." We'd move a lot of furniture, we had a station wagon and, this was terrible to do I guess but, I'd drive real slowly and get the kids. We'd have the tailgate down, and we'd let the kids sit on there with their feet hanging down. That wasn't a good thing to do at all.

CH: So, you built this cottage and you lived out here in the summer? And then you lived on 22nd Street?

TVH: Yes, we'd move out as soon as school got out.

CH: Then, did you sell your house on 22nd Street eventually?

TVH: Oh no, we kept them both. We didn't sell our house on 22nd until we decided to move out here permanently.

CH: How long ago was that?

TVH: I'd say about thirteen years maybe. Of course the kids were all grown.

CH: Were you still teaching then?

TVH: I'm trying to think when I quit teaching. I don't know. Maybe it will come to me.

CH: Was your husband still working as a salesman then?

TVH: No. It was very silly of him but he said he hated travelling, so he quit working for the 3M Company after he had been with them for 19 years. If he had worked 20 years, he would have had a nice income. But instead, he only got about \$165 a month, or something like that. Then he would try different things. First he tried being a salesman for a man who had invented a kind of furnace.

CH: What would you say, over your whole life in Holland, what is your most vivid memory of Holland? What sticks out in your mind?

TVH: I suppose I liked it when we got prizors, we always called them prizors, from the 3M Company. That was kind of nice, because if Paul would sell a certain quota, then they'd let us choose from a little magazine, a catalog.

CH: What about World War II? How did that affect your life?

TVH: Well, my husband was working for Fathner Bearing Company, and it was where Hart & Cooley is. And I guess they thought he was kind of smart, because he graduated from college and stuff. They made him a kind of a foreman. His boss

was kind of a drinker. I won't say his name. So Paul was kind of in charge. In those days, during the war, people could have half an hour to eat lunch. They'd go up on the roof, well, guys would take women up on the roof because women were important in those days, because so many guys were gone to war. That wasn't so good.

CH: So they made bearings for what?

TVH: Let's see, it was for the Fathner Bearing Company, which was an eastern company.

CH: So was it for tanks, or something like that?

TVH: I don't know what it was for.

(end of side one)

TVH: Yes, and even after Rein was born, I think we had a buggy. Maybe we had buggies in those days. Anyway, I'm sure we did. We didn't have a car, and my dad would say, "Why don't you and Paul come down and help me at night." He didn't have the store open, but then we would unpack things, and put them on shelves.

CH: So did you get extra food that way so the rationing really didn't effect you very much?

TVH: I don't know. I know I made my first pie, well it wasn't my first pie. I was going to have Paul's mother and dad over for dinner. I made a cherry pie, and I'm trying to think how I got too much salt in it, way too much salt, it was terrible, and I'm trying to think how I did that. There was a logical reason. It tasted terrible.

CH: So he didn't have to go to the war?

TVH: No, he was working at Fathner Bearing and they counted that as a war products

industry.

CH: Did the war change Holland?

TVH: I know my dad had the grocery store, and I guess we would get meat from him sometimes, that you weren't supposed to get. You were supposed to have a ration coupon. I'm trying to think why I put too much salt in that pie crust...

CH: What about Main Street in Holland? How has that changed over the years? What are your earliest memories of what Main Street, 8th Street, looked like?

TVH: My dad was next to Rose Klog, and Rose Klog was next to Lokker-Rutgers I guess. I can't think exactly how that was, but it was on the north side of 8th Street, and there were a lot of grocery and meat stores.

CH: Was it paved then?

TVH: Oh, yes.

CH: Street car going down the road?

TVH: No. Street cars were out of date long before that. I don't know if I ever had a ride on a street car. I don't think I did.