

EI-631

AGNES VANDER BAAN

BIRTHDATE: APRIL 5, 1907

INTERVIEW DATE: 1995

AGE AT TIME OF INTERVIEW: 88

RUNNING TIME: 1:00:18

INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.

RECORDING ENGINEER:

INTERVIEW LOCATION: WHITINSVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS

TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: TAPESCRIBE

TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY:

NETHERLANDS, 1914

AGE: 7

SHIP:

PORT:

RESIDENCES:

- **THE NETHERLANDS: YLST, FRIESLAND**
- **THE US: WHITINSVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS**

LEVINE: I'm here in Whitinsville, Massachusetts, with Agnes Vander Baan, who came from the Netherlands in 1914, when she was seven years old. She's now eighty-eight years old at the time of this interview, and I want to say I'm delighted to be here, and I'm so happy that I found you, and that I'm able to talk with you for this Ellis Island tape.

VANDER BAAN: Thank you.

LEVINE: You're welcome. If you would start, Agnes, at the beginning, with giving your birth date, for the tape. You're birth date.

VANDER BAAN: When I was born, you mean? April 5th, 1907.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And where in the Netherlands were you born?

VANDER BAAN: In Ylst, Friesland.

LEVINE: Okay, and you spell that?

VANDER BAAN: Y-L-S-T.

LEVINE: Okay, and you lived in Ylst--?

VANDER BAAN: Ylst all of the time that I was in Holland. We never moved out of that town.

LEVINE: Okay, what do you remember about the town?

VANDER BAAN: Well, I remember it had—the streets were always very clean. They were always scrubbed, every day, practically. Everybody scrubbed in front of their house. They were brick.

LEVINE: They scrubbed on their hands and knees?

VANDER BAAN: No, they had heavy brooms, or something. They made the brooms out of branches of trees that grew on the street. And my father worked for the city, at one time, towards the last, when I was old enough to remember. He had other jobs before that, but when I was old enough to remember, he was working for the city. And once a year, these trees—and I can show you in this book what they looked like. They were called lindebaumen, which is linde, is the name of it, and baumen means trees. And they were really quite attractive, but they were kept trimmed, like you would trim shrubs. But they had this big contraption that they had to climb up on, and with like a sword, it looked like, that they trimmed these trees all off, so that they were—no branches sticking out over the street. They were all on the side of the street. And they really looked beautiful. You have to see it to realize what they looked like. And the houses were all right close to the street. There was really no sidewalk to speak of, because all they had there was horses and wagons, and then the boats in the canal, which ran right through the middle of the town! A big canal ran right through the middle of the town.

LEVINE: Now you started to say about—people cleaned the streets with those--?

VANDER BAAN: Right, they were paved with brick, as you would put in a brick walk. And they would clean the streets off. You know, with animals running through and everything else, they were kept very clean. And you would clean in front of your own house. See what I mean?

LEVINE: So you lived in one of those houses?

EI-631/VANDERBAAN

VANDER BAAN: Oh sure, on the side of the street, you know.

LEVINE: And what—can you describe the house?

VANDER BAAN: Well, I can remember, we didn't have central heating or anything like that. And we had kerosene lamps, like they had out here. But I can remember we had one big room in which we lived, and then we didn't have bedrooms. The beds were built into the wall! And then they'd have curtains to draw them, and through the day they'd shut the doors that they'd close. And we all had feather beds, just like they do in a lot of foreign countries. I can remember that very well.

LEVINE: Could you describe that room, in which the beds were built in the wall?

VANDER BAAN: A big room. We didn't have any sink, or anything like that. I don't remember too much about my mother—my parents carried the water in, I remember that. And we had quite a few windows. The last house we lived in, that I can remember, across the front of the house, so we had plenty of light. And we had one great, big cabinet with doors that opened up, and all our clothes hung in that. It reached almost to the ceiling; the top had shelves, and all our clothes were in that cabinet. And I had a sister older than I, and I brother older than I was. So there were five of us in the family.

LEVINE: What was your father's name?

VANDER BAAN: Rimmert was the Dutch pronunciation it. It's R-I-M-M-E-R-T, and it was—they translated it into Raymond in this country when we came out here.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, and your mother's name?

VANDER BAAN: Diewka. I don't even know how they spelled that, but out here they called her Dora.

LEVINE: Would you just make a guess at the spelling? You could probably guess—

VANDER BAAN: I think it was D-I-E-W-K, and I think there was an E or an A at the end of it, but I'm not positive. You see, it's so many years ago, and she never went by that name here.

LEVINE: Right. Now what was your mother's maiden name, do you know?

VANDER BAAN: DeBruin, Capital D-E, Capital B-R-U-I-N. That was DeBruin.

- LEVINE: And what was your father like? Can you describe him, like when you were a little girl, when you were about seven years old, when you were coming here?
- VANDER BAAN: He was pretty special to me, because he was—he was very fussy about our bringing up.
- LEVINE: In what way?
- VANDER BAAN: He was a strict Christian man that lived by the Bible. And he used to always—he was a great reader, as I am, too. I like—you see a lot of books around. I like to read, too. And he used to have me on his knee, and read to me, in his spare time, and often times nights before going to bed. And then he would also read Bible stories to me before I went to bed. This was in the old country already, and then of course that continued after we came to this country. And very much for children going to Christian school. We had a Christian school there; I went one year. And then school started, let's see, I think there was one month that we had off, but it started in April, and would go through the winter, and then we'd have one month off, about four weeks, that we had vacation. And then you would be advanced to the next grade. And we came here in May, and I had just in March finished the first grade, and I was in the second grade one month. So I can remember all that.
- LEVINE: What do you remember about the school?
- VANDER BAAN: Well, you know, they dressed different there than we do here.
- LEVINE: Describe how they dressed there, when you were—
- VANDER BAAN: Well, we always wore dark dresses, to a certain extent, but we always wore a white apron over it. And then every day my mother would give me a clean apron if it needed, you know. And we wore homemade woolen knitted stockings, and wooden shoes.
- LEVINE: Now was this—this dress with the apron, that was because you went to the Christian school?
- VANDER BAAN: No, no. No, that had nothing to do with that. It was the type of dress that was common there. It was not a uniform, no.
- LEVINE: And did you knit? Did you knit stockings, too?

VANDER BAAN: I learned to knit when I was a little girl, because when we came to this country when I was seven years old, I knew how to knit socks. I don't know now how I ever did it. But why I remember it: the only relatives we had here in this country were my mother's aunt and her family. She was already a widow. She was an elderly lady, but most of the children around here couldn't talk Dutch, and I could talk Dutch, and she—we lived right near her, and she used to love to have me come over. And of course the kids didn't talk Dutch, and I had to learn all that, so I didn't have too much in common with them to begin with, 'til I had gone to school a while and learned the English language. But it was, at the time, shortly—I don't know how long after, but the war broke out. You remember, that first World War?

LEVINE: Right.

VANDER BAAN: Well, a lot of the older people used to go to the Town Hall here, and knit for the soldiers. And she told all of those women that I could knit, and I was only seven years old. So she insisted on taking me along, and they were amazed. And would you believe this? My Dad taught me to knit! Because he, when he was a boy, growing up, his father had—was in kind of a business. He died young, his father did. But they used to, rather than using a horse and wagon or a truck as they do here now, to move, like, loam from farmers to another place, or they always had what they called turf to burn. There's certain—maybe Edith told you about that. Did she tell you about that, that they burned the turf, they called it. And that came from the ground. I don't know how they did it; I was too young for that. But I can remember, I had an uncle that did it, too. And they would use these barges, like flat boats, to—they might have a little place on one end where they could live and sleep when they moved around. But that's how they moved the stuff around, you know, like truckers would do today! And then of course, it gets cold there, and the canals were all frozen over in the winter, so there was a long time then that my father, as a young boy, didn't have work to do. But my grandmother did not believe in idle hands, so my father had to learn to knit as well as his five sisters! He had five sisters, and one younger brother who was younger than he was, and he was a cripple. But my Dad was the only other boy. So he knew how to knit, so he taught me how to knit.

LEVINE: Do you remember your father's mother, your grandmother?

VANDER BAAN: Yes. She was tall and, fairly tall, and very thin. I remember her. And she had white hair. But how old she was, I couldn't tell you,

because as I say, I was only—and she died when I was about five. But she lived across the street from us, and I was named for her.

LEVINE: Oh, do you remember any experiences with her?

VANDER BAAN: Well, I know I used to go over to her house, and she used to make applesauce, and that was her nickname for me, because I always would say, “Have you got applesauce?” you know. So she called me Applesauce as a kind of a joke. But I remember when she died, and I remember that clearly. She was laid out—they didn’t have funeral parlors—laid out at my aunt’s house, my father’s oldest sister, who lived the other end of town. And my mother and Dad took me over to see her in the casket. And she didn’t look like Grandma. They had parted her hair in the middle, and she had two long braids down here, and that was not the way she was used to wearing it. And she’d had—later on, we talked about it, my Mom and I, and my Mom things that she had ruptured gall bladder, or something like that, because she turned yellow, you know, from the bile. In those days they didn’t do operations, either, you know. And she’d been sick before she died, and she turned all yellow. And when I looked at her, I said—in Dutch, the word for grandmother is Beppe. That’s the Friesian word for Grandma.

LEVINE: How do you spell Beppe?

VANDER BAAN: I think they spelled it B-E-P-P-E, or something like that. Something like that. I can read the Holland language, but not the Friesian language. There’s all this different languages in the—maybe Edith told you that, too.

LEVINE: Well now this Beppe, is that a Friesian word?

VANDER BAAN: Yes. That was what we called her. And that meant Grandma, you know, it was not her name, but was, that meant Grandma. And I pulled on my father’s leg, and I says, “I want to go home; I don’t ever want to see Beppe again.” Those were the words I used. I remember that, but that’s all I remember about her, you know, always going to her house, and always looking for applesauce!
[Laughs]

LEVINE: Do you remember anything else about funerals there that maybe is different from the way they are here?

VANDER BAAN: Yes, they are different, because they didn’t have them—in fact, towards the last when we lived in Holland, my father was caretaker of the cemetery, and it was right near where we lived. We lived, it

went—this was the main street where the canal went through—I can show you in the book—and then there was a street that turned off right at the corner where our house was. And at the end of that street was the cemetery. My son was there, and he said, “You described it perfectly, Mom.” They thought I was pretty good, my son and daughter-in-law, because I had described it, and they found it just the way I said it.

LEVINE: What happened? How did the funerals differ?

VANDER BAAN: Well, they would always have the funeral part in the church. It seems though people had the bodies, were at home. And I never went to a funeral myself, that I can remember of. But we used to see them go by, and then they would carry the casket, and all the people walked behind it, and would go down to the cemetery. And what they did on the cemetery, I don’t know, because I wasn’t there. But you didn’t see a lot of upright stones; they were flat stones, over the grave.

LEVINE: How about things like marriages, and other, you know, significant events in a person’s life? Do you remember anything of those kinds of ceremonies?

VANDER BAAN: No, see, I was too young for that, no. I know that they used to—they had to go to the State House. A church marriage wasn’t valued there at all, not unless you went to the State House first. And I can show you a picture of one in here, of the one we had in our town. And this is from my parents. And all the records were kept there, of marriages and everything else, and you were married there by somebody. I don’t know whether it was a judge or what. But then you would not consider yourself married until you had—that is, the Christians didn’t—until they were married again in the church. That they considered valid. They wouldn’t go live together until that time. That’s all I know about marriages, and I got this from hearsay.

LEVINE: How about the church? Can you think of any events connected with the church that you remember from when you were little? Any festivals, or religious days, or observances?

VANDER BAAN: Not too much, not too much. The only thing I know of, something that they didn’t do here when we came here, is the women all wore kind of longer skirts anyway, you know, that it was cold there, and the churches were not heated. And they all carried these little boxes along that had coals in it, and there was an opening, openings in the top, and they would have them under their feet to

keep them warm. And with all of the women having them, it did give some heat off in the church. I can remember that, but that's about it. And I do remember the organ in our church was kind of up, away from the audience. It was up, kind of, you know. But it was one they had to have somebody pump it, you know what I mean? It didn't work by electricity or like that. They had somebody that—I know I used to, I heard my mother says lots of times, "Oh, such and such a man would pump it," you know, so that they could play it. If there wasn't that guy to pump it, nobody could play it!
[Laughs]

LEVINE: So during the church service, somebody would be pumping the organ?

VANDER BAAN: Yes, they would sit up right near there, and then whenever it came time to sing a Psalm—and they always sang the Psalms. And there were some churches that didn't even have organs. They would have someone that led the singing. Someone with a good voice, that knew the tunes and everything else, would lead the singing. But our church did have an organ; I remember that. We considered the church being quite advanced, I guess. I don't know
[Laughs].

LEVINE: And how about your mother? What was she like as a person?

VANDER BAAN: Well, kind of hard to explain. She was a very hard worker. She had worked for a farmer as a young girl, and at that time she had to—this is all hearsay, of course—she had to, when she first went there—she only went to school three years, and then she had to go. She came from a big family, one of the oldest, and she never lived at home again after that. And she was eleven years old—can you imagine that? And she had—at first she had to take care of the children. Then she was sort of nursemaid type of girl. And then she also had to learn to milk, so she went to milking time, she had to learn to milk. Then as she got older, and I suppose accomplished in milking and everything, she was made to do housework, and go to the barn when it was milking time. And they had, out there, the village where we lived, the farmers would always have a herd of sheep, too. There wouldn't be a great big herd, but they'd have sheep. And I can remember my mother crossing over, from our house, over the bridge, to a farmer's house to milk the sheep every night! And she'd do every morning. And then they made—they sold the milk as milk, and they made delicious cheese out of that milk, too.

LEVINE: The sheep's milk?

VANDER BAAN: No, she didn't do that, the farmer's did. But she would often bring a little home for us when she'd been milking. I can remember those things.

LEVINE: And she was hard working? And then how was she with you, as a mother?

VANDER BAAN: Yeah, she took care of our home, and everything. They didn't have anything to do with, you know what I mean? They had to do their washing; everything had to be lugged, everything had to be scrubbed. And they didn't have all of the conveniences and everything. We don't have any work, compared to what my mother had! And then, on top of that, when it came to being house cleaning time—and the Dutch people were house cleaners, I'm telling you—she'd go working for other people. And one thing that she told me about was after my brother was born, they had a friend, or people they knew very well, that she used to work for some, that were quite wealthy, in town. And the woman was very sick, and she had a baby born right after my brother was born. And she couldn't nurse it, so they came to my mother, would she come twice a day, and go there, and nurse that baby, as well as nursing my own brother? And she did that until he was a year old! Can you imagine that?

LEVINE: Can you remember any experiences with your mother when you and she were together? Things that you did, or any kind of activities, or just--?

VANDER BAAN: Not too—see, I was only seven when we left Holland. And I remember my mother wearing a Dutch cap. And then, I don't know if you're interested in how it happened that we left Holland?

LEVINE: Yes, definitely.

VANDER BAAN: Well, my mother had, as I say, the aunt out here, and one of her cousins was a very brilliant man. In fact, he owned a store right here in town, and he was also Agent for the Holland America Line. And he came to Holland, and visit all of his relatives that he had out there, and also stopped at our house. And I remember he was a tall man. I remember this strange tall man coming, and my father getting quite excited and everything. My Dad had been talking about leaving Holland. He'd heard a lot about the United States, and he was interested because he figured, they had to work hard there, in Holland. And he felt that the children growing up—my sister was fifteen when we left, and my brother was eleven, and I

was seven. And this happened about, I would say at the most, two months before we came out. He said to my father, "Well, if you are interested," this is what—I always call him Uncle Arthur, because to call him by his name, I was too young, you know. And when we got here, the kids out here were all calling him Uncle Arthur. So he said to my father, "If you're interested in coming to the United States, I'll help you all I can." Well, it's all that my Dad needed. He said, "We'll find a house for you." He said, "I will send you the tickets." That was the first thing he said. But then he said, "Don't wait too long," because he said, "As long as you have the two children under twelve, they can go on one ticket." And then he said, "That will only mean a ticket for you, your wife and your oldest daughter," and then one for my brother and I, "And you can save that half a fare," which meant a lot. Oh, my, that did it with my Dad! So then he said, "I'll send you the tickets and you can pay me off when you get to working in the United States." Well, what could be better, right? So my father just right off decided, he and my mother both, decided they would go to the United States. Well, that was something! You know, a whole family packing up. They had to have an auction.

LEVINE: Do you remember the auction?

VANDER BAAN: Well, I remember all of the junk around! You know what I mean? Children don't pay that much attention—not at seven. But I remember a lot of going on. And my mother wore one of these white caps, and she had to let her hair grow, because she couldn't wear that cap here. And they always kept it cut kind of short, you know what I mean, so they could tuck it under their hat? But her hair grew pretty good; she did buy a switch so that she could tuck it under that knot, you know, braided it and everything. I remember all that, because she had to go to the city to get that. And then we had to go to all of the aunts and uncles and say goodbye and everything. And my Mom with Grandma, living in another town, and I can still see her, and I think of her so often! We were all getting on the tramway in front of her house to go to where we had to go, and she was crying like everything. I thought it was a great excursion, you know, a kid of seven years old going off—never been on a tram before! It was like a train, you know. They called it the tram. And she was crying like everything, and I said to her, I asked her, "Beppe, why do you cry?" And she says, "This is like a funeral of five." I'll never forget she said that; it was just like she said she was burying us. She said, "I'll never see any of you again." I couldn't understand that, you know. I couldn't understand why poor Grandma cried. But it was true; we never saw her again. So you know, these things come back.

- LEVINE: Yeah. How about your brothers? What were their names, and what were they like at the time you were leaving?
- VANDER BAAN: My sister's name was Jantje. That translated that into Jenny when she came out here.
- LEVINE: How do you spell Jantje?
- VANDER BAAN: J-A-N-T-J-E. A lot of the Dutch women's names ended with J-E in the end; that was very common. Or T-E—J-E or T-E. And my brother's name was Jacob, and they kept it. No, he stayed that. They pronounced it Yacup in Dutch, you know, but it was spelt the same. So that was their names.
- LEVINE: And what were they like, when you were seven and they were however much older?
- VANDER BAAN: My brother was—turned twelve. We got here the sixth of May, and he turned twelve on the nineteenth of May. So we got here just in time. That's why everything had to rush. My father was going to save all that money for that half of a ticket. Get me? My sister was fifteen. She finished all of the grades in school in Holland through the sixth grade, I guess it was, and then she had worked for a while babysitting, or taking care of children for some people that had money. I think she always came home at night.
- LEVINE: And what was her name?
- VANDER BAAN: Jantje, and they changed it to Jenny.
- LEVINE: Uh-huh. Okay, so that's why you left. Now, do you remember the auction, or do you remember things that your mother packed to come here with?
- VANDER BAAN: Well, they had trunks full of stuff, I know, because my mother took a long all of the bedding. I can remember blankets and stuff that we had, and they had good woolen blankets and stuff there. I remember all that that came here. But as far as the packing of it is concerned, I wasn't interested. I was out playing, you know. Seven years old! [Laughs] Just turned seven in April, and we moved in May!

[End of Side A/Start of Side B]

LEVINE: Do you remember anything she brought that you noticed once you got here and got older? Any treasures that she kept around?

VANDER BAAN: Yes. I'm sad to say I don't have any of them. My sister got them all, and I don't want to run my brother-in-law down, but he was one—my brother was one—my brother had a good job. He worked himself up, and he got a good job, and he was one of the Assistant Supers in the White Machine Works here. A smart boy, like my Dad, very smart. And he had no family, that is, no children. He was married, but he had no children. And he didn't care about a lot of these things that would have interested me, you know, and did interest me. But they disappeared! And there were two things—no, three things that bothered me. One of them was: my mother had a beautiful necklace. It was three strands of a dark red bead, and they had a gold clasp in the back. And the gold clasp was real Dutch gold, which was not ten, twelve karat. What I mean to say, it was really pure gold. We don't know what happened to it. And another thing was she had—maybe some of these other girls had got them, I don't know, but they called them a stoofkje. It was a thing on the table that you would put on the table, and you had kerosene in the bottom, and you could light it. Did the girls talk about them? [Phone rings] [Tape off/on]

LEVINE: Okay, we're resuming now after a telephone call. We were talking about the stoofkje.

VANDER BAAN: Yeah, and I said there were a few things besides the beads. I would like to have had that stoofkje, you know, because they're kind of ornamental. They're pretty, they're unusual. And the teapot that my mother always used on top of it—that also came from Holland, and I would like to have had them, but they all disappeared.

LEVINE: Now, is that S-T-O-F-K-A, you think?

VANDER BAAN: Yeah, I don't know if that's the way they spelt it in Holland.

LEVINE: Do you know how it might be spelled?

VANDER BAAN: No, I don't know.

LEVINE: Okay.

VANDER BAAN: But that's what we always called it. Now, it might be that I'm pronouncing it the way we did it in Fries, you know. We lived in Friesland, you know, and the dialect is different than the Holland

language would be. I don't know what they would call it in the Holland language. But those were the things that I wanted badly, but they—we don't know what happened to them.

LEVINE: I see. Now, do you remember leaving the town, and going to where you took the ship from?

VANDER BAAN: No. Well we went, as I say, to my grandmother's, the other town, and all the relatives around said goodbye to them, my mother's side of the family, see? And I remember going on that boat, that short trip over the—if I understand it, it came from England, that it was the English Channel we went across. But otherwise, I really don't know. But we were on that small boat only a few hours. And then we landed, got onto the big boat, the ocean liner.

LEVINE: Do you remember the name? Oh, you don't remember the name?

VANDER BAAN: Not the small boat, no.

LEVINE: No, but the big boat?

VANDER BAAN: No. All I know, it was the Holland-American Line, but I don't know if it even had a name. Dear girl, this was over eighty years ago!

LEVINE: [Laughs] I'm sorry.

VANDER BAAN: That's all right.

LEVINE: If you don't remember, it's fine, but I'll ask anyway!

VANDER BAAN: I know, I know, and seven years old—you don't pay attention.

LEVINE: Yes, I understand, right. Okay, so what was the passage like on the Holland-American ship?

VANDER BAAN: Well, they had different classes of certain—they sort of kept nationalities separate. I think they did that more for your convenience and enjoyment than—because you're on the boat two weeks, you know—than anything else. And I remember there weren't too many children on the boat. But there were a couple sailors on the boat that took a fancy to me and another little girl. And my parents said they thought she was Polish. But I used to—you know how kids can always communicate! [Laughs] The guys rigged up a couple of swings for us somehow or other, and we'd have a good time on those swings! And my mother and my sister

were both sick. They never even saw the—got up on the deck, I don't think.

LEVINE: Were you in Steerage? Were you in the bottom of the boat, in like a dormitory?

VANDER BAAN: Yeah, oh yeah. Almost all the state rooms were down below. You had to go downstairs to get to your stateroom.

LEVINE: So you were in a separate little room, or were you in a big room with other people?

VANDER BAAN: No, where the sleeping quarters were like in the walls, and they were kind of—it was kind of private, I think, because my mother and my sister stayed in bed all the time. They couldn't lift their heads, they were so sick! But my Dad and my brother were all over the place, and so was I! I was a little stinker, I guess. I don't know [Laughs].

LEVINE: Was there anything that happened aboard the voyage, else, that you recall?

VANDER BAAN: One thing, that I used to hear my mother talk about, and the time that it got kind of rough, and they happened to have pea soup for dinner. And the thing wasn't fastened—they would fasten things to the table so that they would stay put. And it seems as though, I don't know if there was a floor or something under us, but it seems as though the boards weren't too tight anyway. [Laughs] The pot of pea soup tipped over, and it went all over the floor, and downstairs they got a lot of it through the floor! [Laughs] That's the only incident that really I can remember!

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Do you remember when the ship came into the New York Harbor?

VANDER BAAN: Not too much. It was either late at night, or early in the morning. I don't remember anything of that, really. All I remember, though, is walking, walking, walking. I thought we were never going to get anywhere, until we came to this big barn-like place, and that was Ellis Island, they said. I didn't like what they did to me there!

LEVINE: What did they do?

VANDER BAAN: They looked us over from head to foot, and I had long, long hair, and my mother didn't braid it or anything. It was always hanging loose, you know. And they were digging around in it, digging

around it, and they combed. And I kept telling them in Dutch, “I don’t have lice! I don’t have lice!” [Laughs] But that’s what they were looking for, you know. Because the way they acted, that’s all I could think of. And I remember that. And they—I don’t know, they gave you shots, or what. They vaccinated us.

LEVINE: At Ellis Island, or before you got on the boat?

VANDER BAAN: I don’t know. I think it was at Ellis Island, before we came into this country! You know, before we got off of Ellis Island. I think that’s where it was. And my mother’s didn’t take, but mine did, because I never had any trouble about it afterwards. But I remember that, and I didn’t like that very much, either. You know, children don’t like those kind of things.

LEVINE: Right, yeah. And do you remember anything else about Ellis Island, what it looked like, or what happened to you there?

VANDER BAAN: No, only those things that were disagreeable! [Laughs]

LEVINE: Do you remember when you were free to leave?

VANDER BAAN: Yes. This Uncle Arthur showed up again. He came from New York and picked us up off—when we came off. Do you go on a boat or something, from Ellis Island? It seemed to me we did. Not a very big boat, but some kind of a contraption, and there was Uncle Arthur, waiting for us. Well then I felt pretty good, because I thought he was pretty nice when he visited us, you know. And then we got on a train from New York, and I think we had to change or something; I don’t know just where. But then there used to be a streetcar would run from the station in Lynwood down to the foot of Cross Street here in town. All along Lynwood Avenue there were car tracks. And then we all got off, and we had to walk up that hill to where they lived, and we went to his house. And we ate in a big dining room. They had a nice house. And she had a nice white tablecloth on the table and everything, you know. And I had—I don’t remember what it was, but it tasted mighty good to me after the food on the boat! [Laughs] You know. And then on top of that, it was in May, and she had a daughter that was about the same age as I was, but they could afford it I guess, anyway. But they were going to have Memorial Day exercises. And I didn’t have any, just the one pair of shoes, really, because we wore wooden shoes in Holland all through the day. She gave me a pair of Ann’s shoes, white shoes, and white stockings, and she gave me a white dress! And I remember all of that. It was Ann’s maybe last year’s dress, I don’t know, but they—he could afford it. They had two sons older,

and Ann was kind of the youngest, and the other two boys were already in their teens, and then Ann came along, you know.

LEVINE: So how did you feel about getting this white clothing?

VANDER BAAN: Oh, that was just so wonderful to me, you know! And of course, that house seemed like a mansion to me! But would you believe it? I lived in that house afterwards! [Laughs] I moved out of there; I moved in here. But it had been all remodeled after that, and made into apartments! But I slept in what at that time was their dining room, was my bedroom! Can you imagine that? Often thought about it, often.

LEVINE: Were there any other things that happened soon after you arrived that struck you as really eye-opening and different?

VANDER BAAN: Well, then when we came—of course, then we moved down to Brook Street, because Uncle Arthur had that all arranged. They had a house for us, and they had it furnished with all the necessities that you really needed. And then later on my parents added more, but we had everything we really needed. And then, as I say, I met my great-aunt, my mother's aunt, and I started calling her Beppe [Laughs] because she was an elderly lady, you know. And I remember going with her to the Town Hall to knit, but outside that—it didn't take me long to learn the English language, and I got along pretty good. They didn't get away with things anymore with me.

LEVINE: How was the school different there from the one you were in in Holland?

VANDER BAAN: Well, this was a public school, and ours was a Christian school. And as I said, my mother worked awfully hard in Holland; she also used to clean that school, the Christian school. And it got very dusty because the kids wearing the black woolen socks, and the wooden shoes stayed in the hall, you know. And they walked stocking feet, so then that would—and they had no vacuum cleaners. My mother—I can remember going with my Mom when she'd go there and clean. Of course, not that I did any cleaning, but I remember going with her. And she would sweep all that up. And here it was so different, you know! The school was altogether different; it was in English language. I don't remember too much of the first weeks of school, until I got so I knew the language some. But my poor sister who'd already been out of school for a number of years in Holland had to go back, first grade, with all the little kids,

'til she could learn the ABC's, and learn to read. And she did pretty good, too.

LEVINE: How did she feel about that, going in with the little children?

VANDER BAAN: Well, she only went to school maybe about three or four months. I don't know; I never asked her about it later on. Then she went out and she got a job and did housework, because in town they were always, always after the Dutch girls, because they found out that they were taught by their mothers to be very fussy and clean. In that respect, they had a very good reputation. Dutch girls could always get a job doing housework in—with the wealthy people here. They were always after them.

LEVINE: So then, you moved into, you might say, a Dutch community here?

VANDER BAAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

VANDER BAAN: And we had neighbors that were, were Dutch, too, and some of them, you know, that had lived here for years were very helpful to my mother. But she never really learned to talk the English language good. No, I didn't meant to—

LEVINE: [Laughs] That's okay.

VANDER BAAN: I'm sorry.

LEVINE: That's all right.

VANDER BAAN: Thoughtless. My father worked in the White Machine Works. Uncle Arthur got him a job through somebody he knew in the White Machine Works, so he went to work right off, the first Monday we were here. And things were a lot better here, because I tell you, my father often told me he earned—in Holland it's not dollars, it's gilden. You've heard of that? Gelders, they called it, in the English language. In Dutch, it's gilden, you know. And here he was getting seven gilden a week. Here he got seven dollars a week, but seven dollars a week went much further than that seven gilden did, so we were much better off! But there's one thing that broke my heart: when I left Holland I had had a new doll not long before we left there, and I couldn't take it along. My mother said, "We haven't got room for it. You've got to leave it here." I cried my heart out! But then, through this Uncle Arthur and them, they got me a new doll. I got an album there that's got a picture in it that shows me holding a

doll after we got here, that they gave me! [Laughs] A picture of us, the whole family, just the way we look when we came from Holland.

LEVINE: Right, okay.

VANDER BAAN: That's about all I can tell you.

LEVINE: Let's see. Did your mother and father keep up a lot of the ways that they had in Holland once they got here?

VANDER BAAN: Well, to some extent. Not—as far as cooking and things was concerned, my mother learned to bake bread very quickly, and she made wonderful bread! And then some of their Dutch neighbors gave her the recipe for brown bread. Now in Holland, we ate very little white bread; it was mostly all—it was made with rye meal. And this brown bread that this—and I still make the brown bread—it's more like our brown bread, you know what I mean? But we don't make it with the rye meal. When my mother first made the brown bread here, you were able to get that rye meal, and she would make it with that, and it was like Holland. In some things, the meals and stuff, were very much like her way of cooking and everything.

LEVINE: And did she teach you certain ideas about life, or about what to do, or right and wrong, that were carryovers from sort of the Dutch ideas of things?

VANDER BAAN: Not really, I wouldn't say. Because the friends that they got out here have lived here for a good many years, and that kind of rubbed off on us, you know. So no, of course, as new things came—well of course, my parents have been gone for years and years and years, you know. But they—and they got some of the modern things when, as they came along, you know. But my mother never had a vacuum cleaner! I had one, and I had to do the vacuuming for her. But she did have an electric washer, but it was one of these—did you ever see those that the tub kind of swings back and forth? That's the kind she had. And I was the youngest, and we didn't live too far, after I was married, too far away from my folks, so I did my mother's washing and ironing from the time I got married until the day they died! And that was every week, and I went there once a week to do the vacuum cleaning and everything. And that, let's see—my youngest boy, who is forty, going to be forty-five years old, or was forty-five years old in April—he's the youngest of my two boys. I've got two boys; the other one was quite a bit older. We lost two in between. And he was a toddler—no, let me see. No, he was a youngster, I would say maybe about five. I don't think he was in school yet when my mother died. And

up until then, all those years, and there was fourteen years between this one and the oldest boy, because I had difficulty carrying babies. And the oldest boy was, as I say, he must have been about sixteen or something like that when my mother died. He was in his teens, I remember that, and all those years, imagine! From the time I was married, that was about fifteen or sixteen years—married a couple of years before we had him—until my mother died, did I do her washing and ironing and her cleaning for her, thorough cleaning. It was just, you just automatically did it! After all, it was your mother!

LEVINE: Well now, we're getting close to the end of the tape. What was your husband's name?

VANDER BAAN: John.

LEVINE: And how did you meet him? When did you meet him?

VANDER BAAN: He was born in this country, and I met him through church. In church, the young people and everything—you get so that after a while you know them all. And I had had other boyfriends off and on, but we weren't that old when we met.

LEVINE: What did you like about him?

VANDER BAAN: What'd I like about him? Well, I'm very prejudiced, and I was very blessed to have a wonderful, wonderful husband, and a good father for my children. I really was. And the grandchildren that—the oldest grandchildren that can remember him say the same thing. And I've got a fellow that used to live with us. His own mother died when he was thirteen; she was killed in an accident. I can show you a picture of his family. Died when he was—no, he was twelve. Wait a minute. No, he was thirteen when his mother was killed in an automobile accident. There were three years—in three years she had the three children. His sister was eleven, his brother was twelve, and he was thirteen when his mother was killed in an automobile accident. And he came, joined the Army. He'd got a stepmother, and that wasn't too cozy. But anyway, he joined the Army and was stationed at Fort Devens. And at that time, all our churches together sent all the servicemen what they called the Young Calvinist. It was a magazine for young people, and they sent it to all the boys, and in it they had an ad saying any young serviceman or woman, too, for that matter, who was stationed at, and it gave the different stations near where our church, you know, near enough to our church. If they had time off and were interested in coming to the church, meals and lodging would be provided. We

put our name in that we were willing to take in a serviceman. Well, we'd had different ones come and stay one weekend and wouldn't come back, but Glenn, this fellow, was stationed in Devens, and he stayed there the whole time he was in the service, in Devens. So when he finally came—my oldest boy was his age. Then he met him, and he had been to a home where he wasn't very—didn't feel comfortable. Another home, you know. And then my son said, "Hey Mom, would you mind if Glenn comes here?" And I said, "No, of course not. That's why we put our name in." So he came, and he stayed three years! He was with us every weekend he had off. Lots of times he come up Friday nights, and the whole family loved him from the beginning.

LEVINE: We only have about a minute left. So I want to get—you can wrap that up, but also tell me your children's names.

VANDER BAAN: Oh, I had two boys. The oldest one is Roland, and he lives in Lynwood, and he's married, and he has three sons, and he's got eight grandchildren. But anyway, then the youngest, and as I say, we lost two in between. I had a very difficult time getting pregnant and carrying them. Then when I lost that second one, I went to this other doctor. The surgeon that took care of me said, "I know a doctor that maybe can help." And I went to him, and he told me, he said, "When you think you might be pregnant, come back." And I did.

LEVINE: And what's that son's name?

VANDER BAAN: Harvey. And he's married, and he has two beautiful children. But he's fourteen years younger than Roland.

LEVINE: Wow. Okay, well the tape's about to run out. I want to thank you so much for a wonderful interview.

VANDER BAAN: Oh, don't mention it. It's been kind of fun reminiscing.

LEVINE: Okay. I've been speaking with Agnes Vander Baan, and she came from the Netherlands in 1914 at the age of seven.

VANDER BAAN: Right.

LEVINE: Thank you so much.

[End of Interview]