**Janet:** Today is July 3rd, 1995, and I'm here in Whitinsville at the home of Edith Oosterman who has been gracious enough to lend her home, so that I've done two other interviews here just prior to this with Hilda Daegstra and Mrs. Oosterman's brother, Jacob Wiesma.

Now I'm going to talk with Edith Oosterman who came from the Netherlands in 1922 when she was 12 years old. I thank you very much for seeing me and inviting the others in.

**Edith:** You're welcome.

**Janet:** Let's start at the beginning, if you'd give your birth date for the tape.

**Edith:** November 10, 1909.

**Janet:** And where in the Netherlands were you born?

**Edith:** Raard, R-A-A-R-D.

**Janet:** Did you live there until you left for the United States?

**Edith:** No. From there we moved different places. We moved where my father had a farm and from there we moved to Dookum, D-O-O-K-U-M, and from there we went to America.

**Janet:** What places in the Netherlands do you remember from when you were a little girl?

**Edith:** Some of Burgum, that's where during the war, my father was in the war and my mother was keeping the farm going with all of us children.

**Janet:** Do you remember anything about that time when you're father was away in the First World War?

**Edith:** I remember one night somebody came to the door, I don't know if they were drunks or what they were, and my mother went through the barn out the back way and run to the neighbor's house for help, when she came back to get the person whoever was trying to get in away from the farm. Alice was born while my father was in the service. There was five of us children.

**Janet:** Do you have any other memories of that period when your father was away?

**Edith:** No. Not really.

**Janet:** Did you remember grandparents at all?

**Edith:** Yes, I remember grandmothers and one grandfather, my father's father. He used to work for the town. He'd go around mowing with a hand sickle fields and all that kind of things because my grandmother, my other grandmother, was the one that had the farm where she brought up the children after my grandfather died.

**Janet:** Do you remember any experiences with your grandmother?

**Edith:** Well, I used to visit her quite often. Every time my mother had a baby, then I was sent to grandma's house. I was there several times. Later on when she moved to the city, then she lived with my aunt and I visited there quite a bit.

I was named after her and I was the first grandchild named after her, but first one my mother, which was the standards they have in Holland. My mother married a hired man which was something was not being done. There was quite a bit of friction there when the parents first get married but later on they kind of consented but it was never the same.

**Janet:** What kind of a person was your grandmother?

**Edith:** She was a nice person. She was big, but they have all this standard business and she married beneath her stand.

**Janet:** Can you think of any other kinds of, what would you call them, standards or attitudes of the way you should be?

**Edith:** If you were a farmer's daughter, you did not have anything to do with a hired man. You were just not one of the family anymore and made quite a difference in their lives.

**Janet:** So your father was working on your grandmother's farm then?

**Edith:** At the time when they got married but then he went and got his own little farm at one place where I was born and then they moved to a different farm, a different town. From there he went to the city to Dookum where he worked in a cement factory where they make all these cement projects like you have for the sewers, all these cement things, pipes and blocks all that kind of stuff. He worked there until we moved.

**Janet:** I see. Do you remember any experiences with your father, any outings you went on with him or things you did with him?

**Edith:** Not too much, no. I remember my mother taking me, young five, six years old, with an old chair on the ice teaching me how to skate. Everybody had to learn how to skate. We girls we had to learn how to knit, even in school we were taught how to knit. We had to knit. I remember walking after school, I would have two brothers on each side hanging onto my skirt but I had to knit so many inches everyday on the sweater or something, whatever I was knitting for. I did that while walking, babysitting the brothers.

**Janet:** Now this was because all the warm clothing [inaudible 00:06:22].

**Edith:** We need all these sweaters that we have.

**Janet:** How did it work with the chair on the ice? You would sit on the chair?

**Edith:** No. I would have an old chair and I pushed the chair. I would push the chair and she would be there.

**Janet:** Like a walker kind of?

**Edith:** Yeah. You just had the back off the chair and you just pushed the chair on the ice to hold yourself up on but everybody had to learn how to skate.

**Janet:** Do you remember any skating activities, any kind of-?

**Edith:** Well, I remember one time the teacher in the school in the morning, he said, "Well it's snowing out today. No school this afternoon." We all met at his house. He lived right on the water so then we all went there and skated. They treated us to chocolates and so on and then also on the ice, we had tents all over the place.

You go skating and they had all these different tents. You could buy chocolates and coffee and donuts and whatever it was everywhere, skate all around the city. It was very exciting and interesting and have all these people that would sweep the ice all the time to keep it clean.

**Janet:** Were these people that were like hired to do that or they [inaudible 00:07:37]?

**Edith:** Yeah, a lot of those were town help, volunteer help but they're working for the town. Somehow they did that.

**Janet:** Was business conducted by people skating [inaudible 00:07:57]?

**Edith:** Well, people skate from city to city. When there wasn't any ice of course then the boats could go through. Then they would go from place to place.

**Janet:** Were boats used a lot also for business purposes?

**Edith:** Oh yes. I remember my uncle who lived right across the big lake, so to get to their house, you always had to go on the little boat and row across to get to the house. Then if you wanted to come back or come over, you just holler at them to come on over and they would come and get you and so on. But the only way you could get to their house would be across unless you went way around the country through the fields.

**Janet:** How about fishing? Was there any fishing?

**Edith:** There was a lot of fishing. We had one of my brothers fished with my uncle who did a lot of fishing. He was a fisherman. He was always fishing, a lot of fishing.

**Janet:** Well, your brother said it, but you mention your mother's and father's names and your mother's maiden name.

**Edith:** My mother's maiden name, in Dutch you spell it Y-T-J-E and that's my baptism name too but they transferred it when they came to this country made Edith out of it. Her maiden name was W-Y-G-A, Wyga.

**Janet:** Would you spell again what Edith is in Dutch?

**Edith:** Y-T-J-E. Ytje.

**Janet:** And that does translate as Edith?

**Edith:** Well, they translated to Edith, whichever. It sounded like it was the nearest.

**Janet:** You went to school?

**Edith:** Yes. I went to school.

**Janet:** Do you have any remembrances of school?

**Edith:** I remember going to school and having all these lakes around, lakes they were... stepping on the ice one time when I thought it was strong and it wasn't. I went right through and got soaking wet. I had lunch for the kids, the other boys, with me, so I had to turn around go back home again when they went to school. I just went through the ice into the water.

**Janet:** Was it scary? Did you [inaudible 00:10:19]?

**Edith:** No. Yes and no. It wasn't that deep, it wasn't that wide, but I just the ice was strong and it was and when I stepped on it, I went down and I got all wet. I turned around and walked back home. We had an hour walk back and forth to school and I was almost halfway I guess. We had to go back home again.

**Janet:** You were the oldest daughter?

**Edith:** Yes. I had two older brothers.

**Janet:** You had responsibility for the younger ones?

**Edith:** Yes.

**Janet:** How about aunts and uncles? Did you have any that you were close to or that you remember doing things with?

**Edith:** Yes, I remember some of my uncles and aunts, my mother's sister. They didn't have any children so they had one of these foreign children, during the war. Where were they from? I've forgotten what country she was from but they had a girl that they brought up and so on.

My uncle was in the service and he was what they call, I think, an undercover agent. He was [inaudible 00:11:28]. He would go around and England and write notes in bottle and throw them in a... And they would get them in England across the shore. At one time, he'd dressed like an old man, they said, "We'll let the old man go. He is no harm." But in the meantime, he was doing all this underground work, spying for the country, for the whatever.

They tried to get him but he had died a couple of days before they got a hold of him. If they had, they would have shot him on the spot.

**Janet:** Wow. Do you remember him?

**Edith:** Oh yeah, very much so. It had piece in a book about it at one time too. He was an offer of some kind in the service and during that war, he did all this spying, underground work that he did for them.

**Janet:** He was what? Your mother's...?

**Edith:** Brother-in-law.

**Janet:** How about religion? What do you remember about- was it called Christian Reform that you were involved with?

**Edith:** Well, in Dutch it was [unknown 00:12:42] it was but it's the same as Christian reform.

**Janet:** Do you remember any occasions, religious occasions?

**Edith:** No, mostly Christmas. We had Christmas program and services Christmas day and the day after. Christmas was mostly all religious church services and all that. Then the second day was mostly family affairs, then the more family affair. The religious day was kind of separate from the regular routine. Of course Christmas presents was December 6th, St. Nicholas day.

St. Nick would come around with the Black Peter, they used to call him, Zwarte Piet and give all the presents out that was completely separate from Christmas giving. Christmas strictly a holiday, Christ’s birth.

**Janet:** I see. Now the Black Pete, what was the significance of that?

**Edith:** He was Saint Claus' helper. He was Santa Claus' helper, St. Nick's helper.

**Janet:** So would the children... you'd get little presents?

**Edith:** We wouldn't get too much, but one thing I know we had this little... the little candies. These little pastry-like pepernoten we called them. The night before somebody would come in, I know in my home, I remembered that, come in and throw them all over the floor and kids would scramble for them and pick them all up and eat them. That was something special.

Also in school, we had special- they'd throw them around. It was sanitary but it wasn't considered. We just grabbed them from floor and eat them up and play with them or whichever we done with them. That one special... I haven't got it handy, but I have a whole piece that I wrote out about that for the Christmas in Holland. I used to write and do things, different things.

**Janet:** Nice. Now how do you spell that, the name of that pastry?

**Edith:** Pepernoten, peppernuts. They're a little like a marble. I made them myself, not in the last year or so but I've made them a lot of times. That was a specialty.

**Janet:** Let's see. What else? How about any other kinds of... What would your mother and father do for a social occasion? Did they have any-?

**Edith:** Not much. They didn't have too much social life because between they were working and my mother had a big family. Like I said, she wasn't kind in with her parent's side of the family, so really the only thing they had was just church.

**Janet:** How about the youngsters? How about you and your friends? Would you do things for recreation that you can remember?

**Edith:** Not that much, just skating, jump rope and marbles. A lot of jump rope, hopscotch.

**Janet:** Did you have the with jump rope the way they have here they have little sayings that you said?

**Edith:** Yeah, you have one by yourself or you have a bunch of them and all these little sayings.

**Janet:** Let's see. What else? Did you hear anything about America before you actually knew you were coming? When you knew you were coming?

**Edith:** No, not too much.

**Janet:** So you didn't have expectations [inaudible 00:016:36]?

**Edith:** Not too much, no. I remember I was a friend of Hilda’s sister-in-law, her telling us that her brother, that was George, was in this country and he would send shoes to them and so on because it was so cheap and he would send shoes back here and different things to the family.

**Janet:** But you were wearing the wooden shoes?

**Edith:** Yes.

**Janet:** Did anybody continue that when they got here?

**Edith:** Not too much. I've got one hanging up over there.

**Janet:** Oh, is that one made for wall hanging? That's not what real shoe [crosstalk 00:17:18]?

**Edith:** No, but it's exactly the same thing. You'd have made to your feet, different sizes. You could go and have your foot measured and then they would make them up, a piece of wood your size.

**Janet:** Oh, really?

**Edith:** Oh, yes.

**Janet:** So then would that be called a shoemaker?

**Edith:** Wooden shoemaker, yeah.

**Janet:** So you go down and... That's interesting, if you can describe that. You would what? Stand on something and-

**Edith:** Stand and they would shape your foot so then he'd know how big they had to be. Then of course they had to hollow them out, of course some they have some ready if they fitted you. And for dress up, most would be like that for dress up then we'd have at a little fancy.

They would be painted black or a little fancy. I know when I was 12 years old. My mother said I was a big girl now so I got pair of regular shoes. That was the first time I had regular shoes.

**Janet:** That must have been quite a profession for a shoe.... He must have been busy?

**Edith:** Oh, yes. There was a lot of those around.

**Janet:** And of course children's feet grow so quickly. You must have had to-

**Edith:** They didn't last that long either. Sometimes they would break. We'd go to kick them off break the tops off and I'd have them fixed.

**Janet:** Do you remember what kind of wood they used?

**Edith:** I don't know what kind of wood they used. Like the story goes the father counted all the wooden shoes by the door to see if the kids are all in bed and there was one pair missing so they checked it out and one of the kids had the shoes on bed.

**Janet:** Do you remember the house you lived in, what it looked like?

**Edith:** Yeah. We had different ones. One was a farmhouse that has the barn connected right to the house. You just go through one door and you go right into the barn house where the cows were. The barn was hitched to the house. We had the same kind of beds too. It was in the wall that you slept in.

**Janet:** That seems to be a particularly Dutch phenomenon.

**Edith:** Yes it was. Later on we had other beds in different rooms. Our last house it was regular beds.

**Janet:** Do you remember the stove or the kitchen what it was like?

**Edith:** Well, I know we had a stove in the living room and the kitchen. It must have been some kind of stove to cook on. I don't know just what it was. I think we had gas. No, we had gas I remember in our house.

**Janet:** So that must have been more modern?

**Edith:** That was a more modern place. That was a town, I don't know if you know the story about St. Bonovich. He was a Catholic saint, he was out in Hollander and he got killed. That was in the town he came from.

**Janet:** Now what were the other religions besides the Christian Reform?

**Edith:** There was Catholics and other congregational, different...

**Janet:** Different Protestants.

**Edith:** Different Protestants, yes.

**Janet:** And Jewish people? Were there any?

**Edith:** Some Jewish people. Not that much, not at that time.

**Janet:** How about foods? Do you recall any foods that your mother or grandmother made when you were little?

**Edith:** Well, we had pea soup every so often and big family dishes and these one dish dinners.

**Janet:** How about bread? Did they get that from the bakery?

**Edith:** We had fresh bread from the bakery come down. I remember where we lived every Wednesday and I think Saturday these wagons would come from the country with their fruits and vegetables and all different things and they would come to our city. Dookum was a city and the marketplace that would be like a market where you could go buy stuff and they would come and bring stuff to the stores.

**Janet:** Can you remember market day, going to the market?

**Edith:** I think it was on Wednesday. We didn't always go because we lived right there and they would also come around by the house with different things.

**Janet:** On a wagon?

**Edith:** On a wagon, yeah. I remember this buttermilk with butter cooked through it. It would be ready like dessert. They would come down and you could get it and get a quart or whatever it was and you would have your dinner all ready. It was already made.

**Janet:** In other words, that would be dinner? Buttermilk was [inaudible 00:22:24].

**Edith:** Well that was a dessert. That particular day, we would have just that with a slice of bread or something like that. Of course we didn't get that many meals. My mother would get meat for the week and we'd all have a little piece on Sunday and the rest of the week with a little bit more water added to the gravy.

Then my father would get a little piece of the meat because he was the one that was working and needed the strength and eggs and things. We never got too many eggs either, so my mother used to get the eggs once in a while because she wasn't too strong and she needed the strength. We were fortunate if we saw an egg just on Easter Sunday and oranges and all that, that was very...

**Janet:** Very rare?

**Edith:** Very, very rare.

**Janet:** Well, now were there any fruits that grew in the Netherlands that you had?

**Edith:** Any what?

**Janet:** Fruits?

**Edith:** Well there were some but we never saw too many of them, apples, grapes. You couldn't afford it. We weren't that class of people.

**Janet:** How about fish? Did you eat much fish?

**Edith:** Well we had some. I remember in markets where you could buy the fish all cooked. You'd go and get your fish and take it home and eat it but those were luxuries for our kind of people.

**Janet:** Did you have any sense of what you would do when you grew up?

**Edith:** No, not really because the girls used to be taught how to keep house and all that and you just grew up to get married and be a mother. That was the general idea. I did want to be a school teacher at one time but that didn't pan out.

Not when we came to this country. That was the end of that but I was 12 years old and our school was small, so the teacher just says well those that have a big family at home, the girls, we could go home. I was one that I could go home. I didn't have to go to school anymore. There wasn't enough room in school, so I went home and helped my mother.

**Janet:** Now did you go to the Christian Reform School or did you go to public school?

**Edith:** No, Christian school.

**Janet:** Most of the people who were involved in your church they went to the church school. They didn't go to the public school.

**Edith:** Yes.

**Janet:** So when you left for Cherbourg, do you remember that journey to get there?

**Edith:** Yeah, we went in the morning, we left. We were at different place so we all gathered early in the morning, I remember and that's kind of a streetcar pulled with horses. Horses were pulling the streetcar from Dookum where we were to another town. I know the day we took the train to Amsterdam or [unknown 00:25:31] wherever we went.

**Janet:** What did your mother pack? Do you remember?

**Edith:** Everything that she wanted. Not big furniture, treasures stuff and all the clothing. I don't know just how much she took, packed. They had four or five big trunks full of stuff, some furniture like some of these personal things that you value a great deal. I don't think they carried any kitchen tables or any of those kind of things.

**Janet:** Do you remember any of the treasures that your mother chose to bring?

**Edith:** Well she had some silverware or something she had. There are all kinds of inspections and my youngest brother was a year and a half so she still had a diaper bag with her so she put that in the bottom of the bag and then put the kits on top. So they open the bag, all dirty diapers so that's as far as they went.

But when we came from... after New York to Providence on the boat, there was a fire there and one of our trunks wasn't painted. It was one of the last one. They put all stuff in that was left which had a lot of my personal little things that I had in it, an autographed book and all that leftover stuff that got put in last and that's the one they threw overboard. Not all of them, just one of them.

That one happened to be the last one they picked up from all the leftovers and did not get painted like the rest of them did all one color. So with the fire they threw all this merchandise overboard and that happened to be one of the trunks that went overboard. I missed up on all things little things that we wanted.

**Janet:** Can you think of anything else besides the autographed book that you [inaudible 00:27:33]?

**Edith:** Well different things that my mother had and the kids had, that last minute stuff that you put in, pictures and different things. Because I had all the girlfriends write in it and all that and different ones and all those things were gone.

**Janet:** Yeah, that's sad. Let's see. You were saying when you got to Cherbourg that you had to wait then for the week?

**Edith:** Yes.

**Janet:** Why don't you tell about that?

**Edith:** My brother had taken French in school a little bit, so my mother wanted a cup of tea very badly, he could say what she wanted or what he wanted. But we just had a good time, the meals. We had a big room we were all of us were sleeping in and our meals and like that.

The bathroom, we didn't know what to do first because all it had was a hole in the ground. You had squat over the hole because it didn't have any toilets to sit on. We weren't going to use those things but it was all it was so after all you did use those things. But as kids we had a good time because we had free running around with and there was the mountains there and you had to be back for meals at night. In the meantime, we had appointments where they cleaned us all up.

**Janet:** Why don't you tell about what the problem was, why you were delayed?

**Edith:** These little nits that you have, they get in the hair. Well, there was three of us girls and we had them and so they wouldn't even let you go on the boat and pass in the country. That's what we had to go over there for, get our hair all cleaned up and so on and then we could go. That was the biggest problem.

**Janet:** Now did you get those on route or you had-

**Edith:** No. There was a lot of lice around, especially some of these places and we had them but we didn't have any lice but still there were some these little nits in the hair.

**Janet:** So the name of the boat?

**Edith:** Orduna, I think I'm quite sure that's it.

**Janet:** Do you remember anything about the voyage?

**Edith:** No, that was good.

**Janet:** Now how were you traveling? Were you in steerage? Were you in-?

**Edith:** We were in third class. There were two kinds of third class. There was the one we were in then there was another way, the other board where everybody seemed to be just different group.

**Janet:** So you were in a cabin?

**Edith:** Yes.

**Janet:** With just your family?

**Edith:** Uh-huh. We had a couple of cabins I think because there were so many of us. But I know my mother was very sick. My father wasn't. Everybody else was sick for a long time, well so many days.

**Janet:** Did you explore the boat or anything?

**Edith:** Yes, we'd wander all over the boats. I remember one night my father was looking for me, and I was very nicely sitting on the stairs watching the first class dancing or something like that. I was very nicely sitting there, and he'd come looking for me all over the boat and I was told to get back to my cabin in a hurry.

**Janet:** What was your father like as a person?

**Edith:** He was good. He was a nice person.

**Janet:** Let's see. What else? Do you remember coming into the New York harbor?

**Edith:** Yes, but not too much, you know, all excited.

**Janet:** Did you know what the Statue of Liberty was or [inaudible 00:31:34]?

**Edith:** No, but we heard about it, the couple that was with us, the people that was my mother's cousin and his wife and three children.

**Janet:** They had returned to-

**Edith:** They went to Holland on a vacation. They lived here. They went to Holland on a vacation. He was my mother's cousin. So when they got visiting there, they persuaded my folks to come to America with them. To leave Holland and to go to America because there was no future in Holland for our family with the big family like we had.

There was no future there at all for the boys growing up and their father. My mother's cousin persuaded my folks to get rid of everything over there and to come back to America with them. That's what we did.

**Janet:** Did your parents sell off whatever they could?

**Edith:** We were renting at the time so it was only [inaudible 00:32:20]. I know we had to sell off our furniture and all that kind of stuff.

**Janet:** When the boat docked at Ellis Island, do you remember anything about Ellis Island?

**Edith:** Yes. What stands out mostly with me, we went in what was kind of a barn, it wasn't elaborate, I don't think. Then there was a fence through here or a part and you could go this way and this way. Most of us went this way, but when they got to my mother, they made my mother go this way, and she had my brother with him, the baby. He was a year and a half.

My mother was lame. She walked lame with one side, and they made her go down that way, and it was a long time afterwards before she finally came back. In the meantime they had made her strip and undress and parade in front of all these different doctors to find out what caused her lameness. If it was something that was inherited or whether it was something that was contagious or whatever it was. But she had it since she was birthed.

But I knew she was very, very upset, coming with a year and a half old youngster that will be forcing for her to parade around all these people. You can't speak a word of English and my father and all the rest of us sitting around waiting wondering what they'd done to her, where she was and what happened to her. That really does- outstanding.

**Janet:** Now what happened? The verdict was that she was okay?

**Edith:** Yeah, she was alright. They let her go through.

**Janet:** Do you remember being examined at all?

**Edith:** Yes, at different times. Especially waiting for the boys and then you'd have to get an examination or a vaccination again and vaccination this on this arm and vaccination on that arm.

**Janet:** How long did you stay at Ellis Island? Do you remember?

**Edith:** Not that long. I think you'd go in and you'd go through all the business and you'd come right back again. We didn't stay at Ellis Island at night.

**Janet:** You didn't stay overnight?

**Edith:** No. Then we went to Seaman's Home in Hoboken. We stayed there. That was run by the Christian Reform people.

**Janet:** Oh I see. That's how you happened to go there.

**Edith:** Then I remember there was a rocking chair in the room and none of us would sit in that rocking chair because rocking chair was for babies. My little brother got to sit in that rocking chair but nobody else would sit in that rocking chair because that was for babies.

**Janet:** You didn't have rocking chairs?

**Edith:** No, we never did at home, just the rocking chair for the baby, little ones. I remember that. None of us kids would sit in it. That was for the baby.

**Janet:** How about the Seaman's Home? Do you remember anything else about that?

**Edith:** No, it was in a nice place. It was a good place. I remember we kids were hungry. My father and the cousin, they had gone off walking somewhere and we were hungry. Somehow finally we got a cheese sandwich from somewhere. It had lettuce on it cheese, but we didn't want the lettuce because that was rabbit food. We'd never had lettuce. We took the lettuce off but we did eat the cheese sandwich because we kids were hungry. But we wouldn’t eat the lettuce because that was rabbit food. Notions, we didn't know any better.

**Janet:** How long were you there?

**Edith:** Not too long. We had to stay there until we got the boat to... We were there one or two nights then we got the boat from New York to Providence.

**Janet:** You knew you were coming to Massachusetts?

**Edith:** Yeah. Oh, who's over there?

**Janet:** Wait. We're going to stop recording here. Okay, we're resuming now after a visit from your grandson and daughter-in-law. We were talking about you got the boat to providence.

**Edith:** Mmm-hmm. We had a fire on the boat.

**Janet:** Do you know what happened?

**Edith:** I understand it was a couple of fellows smoking in bed. It started the fire. We were rushed from our boat, taken. We couldn't get our door open, my sister and I, very well. I had two suitcases, and they were picked up and dumped into a freight boat that came along our side of the boat. We were rescued from this one boat to the freight boat that came along.

**Janet:** Was everyone rescued?

**Edith:** Yes. They got the fire out alright, but they took all people off the boat. Then my brother would get sick or something. They put us in the captain's room, but so many of us.

**Janet:** So it was right near Providence when the boat caught fire?

**Edith:** Well it was in the middle of the night, so probably halfway between New York and Providence.

**Janet:** You arrived then in Providence then in this freighter, the rescue ship?

**Edith:** Yes

**Janet:** Then what happened once you [inaudible 00:38:12]?

**Edith:** Well the men had to go out and check out on all the freight and we lost one of the trunks and they had to get all that business straightened out before we finally got on the train to go from Providence to Whitinsville.

When we got to Whitinsville, there were people that they had notified. They were Oostermans, came to the station to meet us, two or three different families because it was quite a few of us. That's how we got acquainted with the Oostermans. I married the son later on and my brother married another Oosterman's daughter later on, so that's how we connected with the Oosterman family.

**Janet:** I see. Did you actually meet your husband that first night, the first day that you got to Providence?

**Edith:** Well I met him the first day but I was only 12 at the time. In later years he was married and he had one daughter and his wife died. Then I went to take care of his wife at his sister's house and then we got married. Then the Lord told me to... I asked one night about it, and then the Lord says to me, "You're going to be the mother." I says, "Someday maybe she'll have another mother," and I could hear somebody speak and tell me, "You are to be her next mother."

So, in the middle of the night, I opened up the light and I says, "Oh, no. Who was talking to me?" I said that was the voice telling me that I was going to be Helen- Another year later we got married and Helen was five, six years old at the time. She's been like... Well we never considered her a daughter-in-law or stepdaughter, something like that. She was my daughter, that's all. That's the way that worked.

**Janet:** Were the Oosterman's a large family that had settled here that were from the Netherlands? Is that how -?

**Edith:** Yes, they came gradually too. My father-in-law came first and then my mother-in-law. He came first with the oldest daughter and then later on she came with the rest of the children. They had a bakery in town for years, the baking shop.

**Janet:** Did your husband also work in the bakery shop?

**Edith:** He did most of the time and then he worked in a different place and then later on we had fruits and vegetables. He went around the houses peddling fruit and vegetables. When we got married, that's what he did for a long time. He used to go house to house.

**Janet:** When you got here at 12 years old, did you go to school here?

**Edith:** Yes, I went to school down Plymouth. I didn't know any English but then at night after school or different things, they'd teach you or try to help us a bit to get the language. That's all we were here for, the language. We had all the arithmetic and all that business. I could do all those sums and everything good. You didn't do them in English, but you saw the figures and you did the same way. You got the same answers, it just the language you had to catch.

**Janet:** Did you have a helpful teacher or teachers?

**Edith:** Yes. I had good teachers. Clerk and so on, different ones.

**Janet:** How about your mother and father? Did they persist in speaking Dutch?

**Edith:** They learned eventually because my father went to work in a factory in a foundry. He worked nights for a while then he'd walk an hour back home from... Worked from 3 to 11 then he'd walk all the way to town and all the way out to the country every night. My mother was determined to learn more. She would take our kid's books and wanted to read and she wanted to learn English more. They did alright, not fluently and at the time of course we had the church service in Dutch all the time.

After we got here they changed and had one English and one Dutch. A few years later, everything was English but as long as the play was partially in Dutch and partially... You did learn the English language very fast. Then we had a Dutch store man, a grocery man, to come down so the folks didn't really have to learn that much. It's different nowadays.

**Janet:** Did your mother and father, do you think they were happy they had come here?

**Edith:** Yes. I think they were. I think my mother was lonesome at times and missed her mother and then when her mother died of course we were here and my father's mother. They went back for a trip at one time, and they used to talk about Holland this and Holland that, everything was still more or less... But after they went back for a trip once, then they came back, then they were satisfied. Because Holland seemed so small and everything was so small and people had gone and after that they were more content to be satisfied were they were.

**Janet:** Had they been here for quite a while before they went back to see Holland?

**Edith:** Yes, because we were married.

**Janet:** How about you? Do you have any desire or have you gone back?

**Edith:** I was back in 73, 74. I took a trip around the world. My son was stationed in Saigon so we went through Hawaii. My daughter-in-law's mother went with me, Hawaii and Saigon and all these places in between. We stopped in Switzerland and Italy and all these places then we finished up in Holland where I saw the school I went to and that looked very small and the church looked very small and I still met some of my relatives. There was a couple of aunts living, met a lot of cousins. That was a very interesting trip.

**Janet:** Well, how do you feel about it yourself as far as being Dutch and being American?

**Edith:** Not that much. We used to view you were a Dutchman, you were a Dutchman, but that's kind of, you don't resent it so much with some people now they do that. Some would rather you just... It wasn't that big a deal because we were very well respected, Dutch people, very much respected in this town. It wasn't for a lot of the Dutch people, lots of Dutch farmers and all that around it. Nowadays there aren't that many anymore but at that time, they were very well up in the town.

**Janet:** And your religion carried over from old world to here.

**Edith:** That's right. Religion carried over. We still have devotions when we eat and so on. That's what's it's like in country. The Bible in school, prayer in school, all that, we didn’t have trouble with the people the way a lot of it is nowadays.

**Janet:** Would you have any advice maybe for new immigrants coming in from other countries today based on your experience of coming as a 12-year-old?

**Edith:** Well you just get up and work don't expect to get that big job like you had before. You start from the bottom up if you want to get anywhere. Don't be afraid to stick out your hands and work. You don't go on welfare, not if you can possibly dig ditches or something else.

When my son came out of the service, he says, "Well you can go on welfare." "Oh no. I'd rather work in the farm," he says. "Anything else," he says, "I will not go on welfare." That's what he did. He worked himself from the post office up cleaning the rooms and the toilets and whatnot until he got way up high into his office where he did by working and doing... You don't have it handed to you.

**Janet:** Can you think of any kind of rules for living or tenets or whatever you want to call it that your mother and father passed along to you and your brothers and sisters that you in turn passed along to your children?

**Edith:** Seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and walk in his ways. You don't do the worldly things. You're asking, "Well Lord, what do you want me to do?" You just don't go on your own, do this. You don't go lot of the other things. You have no desire to serve in all the other things. And you try to bring the children up the same way. Some have drifted away.

**Janet:** I take it when you ask the Lord he answers as he did with you?

**Edith:** Yes, he does. People think that's funny or something. In that I says, “No. That's the truth.”

**Janet:** Is there anything else about your life in this country and... You met your husband and you... Were you working between the time you stopped school?

**Edith:** Yes, I left school when I was 13, 14. I did housework. I went to different homes and I did housework, different families I had been in to.

**Janet:** Did you do that up until the time you were married?

**Edith:** Until I was married. Then of course I was married and I had a six-year-old daughter right away.

**Janet:** Right. So then you stay home or did you work too?

**Edith:** Yes, I did stay home. During the war, I did go working in a factory on an airplane business and so on. But then my daughter was big enough so I went in at 3, she came out of school at 2, she could stay home with the children to take over.

**Janet:** What prompted you to go to work during the war?

**Edith:** Well help out. My husband wasn't making that much in the family and everybody helped during the war to work. Whenever needed jobs on parts of airplanes and all that. Later on I did go back to work. We worked in a hat shop making all kinds of hats.

**Janet:** What was that like?

**Edith:** It was fun, it was different but then the kids were bigger.

**Janet:** How many children did you have?

**Edith:** I have four boys and Helen. My throat bothers me. Helen was the oldest and then I had four boys. One lives in town.

**Janet:** What is his name?

**Edith:** James. He's married and he's got three of his own children and he's got five or six adopted ones. They're all out of the house right now. They're all either married or what, he brought them all up.

**Janet:** And then what about your other children?

**Edith:** The second one, he died when he was 31. He lived in Michigan. The third one lives in California. He was the one we visited in Saigon. He was in the service.

**Janet:** What are their names, the second and the third?

**Edith:** The second one was Leonard and the third one is Ralph. He is in the air conditioning business in Sacramento. The youngest one was Raymond.

**Janet:** Do they have children? Do you have grandchildren?

**Edith:** Yeah. Leonard had four children, mostly married. They're all married. Ralph had two and two adopted. Ray had just the one boy.

**Janet:** So you have a number of grandchildren.

**Edith:** I have about 25 grandchildren and more than that in great grandchildren.

**Janet:** Wonderful.

**Edith:** Because when my son has three and the other six and they're married and they're all getting... Even the adopted ones, we figure they're yours.

**Janet:** How is this- I know you've just suffered the loss of your son, but how is period of your life, this sort of old age period?

**Edith:** We still manage to get to church every Sunday, whichever comes up and then like we have here, we have a nice group of people. I have one of the ladies that we visited quite a bit. I still drive my car and get groceries and take Hilda along with me. We go grocery shopping and we go off to lunch and different other things that come up. I do a lot of knitting.

**Janet:** You still knit?

**Edith:** I knit, knit all the time. I knit all kinds of hats for the babies for the hospital. Then I knit for hats Salvation Army, for Kids for America. I've got a whole bag full out there. Then you knit for the children and grandchildren, most of the great grandchildren mostly now that you knit for. I do a lot of knitting.

**Janet:** Well that must be satisfying to do.

**Edith:** Yes, that's relaxing and it's satisfying. You have to get your own meals and do your own cooking and cleaning up, whatever.

**Janet:** Is there anything else you can think of that has to do with having immigrated to this country as a young girl and living [inaudible 00:53:10]?

**Edith:** No, I think I just want to do things that was planned for us in the Lord's way that we had to come to this country and meet our mates and whatnot and so on. There's a future here for my father with the grownup boys that they would not have had in Holland. I don't think so. We're just thankful to be here and people to have freedom of whatever.

**Janet:** Well, you would have had that there. You had the freedom. It was just the economic opportunity in Holland-

**Edith:** Yeah, we didn't have the opportunity for the families like you do here.

**Janet:** Have you visited Ellis Island?

**Edith:** No, I haven't. I haven't been up there.

**Janet:** Do you have an interest in that?

**Edith:** Well, I might but now I don't travel that much anymore, trouble with my legs a bit. I fell on the ice a years or ago so my back is kind of bothering me and the legs. You don't travel so much anymore. When I did travel, I went to California a few times and Michigan where my other son was living. Now you don't travel that much anymore and you don't get out that much anymore.

**Janet:** Well, that makes it nice that you have such a nice community here.

**Edith:** Well, that's nice.

**Janet:** Well, I want to thank you so much.

**Edith:** Well, you're welcome.

**Janet:** It has been the most interesting interview, very interesting. I'm speaking with Edith Oosterman who came from the Netherlands when she was 12. It's July 3rd 1995 and this Janet Levine and I'm signing off.