

EI-434

ADOLPH ALBERT BOUWENSE

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THE NETHERLANDS, 1923

AGE

SHIP: "THE NEW AMSTERDAM

PORT: ROTTERDAM

RESIDENCES:

- **NETHERLANDS: MIDDLEBURG, WALCHEREN, ZEELAND**
- **US: FARMINGDALE, NY; INVERNESS, FL**

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. It's February 21, 1994. I'm here in Inverness, Florida at the home of Adolph Albert Bouwense, Sr., who came from The Netherlands in 1923 when he was thirteen years of age.

BOUWENSE: That's right. And I darn near didn't like it.

LEVINE: Oh, okay.

BOUWENSE: What you call it, when I was at Ellis Island, uh, they found, uh, scars on the eyeball, and they had me there for a week in the hospital there. And I came over with my brother. My father came and got my brother, and I had to stay a week in Ellis Island at the hospital.

LEVINE: Okay. Before we talk about Ellis Island, let's start with your birth date and where you were born, and we'll talk about The Netherlands.

BOUWENSE: All right.

LEVINE: And then we'll get to Ellis Island.

BOUWENSE: Well, I was born in 1909, August 23rd, in Middleburg , Walcheren, Zeeland. That is part of The Netherlands, in the southern part. And I came over.

LEVINE: Well, tell about life there. Do you remember the town?

BOUWENSE: Well, I went to, I only went to school over there, that's all. I mean, uh, my father had a cigar store over there. And . . .

LEVINE: Did you ever help him in the cigar store?

BOUWENSE: I was small, you know. And, uh, we had a library there, and, of course,

Pop, my father, he ran the store, and then after a while my mother run the store, and he was working in the factory.

LEVINE: What kind of factory?

BOUWENSE: Well, the Phillips [ph] Factory, where they make electric light bulbs, over in Middleboro. As a matter of fact, my cousin still works there.

LEVINE: So, uh, do you remember the house you lived in?

BOUWENSE: Yep.

LEVINE: Could you describe it? What was it made of, and what did it look like?

BOUWENSE: Well, it was a front store. The store was in the front. That was the cigar store. And we lived in the back. And we had an upstairs, and the last time I was back to Holland it was a bank. So that's how things change over there.

LEVINE: Do you remember the kitchen of the house?

BOUWENSE: Not very well, because I remember my mother, I was fooling around with the cat, and my mother was laying in bed, and she picked up a slipper and threw it at me, I remember that. (Dr. Levine laughs) I was young then.

LEVINE: Well, uh, what was the town like, Middleburg?

BOUWENSE: Middleburg was a town from about, uh, twenty-five hundred, maybe more. I don't know. You know, I, it was like, uh, like Ocala is here.

LEVINE: Ocala, uh-huh.

BOUWENSE: That's about the same size, as I would say.

LEVINE: And what did people do in that town? Was there an industry?

BOUWENSE: Well, the factories, they had different factories and (?) the house, and, uh, markets and stuff like that, and stores. You know, whatever make a village, whatever make up a village.

LEVINE: Was there farming around?

BOUWENSE: Oh, yes, plenty of farming. Uh, what we call farm, boer, B-O-E-R, that's farmers over there, and they used to come to town every Thursday with their vegetables and butter and eggs and stuff like that.

LEVINE: Do you remember the market days?

BOUWENSE: Oh, yes. And they still have it on a Thursday, on the marketplace that's over by the courthouse.

LEVINE: Did you ever, uh, buy things at the market?

BOUWENSE: I did. My father had a stall there, like they have here at the flea markets, you know, the different stalls. He used to have one, and he sold postcards, cigars, cigarettes and stuff like that.

LEVINE: Did he actually roll the cigars?

BOUWENSE: No, no, no, no.

LEVINE: He bought them from someplace and sold them to people?

BOUWENSE: Yeah. Well, he had the cigar store. He sold pipes and everything else like that, too, and tobacco and all that. Because it was a cigar store, you know what I mean? That's all they sell is cigarettes, cigars, tobacco and pipes and all that stuff.

LEVINE: Were people smoking very much?

BOUWENSE: Oh, yeah, they smoked a lot.

LEVINE: Did the women smoke when you were a boy?

BOUWENSE: I didn't see that, no. I didn't. Uh, I wouldn't say that they were smoking, because I didn't see any of them smoke.

LEVINE: What was . . .

BOUWENSE: But that was, well, seventy, seventy years ago. (he laughs) What

they do today, I don't know.

LEVINE: Yeah. Um, was, was smoking like an activity? I mean, would men sit around after dinner?

BOUWENSE: Yeah. After dinner or, uh, like Sunday they'd be sitting outside on the porch or on the stoop and, you know, talk to people as they went by and stuff like that, have a pipe in their mouth. And on the farm they have a pipe in their mouth. Yeah.

LEVINE: Tell me about going to school. What was school like for you in The Netherlands?

BOUWENSE: Well, school, I was to, I went to the first, uh, oh, private school. I went to a private school because my father had the cigar store and, of course, we were more than workers. We were, you know, merchants. And I went to the private school. And in the private school you learn Dutch, and arithmetic and all that. But in the fourth grade you started getting French, like the door, the window and stuff like that, small centers, you know what I mean. Then if you went to the fifth grade, then you had Dutch, French and either German or English. And the reason why that is because you've got to learn a lot of languages over there, it's because you have so many, the Dutch had so many colonies at that time, you know what I mean. And since they were a seafaring nation, you had to learn all these, so that in case you got on board of a ship as a sailor, you knew where you could talk the language, see.

LEVINE: So what did you study? You studied French?

BOUWENSE: I started to learn French, yes. But then my mother died and, uh, Pop lost the cigar winkel, as they call it, the cigar store, and, uh, then I was taken out of that school and I was put into public school. And I stayed there till the sixth grade.

LEVINE: Now, how was the public school different from the private school?

BOUWENSE: Well, you don't get the foreign language so much. You get that when you go to high school and stuff like that. But, uh, you stay in the elementary school, as I would call a public school, and then you go to the *Arbeidsschool*, which is a vocational school, see.

LEVINE: Did you do that?

BOUWENSE: No, I didn't. I was, when my father came, when my father left, uh, we moved from different places. Then when my father left to come to this country, my brother was put in a foster home and I was put in the orphanage because I was older. I was put in the orphanage. And, uh, up to 1923.

LEVINE: When did your father leave The Netherlands?

BOUWENSE: About four years before I did, so that would be right after the war in 1919, somewhere around that time, in 1920. I don't know exactly.

LEVINE: So how old were you when your mother died?

BOUWENSE: I was eight, and my brother was, uh, well, he's five years younger than I am, so he'll be three.

LEVINE: Yeah. Now, what did your mother die of?

BOUWENSE: That I never found out. Uh, I never . . .

LEVINE: Was she sick a long time?

BOUWENSE: No. But she used to have, I've seen her take the bromo seltzer and stuff like that. And I don't know what she was taking it for, so I don't, you know, uh, when you're a kid you don't ask questions.

LEVINE: Yeah. Do you remember anything about the medical care? Was there folk medicine, or how did people . . .

BOUWENSE: That I don't know. Uh, I've got to be honest with you, I don't know nothing about that because, uh, later on when I went back to Holland, oh, in '75, I was with my cousin then, he was what they call a pensioner. He was retired. And, uh, he, uh, he used to go to the drugstore, the apotheeke, as they called it over there. Uh, he'd go to the drugstore, and he gets his medicine, and all he had to do was sign for it. He went to the hospital for treatment, and all he had to do was sign for it, so I don't know. But I remember hearing that when I was a youngster, uh, my father used to pay ten cents a week for me and my brother, like

insurance, you know. And then as you grow older, they increase that, so you have to, say, pay twenty-five cents every week. So, I remember that.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Were you a religious family?

BOUWENSE: Well, yes. We were a religious family. My father was a religious man, yep. I can say that.

LEVINE: What religion?

BOUWENSE: Protestant, yeah.

LEVINE: How did your father observe his religion?

BOUWENSE: (he laughs) I don't want to talk about that. (he laughs) Because, uh . . .

LEVINE: Oh, wait. We'll pause here for a second.

BOUWENSE: All right. (break in tape) Yeah, so . . .

LEVINE: That's a sore point, then.

BOUWENSE: To me it is a sore point because, well, Pop used to read the Bible after supper, and he'd read a whole chapter, and if you went (he imitates snoring) he would (?). If that was over, you'd get another one. So . . .

(he laughs)

LEVINE: Oh. So he was, uh, uh-huh, uh-huh.

BOUWENSE: You see what I mean? That was a sore spot on my part.

LEVINE: Yes. Well, did you have to go to church a lot?

BOUWENSE: Just on Sundays, Sunday school, and when I was small Sunday school, and when I got bigger then I went to, uh, to the church with my father.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. How about your mother? Was she religious?

BOUWENSE: Yes. She was religious.

LEVINE: Um, what was your mother's name, and her maiden name, if you can remember?

BOUWENSE: Oh, yeah. Johanna was her first name, and Steutel was the family name.

LEVINE: How did you spell that?

BOUWENSE: S-T-E-U-T-E-L. Steutel.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And your father's name?

BOUWENSE: Uh, Albert Wilhelm Bouwense. He was born in over in Vlissing.
Harlem, in Zeeland.

LEVINE: In New Zealand?

BOUWENSE: In Zeeland.

LEVINE: Oh, Zeaeand. Could you spell the name of the town? F-L-I . . .

BOUWENSE: No. V-L, Vlissing. V-L-I-S-S-I-N-G.

LEVINE: Okay. And did your mother and father have parents who were alive?
Did you have grandparents?

BOUWENSE: That is what I'm going to do this year if everything goes all right. I'm
going over to Haarlem, and going to look up the family tree.

LEVINE: Do you remember grandparents at all?

BOUWENSE: I remember some but, I mean, I didn't see them very often, so I mean, I
ain't got much of a recollection of them.

LEVINE: How about aunts and uncles?

BOUWENSE: Oh, I had uncles, and they came down the house every, say, around
Christmas time or, you know, on, uh, New Year's and stuff like that. But
that's all you seen them. Unless you're going against them in town, you

know.

LEVINE: Do you remember how you celebrated Christmas?

BOUWENSE: Yeah. Uh, on December 5th, we had St. Nicholas, Santa Claus day. And, uh, then they had a fellow that dressed up like a bishop, and he had a helper, a black boy. They called him Szwarte Piet. And then you got presents and candy and stuff like that on December 5th. Then December, uh, 25th and 26th, that was Kerst Daag. That was Christmas.

LEVINE: How do you spell kerst

BOUWENSE: K-E-R-S-T. Yeah. K-E-R-S-T, D-A-A-G. G. (he laughs)

LEVINE: G, uh-huh. And, um . . .

BOUWENSE: Because, uh, what you call, in Dutch the G is J, you know. It's hard, if you start spelling, that it don't come out right.

LEVINE: Well, now, were there any other holidays that you celebrated when you were in The Netherlands?

BOUWENSE: Well, they had the queen's birthday and stuff like that. And then, uh, during the summer there was another day that they, uh, run races and stuff like, like for the fairs, you know, like that. And that's about all. I mean, mostly workers over there.

LEVINE: Did you ever, uh, take part in any of those, uh . . .

BOUWENSE: Yeah, uh, yeah. When I was young I start doing gymnastics and stuff like that, to do it on that day, on the market, they have a platform there that the boys and girls done gymnastics over there.

LEVINE: So you competed?

BOUWENSE: Yeah, we competed. And, uh, you know, it was more for show than it was for, uh, competing or anything.

LEVINE: I see. Uh-huh. Yeah. So did you get good at that? Was that something you . . .

BOUWENSE: Yeah, I was getting good at that until I came over here. And then, of course, I was knocked in a cocked hat.

LEVINE: Well, tell me what, did you have chores as a boy when you were still over there? Did you have certain jobs that you . . .

BOUWENSE: When I was in the orphanage, yes. I got chores.

LEVINE: What did you have to do?

BOUWENSE: I had to polish the shoes and, what you call, peel potatoes and stuff like that. When the beans come in you had to, they made, uh, pickled

beans, what they call *sneeboon*.

LEVINE: Could you spell it?

BOUWENSE: S-N-E-E-B-O-O-N, *Sneeboon*.

LEVINE: And that was pickled?

BOUWENSE: Yeah. They do it just like they do sauerkraut. And, uh, that was for the winter. And then, of course, they had sauerkraut and beans in the orphanage. And then, uh, if I had to stay there longer, I left there when I was thirteen. If I had to stay there till fifteen, then they put me in the vocational school, the Arbeids School, as they call it. It's a vocational school. There you learn how to be a carpenter or a tinsmith or anything like that.

LEVINE: Did you have in mind what you wanted?

BOUWENSE: Well, I was going in for tinsmith but, I mean, I never got that far.

LEVINE: Well, do you remember your father telling you that you were going to have to go into the orphanage, and your brother was going to have to go . . .

BOUWENSE: No, no, no, no. When he left, he left us at a certain house, and then when they got tired of us they put us in, the town put us in, Al, they put my brother Al in a foster home, and they put me in the orphanage

home, because I didn't have no family.

LEVINE: So what was it like? Did it take a lot of getting used to to be in the orphanage?

BOUWENSE: Oh, well, it was kind of awkward, I would say, because, I mean, uh, I was all alone until I got with the other boys, and then I started going to school with them. Then, of course, you know, you get acquainted, and then it was all right. Then at night, of course, I was a joker, and I started making, then we all went to bed, us boys had the dormitory. We went to bed, I got them laughing, of course, and then, of course, I was in trouble.

LEVINE: What happened when you got in trouble?

BOUWENSE: Then they take your pillow away from you. And up to today I can't sleep with a pillow. (they laugh)

LEVINE: So did you have a best friend there?

BOUWENSE: Well, I had a couple of friends there, but I didn't keep in touch with them.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything about being in the orphanage that was enjoyable?

BOUWENSE: Well, I went to school. I went, from the orphanage I went to school, and

from school I went back to the orphanage. I mean, I didn't have much playing around.

LEVINE: Did you do gymnastics when you were in the orphanage?

BOUWENSE: No.

LEVINE: So, um, let's see. Did you see your brother after when you were in the orphanage and he was in the foster home?

BOUWENSE: No, not often.

LEVINE: No. So when you, how was it decided that you would come to the United States?

BOUWENSE: My father sent for me, for me and my brother. He was over here.

LEVINE: Right.

BOUWENSE: He sent over for my stepmother first. Then they saved their money, and then they sent for my brother and I.

LEVINE: Did you know your stepmother when you were still in The Netherlands?

BOUWENSE: Yeah. I met her, she was a refugee from Belgium, from the First World War. And that's how we met, and when I came over here, of course, it was home sweet home again.

LEVINE: Yeah. So did you ever live with your stepmother and father when you were still in The Netherlands?

BOUWENSE: Yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah. After your mother died . . .

BOUWENSE: Yeah.

LEVINE: Then there was a period of time when you stayed with somebody else, and then you stayed with your father and stepmother, or . . .

BOUWENSE: No. I came from the orphanage. My father sent money over, and there was a guardian on board ship that took care of my brother and I. And, uh, then when they came over here, then, uh, my father came over to Ellis Island, got my brother, because I couldn't go on account of that I had scars on the eyeballs, and they were not going to leave me go. But then in a week's time they saw that there was no change, or something like that. And then my father came over and got me.

LEVINE: I see. Well, um, do you remember leaving The Netherlands to come on the, to go on the boat, to come here?

BOUWENSE: Yeah.

LEVINE: What was that like?

BOUWENSE: Well, the people that was guardian on the boat, they came over and got me and my brother and all four of us went over to Rotterdam, and then we got on the boat.

LEVINE: Was that the first time you had seen your brother in a long time?

BOUWENSE: Well, I saw him about once a month. You know, when we went to school or something like that, I'd see him.

LEVINE: He was at the same school you were at, you went to?

BOUWENSE: No, he went onto another school, but we came out about the same time, say, three o'clock in the afternoon, and I run into him, you know.

LEVINE: So, um, did you write to your father? Did you have any letters from your father telling you what it was like in America, and things like that?

BOUWENSE: No, no, I haven't. I haven't. Nothing like that, no.

LEVINE: I mean, did you, had you heard from him at that time?

BOUWENSE: Well, a postcard. That's about all.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So what did you expect? Do you know what you thought when you were coming?

BOUWENSE: Well, I'll tell you, I didn't know what to expect, because the reason, was (?) a caution, and everybody was seasick. And, of course, us kids, it didn't bother us. We had ice cream coming out of the ears, I guess.
(he laughs)

LEVINE: Now, where did you leave from?

BOUWENSE: Rotterdam.

LEVINE: Rotterdam. And what's the name of the ship?

BOUWENSE: The New Amsterdam?

LEVINE: And how was that? How . . .

BOUWENSE: Well, I was, we were on, we were steerage, that is, on the tail end of the boat. And, uh, you only had a certain amount of area that you could walk around on. But, uh, when everybody was sick, we had pretty near the run of the whole boat. (they laugh)

LEVINE: You mean the deck, the deck part?

BOUWENSE: Yeah.

LEVINE: The people were down in the, in the hold of the ship, in beds?

BOUWENSE: I guess so. (he laughs) I didn't see nobody. The only thing is I saw

the sailors and deckhands and stuff like that. And, of course, when they see you, they want to give you something, you know. Well, I remember one man give me a quarter. That's what I had when I came to this country, a quarter in my pocket that the man give me.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Was this a deck, a deckhand?

BOUWENSE: No. He was a, a passenger that, uh, was on board ship.

LEVINE: So you weren't seasick?

BOUWENSE: No.

LEVINE: You were up on the deck?

BOUWENSE: Yeah. My brother and I and other kids, it didn't bother us.

LEVINE: So did you have . . .

BOUWENSE: Even today it don't bother me, (?).

LEVINE: Did you ever think of being a sailor?

BOUWENSE: No.

LEVINE: Being on ship?

BOUWENSE: No. I never had to give that a thought because, uh, my father was a merchant, you know what I mean. And I figured we were going to keep doing that.

LEVINE: Okay. So, um, when you got to the New York Harbor, do you remember the ship coming into the New York Harbor?

BOUWENSE: Yep. It was a little foggy, and then when the fog lift, we seen the Statue of Liberty.

LEVINE: Did you know what it was?

BOUWENSE: Well, I heard a lot about it, so I knew what it was, you know. You hear aboard ship, you know. And then, of course, when they seen it, everybody went to the railing, you know.

LEVINE: Where were people doing when they first saw the Statue?

BOUWENSE: Well, some were crying, some were worried. They didn't know what was going to happen. I don't know what their thoughts were, because all I knew is that my father was here and he was going to pick me up and this and that and the other. And the outcome of the thing was, he came to get me, but, uh, immigration board wouldn't let me go on account of I had scars on the eyeballs.

LEVINE: Did you know you had scars on your eyeballs when you were on the ship?

BOUWENSE: I didn't know at that, I didn't know it at that time, but I found out later why. I had the measles, and they didn't keep me in a dark room. And I know my eyes used to get all crusted over, and that's what done it. So, I know what it is. Even today the doctors look at my eyes and they're amazed that I can see. As a matter of fact, I can read the stock quotation today without glasses.

LEVINE: That's wonderful. Well, um, so when you got to Ellis Island, your father came and took your brother.

BOUWENSE: Right.

LEVINE: Did you see your father at that time?

BOUWENSE: Yeah, I saw my father at that time.

LEVINE: And how was that, seeing your father after that long period of time?

BOUWENSE: Hey, you know, we hugged one another and stuff like that. And, uh, of course, it was kind of tearful separation, and when he took my brother, and I was left. And I was with people that didn't understand me. I couldn't talk English. There were hardly any Dutch left. And . . .

LEVINE: Did you understand what was happening? Did you understand that it was . . .

BOUWENSE: Well, in a way I did, and in a way I didn't, because I was afraid they was going to send me back, see. And that'll take all the pleasure out of anything.

LEVINE: So you were in the hospital then?

BOUWENSE: Yeah.

LEVINE: And how were you treated?

BOUWENSE: Oh, I was treated, you got treated all right. I didn't have no complaints about that. But I was a youngster and, uh, nobody to talk to, don't know what to do, you know what I mean. If they tell you to go over there, you couldn't understand the language, so you didn't go over there, they just had to push you.

LEVINE: Yeah. So the whole week that you were there, you weren't able to talk Dutch to anyone?

BOUWENSE: No. They were Poles and Germans and stuff like that. The Germans could understand me a little bit, like they say (Dutch). A little bit. So, and then after that, then when my pop got me, then he brought me, from Ellis Island he brought me over to Farmingdale, on Long Island.

LEVINE: Do you remember leaving Ellis Island with your father?

BOUWENSE: Yeah. I left on the ferry boat. I remember that.

LEVINE: And then how did you go after you left Battery Park?

BOUWENSE: I got the first subway train in my life at that time. I was scared to death, because I didn't know what it was. And, uh, then when we got to Jamaica, and then we had to transfer to the regular passenger train, and . . .

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

BOUWENSE: And, of course, I could talk then, because my father could understand me, you know what I mean. But if I say something, he said, "You shouldn't say that. That's a bad word over here." (they laugh) So, uh, you know, like that. I mean, because you say it in Dutch, it don't mean nothing. Like fox. I mean, fussen over there is fussen. And then Pop said, "Fussen, don't say that. That's fox, and that's no good. That's not a nice word." So, I mean, that' show he treated me, you know.

LEVINE: So you switched in Jamaica to the passenger train to Long Island.

BOUWENSE: Yeah.

LEVINE: And then do you remember getting off the train and going to where you were going to live?

BOUWENSE: Well, we had quite a walk from the station to, in back of the, uh, silk dye factory over in Farmingdale. It ain't there no more. But Pop bought a

small place over there in the woods, I remember that. And, uh, he took me there. And there's where my stepmother and my stepbrother and my stepsister, she was only about two, three years old when I met her. And, now, my other sister was still the baby. She was only a baby. So . . .

LEVINE: Do you remember your stepmother's name?

BOUWENSE: Uh, I don't know all her name. Her name was, uh, Marietta, Theresa. I don't know what her last name was.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And, and, so your brother Al was there?

BOUWENSE: Yeah.

LEVINE: And your stepmother had two children?

BOUWENSE: Three.

LEVINE: Three other children.

BOUWENSE: Yeah. Richie, that's my stepbrother, and my stepsister Marietta, and my stepsister Edie.

LEVINE: So were you closest to any particular member of the family?

BOUWENSE: Well, Albert, my brother that came over, he was the closest, you know

what I mean. But, uh, we were all, right now we're all one happy family.

LEVINE: Good. So was this the first time you met your stepmother, when you got to Farmingdale?

BOUWENSE: No.

LEVINE: You knew her from, from The Netherlands.

BOUWENSE: From Holland, yeah.

LEVINE: Okay. Let's see. Uh, so you got here. Now, um, did you go to school?

BOUWENSE: Yeah. And I will never forget the first day I went to school, and there was a guy, a fellow by the name of, uh, Doty [ph], Charlie Doty [ph]. And he said, "When they ask you for your name, say Son of a Bitch." (he laughs) So, you know, I was in trouble right then and there.

LEVINE: So, so, um, then what? How was it for you learning English?

BOUWENSE: Well, it was, uh, hard in a way, and yet it was easy, because when I got home, Pop talked English, you know. And then he explained, this wood is this, and that wood is that, and, you know, like that. And now my brother Richie, who knew Dutch and English, he went to school, so he helped me translate things. So it's all right. It was all right. Even today, when I was working in the university here in New York as a maintenance man, I had to do work for the professors, and the fellow

that was my foreman, he was a *Plat Duitser* (low German)

LEVINE: *A Plat Duitser ?*

BOUWENSE: Yeah, a *Plat Duitser* . He was from Hamburg and Aachen [ph] and all that, up in the Baltic Sea section there. That's what they call *Plat Duitser* . And he could understand me, and I could understand him. If he talked *Plat Duits* to me, and if I talked Dutch to him, he could understand me. So the (?) come in, and they hand us, uh, stuff in millimeters. I look at it, it's seven millimeters. Oh, that's three-and-a-half inches. How can you transfer the millimeters into, uh, inches that quick? I said, "Well, heck." I kept the whole smear, I kept the whole smear in school. I had millimeters, centimeters, decimeter, hectometers, kilometers. I had the whole smear, see what I mean? And I had, when I learned over, when I came here, I had to learn to transfer millimeters into inches, and all that. Now when I'm, say, sixty years old, they hand me the stuff that I learned in school. So it was easy for me.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So you remembered everything.

BOUWENSE: Oh, yes.

LEVINE: Well, okay. So, um, let's see. You went to school, and did you start out in the first grade all over again, or were you put in a, when you couldn't speak English, when you first came?

BOUWENSE: I was in the sixth grade when I came over, and they put me in the sixth grade over here. And I was all right in arithmetic and all that, but history and English, that was my worst subject. But they took, they took that in consideration, and I was all right.

LEVINE: Did you have teachers who were helpful to you?

BOUWENSE: No. I had, what you call it, I had other kids, you know, uh, like I remember one girl, she was a German, and she helped me with the English language. She must have been *Plat Duitser*, because she could talk to me.

LEVINE: So how long did you stay in school, then?

BOUWENSE: Well, about, uh, three months. (they laugh)

LEVINE: And why did you leave?

BOUWENSE: Well, I had an argument with my father, and he said, "There's the door." And I went out that door. And the next time they picked me up, I was in Hoboken. I was going to go back to Holland. I said, "If you don't like me here, I'm going back. (he laughs)

LEVINE: So what happened?

BOUWENSE: Well, they picked me up and brought me back, of course.

LEVINE: Who picked you up?

BOUWENSE: The detectives.

LEVINE: Oh, he had, he had people look for you?

BOUWENSE: Look, I was a kid thirteen years old, and going looking for a job as a cabin boy to go back to Holland. I mean, that's how come I was picked up. I don't know what happened. (he laughs)

LEVINE: So you went back home, and then what?

BOUWENSE: Well, then I got in trouble again, and, uh, then they put me on, social worker over there in Farmingdale, he put me in touch with somebody in Mineola, Mr. Goldberg over there. And, uh, he put me on a farm over there in Merrick. There's where I learned to milk cows, clean stables and stuff like that, for my room and board. And then, uh, I came there Easter time. And at, what you call it, at Thanksgiving, they had some company come from New York, Brooklyn, I think it was, and they brought kids with them, and I was cleaning the stable, and they were talking to me, and I couldn't understand them, and they hit me. And I that was the wrong thing to do. I sailed them to Bodum [ph]. And, of course, I was incorrigible. I couldn't be bothered. So then they put me in the foster home for a week, and then Mr. Goldberg from, social worker from Mineola, they put me on a farm in Oceanside, and I stayed there for ten years.

LEVINE: Was this also a, uh, dairy farm?

BOUWENSE: Dairy, yeah. I had to milk cows in the morning before I went to school, and after school I had to feed them and milk cows again at night.

LEVINE: So did you like that work?

BOUWENSE: Well, that's the best I knew how. Yeah. I, I didn't, then after that I (?), I done all kinds of work. Worked on a carnival.

LEVINE: What'd you do on the carnival?

BOUWENSE: Barker. "Hurry, hurry, hurry. Come and see the last show. The last show's about to begin. (?) charge a dollar, a dollar, a half-dollar, or a quarter, just one thin dime, one thin dime. Who's the first customer?" (he laughs) "Come and see Yo-Yo, the dog-faced boy. He walks, talks and crawls on his belly like a reptile. Hey there, lady, don't you feed the elephant peanuts."

LEVINE: (she laughs) How long did you do that?

BOUWENSE: Oh, I done it for a summer, I guess.

LEVINE: And then what, what other kinds of things?

BOUWENSE: Well, I'd done all kinds of work. I'd even die for a living.

LEVINE: You'd die?

BOUWENSE: I'd die for a living.

LEVINE: How'd you do, what'd you do?

BOUWENSE: A (?). (they laugh)

LEVINE: Yeah. So, so, um, in the meantime, you were just traveling around, doing these different jobs?

BOUWENSE: Yeah. I mean, I was ten years at the farm, and I got tired of it, and I wanted to see the country. And I, you know, it meant bumming around. And got a job here and there. That's how we got around. And wherever I go I was broke. The people, Mr. Hendrickson [ph], in Oceanside, I always could come back, and he'd . . .

LEVINE: To the farm.

BOUWENSE: At the farm. And, you know, and work on the farm.

LEVINE: Well, were they like parents to you, the Hendricksons?

BOUWENSE: No. They were like, uh, what would you . . .

LEVINE: An employee?

BOUWENSE: Foster home, you know, foster parents. That's, you know, because they took me in at thirteen, and I left when I was nineteen, something like that, you know. Nineteen, twenty, somewheres in there.

LEVINE: But they were kind to you?

BOUWENSE: Oh, yes, very kind people.

LEVINE: So it wasn't a bad experience.

BOUWENSE: Oh, no. I had a, I didn't have a very good childhood, as you may say, because there was always something happening to me. But I made out all right. As you see, I made out all right.

LEVINE: Good. Well, so, um, let's see. So you, when you left the farm, then you traveled around, and you did different kinds of jobs.

BOUWENSE: Yeah.

LEVINE: And then did you ever settle in with any particular job?

BOUWENSE: No.

LEVINE: No? Just doing different things.

BOUWENSE: Oh, mostly maintenance work. I liked that, because I liked to work on my hands.

LEVINE: And you can fix things, uh-huh. Yeah.

BOUWENSE: Yeah. You see, my workshop over there, I got all kinds of tools in there.

LEVINE: Yeah? So, um, how did you meet your wife?

BOUWENSE: Well, I was, I was back home again, and, uh, you know, I was working in the silk mill, and she was going to school, and I was staying at, I met a fellow who had a gas station, and I was over there one night, and she came in, and I asked for a date, and she says no, and then a couple of days later I met her again. And she said, "All right." And she give me, what you call, a vague idea where she lived. And, uh, she figured I couldn't find it, but she didn't know I was the milkman. So I found the place all right. so . . .

LEVINE: When you say you were back home, you were back home living with your father?

BOUWENSE: Yeah. After traveling around like that, you know what I mean, I got back home again.

LEVINE: So then did you court your wife for a long time?

BOUWENSE: Nine months.

LEVINE: And tell me your wife's name and maiden name.

BOUWENSE: Uh, she has no middle name. It's just Elizabeth Elbert, her maiden name was.

LEVINE: E-L-B-E-R-T?

BOUWENSE: Yeah.

LEVINE: And then did you have children?

BOUWENSE: I got one. After that I lost the combination. (he laughs)

LEVINE: What's your child's name?

BOUWENSE: The same as mine, Adolph, but everybody calls him Al. As a matter of fact, everybody calls me Sparky, because when I was on the farm, uh, the funnies, the Barney Kuger and Spark Plug was in The American Journal. And when I was working at the farm, when I first come there, the boss's brother, he had a date, and I came with two pails of milk out of the barn to go to the milk house to cool them down, and I was a slowpoke, he, "Come on, Spark Plug," and Sparky stuck after that. So that's how I got the name Sparky. Everybody asked me, "Well, you on a submarine? Were you on a navy vessel or something, because you're called Sparky?" Nope, a long story. (he laughs)

LEVINE: So, um, what would you say that you've done that you're most proud

of?

BOUWENSE: Well, getting married, and work hard. I work hard. I worked on a factory, and then I went out, and after work was done and (?), and making lawns and stuff like that. And, to get ahead. So, I think I done all right.

LEVINE: Yeah. Well, um, do you think being born in The Netherlands and coming here when you were thirteen, do you think that had a big influence on the kind of person you are?

BOUWENSE: I think so. Because, uh, over in Holland everybody is what they call, uh, frugal. And, of course, when I came here, I was frugal, too. I even get kidded about that.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So that's one of the characteristics that's Dutch that you still have, huh? Yeah. Is there anything else about you that you would say, either customs, or quality of life?

BOUWENSE: Well, I still got my wooden shoes. I got them standing there.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh. I didn't see them. But you'll have to show me later, because you're hooked. (referring to the microphone) You've got this on.

BOUWENSE: I see. (he laughs)

LEVINE: When we get finished, you can tell me. So are you proud of your Dutch heritage?

BOUWENSE: Oh, sure. Why not? It's a clean country. Sometimes you see, everything is the same here. And, uh, so it was a good, a good upbringing I had, I would say.

LEVINE: Was your, is your wife also from Holland?

BOUWENSE: No. She was born in Hempstead, on Long Island. She never was off Long Island till she met me. The first time I took her out on a Sunday, and she said something, she wanted to see a covered bridge, and I knew where there was one up in New York State, and I took her over there.

LEVINE: Um, let's see. Is . . .

BOUWENSE: We're only married, we're married now fifty-three years. So . . .

LEVINE: How is this phase of your life, in your retirement?

BOUWENSE: Every day is Sunday. I work in the morning, and in the afternoon I take a shower and get cleaned up and take it easy.

LEVINE: When you say you work, what do you do?

BOUWENSE: I work on the place here. Uh, what you call it, putting down a walk over

there, and weed. Right now I got to do a lot of weeding, because I was working on something else. And, uh, I got in back of the shade shed, I got about fifty, uh, palm trees, like that, cabbage palms, seedlings. They're only that big, but now I'm going to put them on the other lot.

LEVINE: So when, uh, when did you retire from actually doing (?).

BOUWENSE: '75. I was sixty-five when I, around that time, I retired. So, I worked hard all my life, so I, I think it's time that I stopped.

LEVINE: So then did you stay on Long Island for a while before you moved down here?

BOUWENSE: Yeah. I had a place in Long Island. I had ten acres there. And, uh, I sold that, and then I, with the money I got out of that, I bought this place.

LEVINE: Good. So you're pleased to be in Florida?

BOUWENSE: Oh, yeah, yeah. I wouldn't go back to, uh, to New York, to the snow. They can have it.

LEVINE: Well, now, did you visit Ellis Island? Is that how you got this far?

BOUWENSE: Yeah. Well, what you call it, when they started, uh, to restore the Statue of Liberty, I got a letter asking for a donation. And I donated a hundred dollars, and that's how they got my name. Now, when they

started on Ellis Island, of course, I donated for that, too.

LEVINE: So your name's on the Wall of Honor?

BOUWENSE: Yeah.

LEVINE: How was it for you to go back there and see it now?

BOUWENSE: Fine. My grandson saw it, too. He went with me, and he seen it.

LEVINE: So do you have one grandchild?

BOUWENSE: No.

LEVINE: How many grandchildren?

BOUWENSE: I got three grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren.

LEVINE: Oh.

BOUWENSE: And my name is up on the moon, too.

LEVINE: It is?

BOUWENSE: Yeah. My brother worked for Grumman on the LEM, and when they shot it, when they went up to the moon they had a plaque for everybody that worked on the LEM, and that was on the LEM, and they left it up

there.

LEVINE: Huh. This is your younger brother, Al?

BOUWENSE: No, stepbrother. He's my brother just the same.

LEVINE: Just the same, uh-huh. Okay. Well, is there anything else you can think of about life in The Netherlands, anything else you remember that we haven't talked about?

BOUWENSE: No. I think we have the whole long smear from the time I was born to the time now. (he laughs)

LEVINE: Okay, okay. Well, I want to thank you very much. You told a very interesting story. It's been a pleasure to talk with you about it. And, as I mentioned, when I get back to Ellis Island, I'll send you a copy of the tape, and then this will be at Ellis Island, and people can come and listen to what your experience was coming here.

BOUWENSE: That would be nice.

LEVINE: Good. Okay, thanks.

BOUWENSE: I hope it got a lot of good jokes in it.

LEVINE: Yeah, you do, you do. Okay. This is Janet Levine. I'm talking with Adolph Albert Bouwense, Sr., who is in, and we're in his home in

EI-434/BOUWENSE

Inverness, Florida, and it's President's Day, February 21, 1994, and this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, and I'm signing off.