

**LEONA HOUBEN HILLEE**  
**BIRTH DATE: DECEMBER 31<sup>ST</sup> 1914**  
**INTERVIEW DATE: JANUARY 22<sup>ND</sup> 1994**  
**AGE AT TIME OF INTERVIEW: 80**  
**RUNNING TIME: 36:01**  
**INTERVIEWER: KATE MOORE**  
**RECORDING ENGINEER: SAME AS ABOVE**  
**TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: AMANDA CARELLA**  
**TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: SAME AS ABOVE**

**NETHERLANDS, 1914**  
**AGE:**

**SHIP:**  
**PORT:**  
**RESIDENCES:**

**NETHERLANDS, ULESTRATEN, HOLLAND**  
**UNITED STATES, BLAIR, MONTANA**  
**UNITED STATES, LAS VEGAS, NEVADA**

**ORAL HISTORIAN'S NOTE:**

**MOORE:** All right, good morning, this is Kate Moore with the National Parks Service, and today is the 22<sup>nd</sup> of January, 1994, and I'm in Las Vegas, Nevada, at the home of Mary Rhimer, with her sister, Leona Hillee who came from the Netherlands in 1914, actually when her mother was pregnant with her. And uh, why don't you begin by giving me your full name and date of birth, please.

**HILLE:** I'm Leona Hillee, formerly Houben, H-O-U-B-E-N. I was born December 31<sup>st</sup>, 1914, Blair, Montana.

**MOORE:** Mm-hmm. And, uh, your family's town that they came from, what size was that?

**HILLE:** In Holland?

**MOORE:** Yes.

**HILLE:** They were all quite small, Maastricht is the largest town close. And uh, they were really from Ulestraten, which is –

MOORE: How do you spell that?

HILLE: U-L-L-E-S-T-R-A-T-E-N. [sic]

MOORE: Mm-hmm.

HILLE: It's just a little ways from Maastricht. And then some of them lived in Gulpen – they're all very close, because the country's so small.

MOORE: [interposed] How do you spell Gulpen?

HILLE: G-U-L-P-E-N.

MOORE: And, uh, what's major industry in those small towns?

HILLE: Uh – uh – oh I don't know, they – I have a cousin that's a pharmacist, has an *apothek*, they call it. And, uh, they had little orchards and things – fruits, there was quite a lot of fruit there. And my mother and father had a mill where they ground the grain to make the – flour.

MOORE: And what did your grandparents do?

HILLE: My grandpa was a Bürgermeister.

MOORE: Of?

HILLE: Of Ulestraten. And grandmother just – wh – well, was the housewife, I guess. And they also had a small orchard. 'Cause my mother worked in the – well – not in the fields, it would be in the orchard.

MOORE: At that time.

HILLE: Uh-huh.

MOORE: And – and the Bürgermeister, um –

HILLE: It's like a mayor.

MOORE: Yes, which grandparent was that? Your father's or your mother's father?

HILLE: [interposed] My mother's father.

MOORE: Your mother's father was. Um, what was your father's name?

HILLE: Houben. Joseph Houben. H-O-U-B-E-N.

MOORE: [interposed] Right. And what was his occupation?

HILLE: He worked – he was in the mill. Uh – grinding – wor – with mother, when they – after they got married. Before that, he lived at, um, Kasteel Vleek. Which is a castle, called, V-L-E-E-K. And, I don't remem – his parents – died real – way before, when he was a child evidently, and his uncle raised him.

MOORE: Mm-hmm.

HILLE: At this castle.

MOORE: And why was he at the castle, do you know?

HILLE: 'Cause his uncle was there, I guess.

MOORE: And, doing what? Living there?

HILLE: I – I really don't know.

MOORE: Mm-hmm. And, uh, what did your father look like? How could you describe him?

HILLE: Oh, he was about five ten or eleven, good looking men. Later on in life he was heavy, but when he was younger, he wasn't. Had real dark hair, blue eyes, kind of a square face. Oh, nice-looking man.

MOORE: Wha – what about his personality and temperament? How would you describe that?

HILLE: Not the best. (Laughs) I don't want to go into that.

MOORE: And is there a story about your father that you associate with your childhood?

HILLE: Not really, no. Our childhood wasn't very great. (Laughs)

MOORE: What about your mother? What was her name?

HILLE: Mary – Hurbertina was her – Hurbertina Mary, but she went by the name of Mary after she came to the States. In Europe, they called her Tina, and she was the – about third oldest, I think. And, um –

MOORE: What was her maiden name?

HILLE: Huber – Hurbertina. H-U-R – H – like Herbert, but Tina on the end.

MOORE: Okay. And uh, what was her occupation?

HILLE: She worked in the mill with father.

MOORE: And in the orchard you said?

HILLE: Yeah. Before she was married.

MOORE: Mm-hmm. And what did she look like?

HILLE: She looked like my younger sister, which is hard to describe. She had, uh – much finer features than I have, uh – she was a pretty woman.

MOORE: How tall?

HILLE: About five s – she was the shortest one of the whole bunch – about five four, five something like that [tape skips]

MOORE: And hair and eyes?

HILLE: Her eyes were brown, her hair was brown.

MOORE: Mm-hmm. What about her personality and temperament?

HILLE: She was a doll, an absolute angel. She really was.

MOORE: You mean she was ki – what do you mean by doll, or an angel? Like --?

HILLE: Well she was such a – nice – nice, pious, quiet, easy-going woman. But still firm with us children. But not mean or anything, you know? Our father was kind of mean.

MOORE: Mm-hmm. Well, what were her chores around the house then, being a housewife?

HILLE: Raising children, and – well we had chickens and pigs and cows –

MOORE: [interposed] In the States?

HILLE: Yeah.

MOORE: [interposed] In the States, right.

HILLE: [interposed] Oh, in the mi – oh, in Europe, she worked in the mill with father, I guess.

MOORE: Mm-hmm. Do you have a story about your mother that you would associate with your childhood? What about her learning to drive – I heard –

HILLE: Oh, that was a catastrophe, (MOORE laughs) needless to say. And uh – what impressed me of my mother in later life was if you’d call her up and say, “Do you want to go somewhere?” her suitcase was packed immediately. (MOORE laughs) She was ready to take off in – thirty minutes – I’m not – I’m not exaggerating!

MOORE: Like, where would you ask her to go, though?

HILLE: Well, if she wanted to come to Vegas, and fly down, or like, my – I have brother and sister that lived in Oregon, and if they’d say let’s go up to the mountains today, or let’s go somewhere or other, boy she was ready to go right now!

MOORE: (Laughs)

HILLE: Or go to Montana and visit – we still have a sister in Montana. And she went back there many times.

MOORE: And why do you think she was like that? Able to go –

HILLE: [interposed] I don’t know! I like travel myself, I travel all the time.

MOORE: Mm. And what about, um – na – could you name all your brothers and sisters in order that they were born?

HILLE: Mm-hmm. Mary – do you want the dates?

MOORE: Yeah, if you could.

HILLE: Uh, November 24<sup>th</sup>, 1910. Anne: May 16<sup>th</sup>, 1912. Myself, Leona: December 31<sup>st</sup>, 1914. Cecilia: December 25, 1919. Martha: July 29<sup>th</sup>, 1921. Josephine: September 30<sup>th</sup>, 1927. And, Roman-Joseph, our brother, which we call Bud: July 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1930.

MOORE: Wow. All right, and, um – do you – you went back to see the house that you lived in. Could you describe your house, at least the mill?

HILLE: [interposed] How m – oh I didn't live there. I was born here.

MOORE: Did you ever see it again?

HILLE: Oh, yes! I've seen it three times.

MOORE: Yeah, what would you – how would you describe it?

HILLE: It was big, and beautiful, I can't imagine them ever leaving that to come over here! (MOORE laughs) To – homestead up in Montana! I really can't!

MOORE: We – how did it look?

HILLE: Looked beautiful. Very.

MOORE: Who owns it now?

HILLE: I have no idea.

MOORE: But you went back to see it?

HILLE: Mm-hmm.

MOORE: And – wh –wh –how would you describe it? You say beautiful, what made it beautiful?

HILLE: It was a big, brick building, and I mean big. Oh – I have no idea the footage. Well-kept, well-maintained, two story.

MOORE: Was the mill still in operation?

HILLE: Uh, not to my knowledge.

MOORE: Mm-hmm.

HILLE: I don't think so, we have a cousin that runs a mill that the government helped restore to keep it as a – historic place.

MOORE: In Holland?

HILLE: In – in Gulpen. Mm-hmm.

MOORE: In Gulpen, okay. And, uh – what was – it was a stone building, you said?

HILLE: [interposed] Yes. Brick I think.

MOORE: And, did you – wh – what did your family tell you about that house at all?

HILLE: They had a fire, that's why they came to America. They had a fire at – well my father had come to America 1913, with another group of men and he liked it. And he thought it would be a great opportunity, and they were going to come to America and stay eight or nine years and make their fortune and go back to Holland, that was their original intention.

MOORE: Mm-hmm.

HILLE: And then they had a fire in the mill, so I guess then they decided this was the time to go.

MOORE: And – and who set the fire? Wh – how did it -- ?

HILLE: I don't know how the fire started.

MOORE: Was the mill destroyed? [Not understood]

HILLE: [interposed] I don't – I don't know that either.

MOORE: And did you parents ever talk about their decision to come to the United States at all later on? To you?

HILLE: No, just what I just told you.

MOORE: Mm-hmm. And what about, um – uh – did they ever talk about the – the house in any other terms besides about them?

HILLE: No, no.

MOORE: Who was the – who did the cooking in the family? Who is the cook?–

HILLE: [interposed] Mother.

MOORE: All right. And what was your favorite food as a child?

HILLE: Probably chicken and cream gravy and fresh peas and carrots out of the garden, and homemade ice cream.

MOORE: Mm.

HILLE: (Clears throat) That you made with ice that we harvested in the wintertime off the lake, which was about eighth of a mile from the house. And we – they put it in ice houses with straw between and it would stay all summer.

MOORE: Did you help cook at all?

HILLE: Cooked some. (Clears throat)

MOORE: Umm, okay – we'll go back to um – did you – did you ever meet your grandparents at all?

HILLE: No, they were deceased in the 20's.

MOORE: Both sides? Except for the burg –

HILLE: No, my mother – grandmother died in – (clears throat) about '20 –5 or 6. And my dad and grandfather died in the early 30's. My mother didn't even go back while they were living, but my sister Anne and I took her back in 1967 – no, she went right back after the war. In 1949, she went back by boat, there was no Trans – Airlines at that time.

MOORE: Mm-hmm.

HILLE: And she flew back, and it was her first airplane flight. By herself.

MOORE: Hmm. And so she was ready to go, wasn't she? (Laughs)

HILLE: (Laughs) She was ready to come home. She went by boat, she came home by plane.

MOORE: Did they tell you about anything about the – the trip over to the United States and all? They tell you anything about getting prepared for, or what – anything?

HILLE: Not a thing. In fact my sister and I – my sister Joey – Josephine, in Oregon, and I have discussed it many times, we've said – "We should have had" – she just prepared a book for her children, of the history of the house they live in 'cause she's selling it, and her husband built it from scratch. And she said, "I wish our parents had given us some history like that." We have no – we have very little history on our parents.

MOORE: And why do you think that is?

HILLE: I have no idea!

MOORE: Mm.

HILLE: Maybe we didn't ask a – questions. Which I wish we had.

MOORE: Mm-hmm. Did they talk about the boat trip to you?

HILLE: My mother was sick, I know that, on the way over. And other than that, they were very crowded and there were a lot of children and a lot of people.

MOORE: Mm-hmm and did –

HILLE: On this boat, and I think they were like, in steerage or something.

MOORE: Mm-hmm. Do you –

HILLE: It wasn't first class, is what I'm saying. (Laughs)

MOORE: And do you know where they departed from, the boat?

HILLE: I would imagine Rotterdam. (Clock rings)

MOORE: Mm-hmm. And um, did your mother talk about selling anything in the house and that before she came?

HILLE: No, because eve – everything was destroyed by fire. They rescued very little. They rescued a clock that they received as a wedding present, which my brother still has. Wall clock. And – very –very little else.

MOORE: Mm-hmm. Were there – your sister mentioned waffle irons or something –

HILLE: Oh yeah, m – uh, Ceel [Cecilia, the fourth sister] has an antique waffle irons of hers, but she didn't, they didn't bring much – over. I imagine they didn't have room on this boat that they were on, 1914, these were not luxury liners by any means!

MOORE: How did your – family get here, wh –uh – um – financially, how were they able to do it?

HILLE: I don't know, I gue – I presume they sold the mill.

- MOORE: Mm-hmm. And that's how your father – no, do you remember your father ever talking about, uh, why he came to the United States? You said that he was –
- HILLE: [interposed] He thought it was – my father would have been a great – adventurer if he'd had a lot of money. He never stayed in one place very long, I don't think any – the other side of the fence always looked better. You know, really.
- MOORE: So he – he – had great expectations for here?
- HILLE: [interposed] Yeah, mm-hmm.
- MOORE: And do you think that it lived up to that?
- HILLE: No. No means, no way! (Laughs)
- MOORE: How not so?
- HILLE: Well it was so cold up there in the winter, and the – uh – uh – um – they – you know they homesteaded, so you got a hundred and sixty acres free for homesteading. If they didn't have grasshoppers or growth, or rain, too much rain, there was always something – so they had very few good crops. Then he tried raising cattle, so he raised hay, well that worked out fairly well. But then the cattle price went down. One year he raised turkeys, that wasn't very successful either. Another year he raised –be – navy beans. Well I don't know, something happened, they didn't have enough rain or something. Everything he tried, the poor fellow just did not work out too good.
- MOORE: And how was life back on the homest – homestead? Uh?
- HILLE: [interposed] It was very hard.
- MOORE: Do you – did you speak – what language did you speak at home?
- HILLE: We spoke Holland Dutch 'til we went to school.
- MOORE: And do you remember learning English for the first time?
- HILLE: I learned from Mary and Anne because they went to school before me, see Mary was two years older, and Anne – Anne was two years older, and Mary was four years older. So I had the advantage of having some English at home. I don't recall it was difficult for me at all, I'm sure it was very difficult for Mary.

- MOORE: And do you remember what they'd do? They'd come home from school and tell you what went on at school, is that it? Or – how did you start learning?
- HILLE: I don't know! They probably spoke English as soon as they learned it.
- MOORE: Mm-hmm.
- HILLE: Because when we – all started to learn English, then our parents spoke English also. They didn't continue speaking Dutch all the time.
- MOORE: And did you remember this as a conscious proj – uh – process at all? Do you remember any incidences about English as a language?
- HILLE: No.
- MOORE: In your childhood –
- HILLE: [interposed] I don't recall any problems really with it.
- MOORE: Were you ever, uh, called any names for being from – uh – Holland, at school?
- HILLE: Well, there were quite a few peo – immigrants around there, so it wasn't too bad, really. There were – there were sever other – several other families besides us that were –that they – if they weren't – hadn't come, their an – their grandparents had.
- MOORE: And did they identify you as foreign?
- HILLE: Oh yes, it wasn't very nice to be an immigrant in those days, you know?
- MOORE: Why not?
- HILLE: I don't know. Do – you were just looked down on. Now it's fashionable to be an immigrant.
- MOORE: (Laughs)
- HILLE: That's right! I remember them making fun of our pigtails, because we had long hair with pigtails. And one day when dad when to town, mother cut them off. Cut her hair off, and we were so elated. And

he was just – very shocked when he saw us with our hair (laughs) cut Dutch bob, you know? Down below your ears?

MOORE: And why'd she cut 'em off?

HILLE: Because we kept pestering her to cut it off. We didn't want pigtails, nobody else had them.

MOORE: (laughs) Was there anything else that was different that you did than other kids did?

HILLE: I don't think so, no. We walked to school. A mile and a half – and everybody else walked also. We were typical kids.

MOORE: Um, talk about your homestead that you had. And life there. Your family came from Ellis Island and went to Montana and got this homestead. Can you describe it?

HILLE: It was a hundred and sixty acres, my father built a home on it – house on it.

MOORE: How big was that house?

HILLE: Very small it had – there was a kitchen, and a bedroom for them. Had a ba – a little – root cellar, we call it like – it's just – it's a cellar, but it's not lined with cement like they are now, it's just – with the sod. Which makes a nice root cellar, because it doesn't – you know – it's mor – nice. And then he – he – put – that was the main part of the house, then he put two more rooms on for us children, then later on about in the – about 1930 I think, he bought another big house and he moved on [tape skips] farm. And we used – we could used both houses there. We did not have inside plumbing or electricity, we had a well that we – it was very close to the – house, maybe twenty feet.

MOORE: How was the house lit then?

HILLE: Um – kerosene lamps at first, and then later on with um, gasoline.

MOORE: Mm-hmm. And um – how – what – how big was – did you have a barn, for example?

HILLE: Pardon? Bar –

MOORE: [interposed] Did you have a barn?

HILLE: [interposed] A barn? Oh, yes, we had a big barn.

MOORE: And uh – how –how big was that? A big barn you said, big, but how big, like wha –

HILLE: [interposed] About like what they are today. Maybe a little small – a little smaller than what they are today. Probably sixty by – oh thirty, or something like that.

MOORE: And what was in the barn?

HILLE: Cattle and chickens and –

MOORE: How much of each? Like, I'm trying to get an idea of how big that farm was?

HILLE: Well the farm was only a hundred and sixty acres.

MOORE: Mm-hmm.

HILLE: How many chickens we had? I have no idea. Everything when you're a child seems like – it – large, and it really isn't. Probably fifty or seventy-five. We had bunny rabbits, about six of those, and we had, uh – at least six cows, I'm sure. And – and horses, because we didn't have a car 'til 1925 or so. We went with horse-drawn carriage in the winter time with a sled – pulled by horses.

MOORE: And, uh – what about the furniture in that house? Remember anything?

HILLE: Well each room – each bedroom had a bed and a dresser. That was it. No carpeting, wood floors. Uh – in the kitchen we had a cookstove, and a heating stove – little potbellied heating – well it wasn't so small, but we had a nice, big ki – like an old-fashioned kitchen range like you see in the stores nowadays. And a big table, and chairs. And that's all about the – all room there was.

MOORE: And the house was heated by?

HILLE: The coal stove.

MOORE: The coal stove.

HILLE: [interposed] Or the cook stove.

- MOORE: The cook stove, right. And describe mealtime at home. What was it like? How'd you eat your meals?
- HILLE: Well, like anyone else does. We had plates, and china and silverware –(Laughs)
- MOORE: [interposed] No, I mean – No I mean how was it organized? You had breakfast together in the morning --?
- HILLE: Oh, yes.
- MOORE: And what was breakfast?
- HILLE: [interposed] Then we went to school – we used oatmeal. And, uh, my mother baked bread, so we called it “black bread” – it was wheat bread. We liked that better than the white. And then in summer time we'd have our big meal at noon. And then just sandwiches or something else for supper.
- MOORE: In the winter time, what was the biggest meal?
- HILLE: [interposed] Well, we were at school.
- MOORE: Mm-hmm.
- HILLE: So, our biggest meal was at night.
- MOORE: Mm-hmm. And wha – what was a big meal consist of at that time?
- HILLE: Meat and potatoes and gravy. Vegetables. Fruit.
- MOORE: Did you eat any foods that were typically Dutch at all?
- HILLE: Well, yes. My mother had a recipe, I wish I could find the authentic one. She called it *Haas a Pastei*, and it was made out of rabbit, and it was delicious. It was like a *pâté* , no? It was really good –
- MOORE: *Haas a pa – pâté ?* How do you spell it?
- HILLE: [interposed] Uh-huh. *Haas a pastei*, she called it. Oh, *Haas a*, which is rabbit, I don't know how you spell it. And *pastei* is like, *pâté* . P-Â-T-É.
- MOORE: Mm-hmm.

- HILLE: And it was li – she made it in a big crock, oh, maybe – twelve inches across, and about six inches deep. And it comes out like a – like a liver pâté or something to make today. And it was really good, and I can't – I've gotten recipes from my cousins over there, but it doesn't taste like hers. And we always had, uh – coleslaw, cabbage. Oh, we made our own sauerkraut. In a big crock, like three feet deep and [tape skips] we made butter, and, uh – in fact, we sold the butter at the creamery, and that was about all we bought. With that money, we would buy coffee and, um, sugar and flour. And the rest of the things we raised in the garden.
- MOORE: How do you view your childhood then? You said it wasn't great, and for what reasons?
- HILLE: [interposed] It was good. We had a good ti–
- MOORE: [interposed] You didn't go hungry, did you?
- HILLE: Oh, heavens no, we never went hungry. Even during the worst of the Depression, we never went hungry.
- MOORE: And did you want for anything, then, as a kid?
- HILLE: [interposed] No. Oh, well, you know how kids are, we wanted for a lot of stuff, but not the necessities. (Laughs) We all had the necessities.
- MOORE: What did you do for games and entertainment as a child, then? On the homestead?
- HILLE: [interposed] Oh, we played a – well – when snow was on the ground we'd make a big circle, and we'd call – we'd play, uh – oh, there's a game they call, I can't remember what it is – hmm – I can – I can't remember. You make, you make it like a pie, and then you chase each other, somebody's it, and – and we'd play [not understood] over the barn, which is with a ball, you throw the ball over the barn and the other side tries to come around and tag somebody. We had all kinds of games that nobody ever heard of today, probably. Marbles, we played marbles.
- MOORE: And, did you play anything like kick the can and those things?
- HILLE: Never. No, we never did. Not –
- MOORE: How about – um – did you play any ball games in the summer?

HILLE: I played some softball, or baseball, whatever you call it. I remember once I made a home run, my dad was watching me, and I was so proud. (Laughs) I was probably about twelve.

MOORE: (Laughs) And, um, what about religious life at home?

HILLE: Well, we – very – staunch Catholics.

MOORE: Mm-hmm. And –

HILLE: [interposed] We went to church, hail, or shine, or whatever, we went.

MOORE: And how about daily, did you have any type of routine?

HILLE: [interposed] No, we didn't. Well, we'd say prayers before meals.

MOORE: Mm-hmm. Do you remember any of those prayers?

HILLE: "For we are about to receive through thy, my lord, these thy gifts, which we are about to receive through thy bounty, through Christ our Lord, Amen."

MOORE: And did you say any other thing eh – before you went to bed?

HILLE: We did – well, we'd say, protect us for some – you know, something like that.

MOORE: Did you, um – who was more religious, your mother or father?

HILLE: Now, I'd say my mother, but they were both religious.

MOORE: Mm-hmm. And did you, uh –

HILLE: And we'd say the rosary a lot, are you familiar with the rosary?

MOORE: Yes.

HILLE: Oh.

MOORE: Did you say it in English or Dutch?

HILLE: English.

MOORE: So, you're prayers – you don't remember any Dutch prayers at all, do you?

- HILLE: [interposed] No.
- MOORE: Um, do you have any stories tha – about family members that you could relate to us, uh, that typified that time? Could be dumb things they did, or whatever, your brothers and sisters?
- HILLE: Gee, I can't really recall anything right now. I imagine we did a lot of dumb things, but I can't recall them! (Laughs)
- MOORE: (Laughs) What about your parents, did they ever, how'd they adjust to life in this country?
- HILLE: I think they adjusted very well. I really do.
- MOORE: Was either of them happier than the other – I mean, we-we're they both – how did they feel about being here, in this country?
- HILLE: I think they just decided they were here and that was it. I never heard my mother say, "I wish I had never left Holland."
- MOORE: Mm-hmm.
- HILLE: Or my dad either. Nev –
- MOORE: So you think that they were content with coming?
- HILLE: Oh yes, I do.
- MOORE: And, uh –
- HILLE: I don't think it turned out the way they had planned, but I think they were – I think all in all, they were glad they did, even in later life. Because went back, like I say, she went back – oh, about five times I guess, four or five times. When she come home, she'd say, "Well, I'm glad we live over here." And I don't know why, I loved Holland, I thought it was just great. I really did, and all of my cousins are very successful have beautiful homes and ni – everything nice, and – and I – like I say, we should have asked her more questions, which we didn't. You know I think – I guess you think she gonna live forever or whatever. Or we weren't interested 'til we got older. And she died in '71, that's twenty three years ago, and uh, but she always was happy – that they had moved to the States.
- MOORE: And did she ever mention anything about the signif – the significance of the Statue of Liberty when they came into the harbor? Was that ever mentioned? She ever mention that?

- HILLE: I can't remember, but I'm sure she was very glad to see it, as seasick as she was.
- MOORE: (Laughs) Um –
- HILLE: You know. (Laughs) Yeah. I know they got on the train after they left Ellis Island, came across to Montana, which must not have been much of a delightful trip at that time either. 1914, a whole bunch of people on the train.
- MOORE: What happened then – and then – you're – in your life in years after that? What happened to the farm, what happened to your parents?
- HILLE: My father decided Oregon would be nicer than Montana, because the winters were so harsh, so he – moved to Oregon.
- MOORE: Took the family?
- HILLE: Mm-hmm. Well, what was left, there were three youngest ones went. The rest of us stayed in Montana.
- MOORE: Mm-hmm. And, um – what happened to the farm – homestead?
- HILLE: [interposed] They sold it. It was – well, he had a loan against it, and he coulda stayed there if he wanted to, but he didn't want to, so I guess he just had an auction sale and sold it and – went o – and left.
- MOORE: Mm-hmm. Now you say that your father was an adventurer, and your mother was glad she was here. Um, it's always difficult to look back and now you've seen your other family there –do you think that keeping that mill there – and this is all hypothetical – they would have a better life there than here?
- HILLE: Financially I think so. I really do.
- MOORE: Quality of life, you think?
- HILLE: I think it would have been an easier life. But they both seemed very glad that they came to America. And even my mother like she said, after back – going back – she still, in her later life was glad they came to America.
- MOORE: Mm-hmm. And how do you view it, their immigration?

- HILLE: Well, that was their – whatever they decided to do, that was – I had nothing to do with that –
- MOORE: [interposed] So you would never think yourself of going to Holland to live?
- HILLE: Oh, no. Well not the – my age – or even when I was younger, I wouldn't. No. I loved to visit it, and I love visit all my cousins over there.
- MOORE: And when you visit your cousins in Holland do you remember any Dutch at all?
- HILLE: No, but I can understand it if they don't speak too fast. There are so many dialects in Holland, that even my Dutch cousins don't understand some of the areas' dialect. They said you go over the next Hille, there's another dialect. And, my parents (clock chimes) did not speak high Dutch, which is more universal – than dialect. My cou – some of my aunts spoke high Dutch, and some of my cousins. I've had – we've had several cousins come over here to visit –
- MOORE: Mm-hmm.
- HILLEE: oh I'd say four or five different ones, and they all speak English –
- MOORE: Mm-hmm.
- HILLE: Because they have to take six – they take six languages in grade school, those children.
- MOORE: Mm-hmm. Well, uh – what happened in your life then? How – what – name some of the major things that happened in your life in terms of your – uh – when you went to school and what happened and who you met and how you – how you lived your life?
- HILLE: Well, I walked to grade school – I loved school, I really did love school – and then I rode horseback to high school. Three miles, winter and spring and fall. And it was tough because it was cold in the winter time.
- MOORE: What was your favorite subject?
- HILLE: I think history and geography?
- MOORE: And do you think the fact that your families were immigrants somehow influenced that?

HILLE: I really don't – I couldn't say. It might be.

MOORE: And so you went by horseback to high school, and then what did you do later?

HILLE: [interposed] I – I graduated from high school, and then – well it was the Depression when I graduated in high school – from high school in '33, I was the – really the Deep Depression, and I went to Great Falls where Mary was a – nurse – my sister Mary – and I lived with her and I got – work. I went – I worked for a – uh – family that owned the Great Falls Brewery for a year and a half for fifteen dollars a month they had three little boys: eight, ten and twelve and they wore white shirts to school and the father wore a white shirt to work, and the nephew lived with 'em and he had a white shirt and I had to wash and iron all those shirts. Fifteen dollars a month and after a year and a half I asked for a raise – five dollar raise and they said no, so I quit.

MOORE: And then what'd you do?

HILLE: Then I went to Haver, 'cause my sister Anne lived there.

MOORE: Which is where?

HILLE: It's about a hundred miles north of Great Falls. Montana.

MOORE: Mm-hmm.

HILLE: And, uh – what'd I do there? Oh, I went to work as a waitress in a coffee shop.

MOORE: And then – then – did you have – did you have a – who'd you live with, your sister?

HILLE: Mm-hmm.

MOORE: I see. And so – name some other – what – were there any family tragedies that occurred when you – when – fa– after your family came here to the country?

HILLE: To our family here?

MOORE: Yeah.

HILLE: No. We've been a very fortunate family. Our sister Anne passed away in 1976, she was sixty-three.

MOORE: Mm-hmm.

HILLE: [interposed] Uh, father died in 194 – 2 or 3. He was sixty something. It was during the war.

MOORE: And what'd your mother do from then on for living?

HILLE: She did housework for a family in -- in Ore – in Eugene, Oregon.

MOORE: Mm-hmm. And so –

HILLE: [interposed] She worked for them for years and years and years.

MOORE: So you basically lived with your sister most of your life – your other sister? (Clock begins to chime)

HILLE: My sister Anne? Yeah – uh – then 'til I got married.

MOORE: Mm-hmm. And when did you get married?

HILLE: In '42. In Great Falls, Montana.

MOORE: And did you marry another person from Holland?

HILLE: No. No, he was from Butte, Montana. Part French and part English.

MOORE: And so –um, are you still married to the same person?

HILLE: No he died. I remarried – a – a childhood sweetheart that I hadn't seen for fifty years in '84 and he died in '88.

MOORE: Ah. A childhood sweetheart –

HILLE: [interposed] Mm-hmm.

MOORE: How'd you find him after all those years?

HILLE: Well, I just happened to be in the library one day, and I saw a telephone book of Montana, and I thought, I wonder if Corey's [ph] still alive. And I –looked in the phone book and there was his name and address. So I wrote him a letter. And his wife had died previously, and – so we got together and we got married.

MOORE: Wow. What a story.

HILLE: His wife had died several years before. Oh, it made the big page of the papers here. (MOORE laughs) And uh – we had a real nice four years together.

MOORE: And so now you're here in – in Las Vegas. And you're close to your –

HILLE: [interposed] I – I've lived here since 1944.

MOORE: And that's because your sister Mary came out here, or?

HILLE: [interposed] Mm-hmm. My husband went overseas. And there was nothing in Montana, of course, to make a livelihood, so I came down here, and went to work. I worked Flamingo for twenty years. Cocktail waitress.

MOORE: In the hotel?

HILLE: Flamingo Hotel.

MOORE: Hilton?

HILLE: Flamingo – yeah, the Hilton.

MOORE: The Hilton.

HILLE: It was Flamingo when I first went there.

MOORE: Oh!

HILLE: It's nothing like it was – then. I retired in '57 – no, four – uh, '67 I retired.

MOORE: And what's it – how's it different now? How's Las Vegas different than it used to be?

HILLE: Oh, it used to be so much fun. It was ten thousand population when I came here. Now it's a million. And you knew everybody in town, and now I know more people in the cemetery than I do on the street.

MOORE: Mm.

HILLE: It's the truth. Oh, yeah, everybody dying. And, uh, all the hotels are cha – it's so big now. It's not fun like it used to be.

MOORE: Is it more commercial than it used to be?

HILLE: Oh, yeah. Everybody was – it was small, and everybody knew everyone. You know? It was friendly, and – really nice.

MOORE: And – so you – you liked it better then than now?

HILLE: Oh, yes.

MOORE: Mm.

HILLE: But I'm not gonna – I still like it. I wouldn't live anyplace else.

MOORE: (Laughs)

HILLE: I really like it. I like the – uh – the winters are so pretty. Uh, the summers, a couple months are miserable, then – they're miserable everywhere if it's hot. Back East I – a stepdaughter that lives back in Annapolis, and she was in Washington D.C. area. When it's hot back there, it's – it's miserable.

MOORE: Yeah.

HILLE: Yeah. So – I – I like Vegas, and I have all my friends here and I play a lot of bridge and I wouldn't – I wouldn't anyplace else. I'd usually get out of the heat in the summertime.

MOORE: W-well, are you happy that your parents came – to the States?

HILLE: Yes, yes I am.

MOORE: And you said you went to Ellis Island? Did you –

HILLE: [interposed] My sis – my youngest sister, Josephine in m-Oregon, and I took a trip – in '92. We left the 1<sup>st</sup> of September we returned the end of November. We drove by car. She met me here – a-and we went to Montana to visit our sister, Ceel, and we went to Mt. Rushmore, visited a friend in Minnesota, one in Illinois, we went to Niagra Falls, we went to New York City. We left our car however, in we – in White Plains, so we took the train in. Then we went up to Maine, Bar Harbor. Then we went back down, we skipped – uh – New York. We went south and we went to – Annapolis where my stepdaughter la – uh – Washington D.C., where my stepdaughter lives. But I'd been there several times before, so we skipped that.

Then we went to the Smokies, and the Blue Ridge, and through Tennessee –

MOORE: (Laughs)

HILLE: (Laughs) And then we went to, um – we ended up in Florida.

MOORE: (Laughs)

HILLE: (Laughs) Not Fort Lauderdale. We had a cruise all booked but they – something happened while we were traveling that it was cancelled but we got our ref – money back. Then we went to Disneyland, and – um – what's that, Cypress Gardens, and then we went to New Orleans for four days and then we went into Austin, Texas and we visited friends there.

MOORE: Did you ever go to Ellis Island in this whole trip?

HILLE: Oh, yeah, we went on a tour.

MOORE: To Ellis Island?

HILLE: Yeah, we took a bus tour in New York City.

MOORE: Well, why were you interested in seeing Ellis Island, if you liv –?

HILLE: 'Cause our parents landed there. I was there before. My sister Ceel and Joe, her husband – in Montana – and I took a trip in their motor home, two different times: '78 and – '77 and '78. And the first time we went to – uh, we stayed with friends in New Jersey right across the river from New York and we went in – they took us around, and we went to Ellis Island, but it was cl – it was closed at that time. We went Statue of Liberty but Ellis Island was not open.

MOORE: Mm-hmm.

HILLE: So this time, Joey and I took this regular bus tour of New York City –

MOORE: Mm-hmm.

HILLE: You couldn't possible see New York City on your own. Although with – well, when we were there before, they had a bus tour that you could take for a dollar and a half for all day, and you could get off and on this same bus.

MOORE: Mm-hmm.

HILLE: I don't know if they still have it, we didn't pursue it. And, so this time, Ellis Island was open. So Joey and I went.

MOORE: What was your impression?

HILLE: Well [tape skips] it really [tape skips] to me. That was my impression, really.

MOORE: Did your parents ever talk about Ellis Island before?

HILLE: Not really.

MOORE: They talk about the quarantine, being quarantined?

HILLE: Oh, yeah, they talked about being quarantined.

MOORE: And what'd they say about it? Just said –

HILLE: They just took it as a matter of course, I guess, that they had – it was one of the things they had to do.

MOORE: Did they say why they were? Quarantined?

HILLE: Probably for disease.

MOORE: And you don't know what – what disease, huh?

HILLE: [interposed] No.

MOORE: Well, I'd like to thank you on behalf of Ellis Island for helping us out, and –

HILLE: [interposed] Well, I hope – to make a – make something.

MOORE: Yeah, no I –

HILLE: [interposed] (Laughs) Just to do something make it a little more interesting. Um, we wish the bus would have had more time, you know? That to – this tour that we were on, we just had x amount of time to spend Statue of Liberty – we had to catch the ferry back to the Battery –

MOORE: Mm-hmm.

- HILLE: And then the bus that we were on was gone, but we got another bus with the same company, which was really great, because they took us places the other bus hadn't taken us.
- MOORE: Yeah, there's a lot to see in New York.
- HILLE: Yeah, oh, you – one day is not nearly enough. But, I had seen so much before, and my sister – wasn't too impressed with – she – she was impressed, but she did not like that many people, and the rush. You know, she said, "Nobody walks around here, they just run." You know? (Laughs)
- MOORE: (Laughs)
- HILLE: And she was [tape skips] she is [tape skips] quiet. The only thing is I'd have to leave there, go some place a little more quiet [tape skips] not quite as hectic as Vegas. Although, she comes to Vegas all the time, and right now she's in Mexi – [tape skips]
- MOORE: One last que – [tape skips] Hmm
- HILLE: [tape skips] On a trip.
- MOORE: Do you – one last question I'd like to ask you is that, do you somehow feel still Dutch in any way?
- HILLE: Oh, I'm proud of my Dutch heritage. I really am.
- MOORE: And how do you feel Dutch in any way?
- HILLE: Because I'm born and – uh, born and Du – I've got Dutch blood. (Laughs)
- MOORE: And do – and do –
- HILLE: And I'm proud of Holland, it's a beautiful country.
- MOORE: And do you – are you interested in it historically? And – I mean, do you read about Du – Holland, and –?
- HILLE: [interposed] Oh, well, I've – (clears throat) I've traveled practically from the top to the bottom – it's such a small country. When my sister and I went after our stay we left our mother in Holland with her sisters which mea – put her nose really out of joint, she wanted to go with us, and she was – well it was in '69, she was born in '73, I don't know how old that makes her, 79 – yeah, she was in her eighties,

early eighties. And, uh – yeah, because she died four years older, and she was – she must have been eighty-four, because she died when she was eighty-seven, or eighty-three. She didn't like it because we took this trip without her, but we took one that would have – regular tours of Holland, you know? Vienna, eh – Rome –

MOORE: [interposed] Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

HILLE: -- Paris, the whole nine yards. And then when we returned, we rented a car. And she and I took the two aunts and my mother on a tour of Holland. Now we've got built-in tour guides. They'd lived there all their lives. So we just zig-zagged. All throughout – we spent eight days, on this – that little tiny country. So we saw really, all of Holland.

MOORE: Mm-hmm.

HILLE: And that was a highlight also.

MOORE: As I said, I'd like to thank you for helping us. Umm, I'll sign off – this is Kate Moore in Las Vegas, Nevada, uh – on January 22<sup>nd</sup> 1994, with Leona Hillee – uh – for the Ellis Island Oral History Project.

[END OF INTERVIEW]