

Tinie Haagsma
Narrator,
with comments by Amy Sullivan, PhD and Christian Jensen

Kristen Reynolds
The Bakken Museum
Interviewer

August 21, 2023
At The Bakken Museum
Minneapolis, Minnesota

Tinie Haagsma -TH
Kristen Reynolds -KR
Amy Sullivan -AS
Christian Jensen -CJ

KR: ... Can you please state your name for the record for me, please?

TH: 00:01:26 Tinie Haagsma.

KR: 00:01:28 Thank you... Can you tell me a little bit about your early life and culture?

TH: 00:01:54 ... I was born in Leeuwarden, which is the capital of a province called Friesland in the north of Holland. Friesland has its own language called Frisian. It's recognized as a language, not a dialect. The people are very proud of it. We're trying to keep it, which is getting harder and harder. It's closer to Old English than it is to Dutch. Friesland is also known for Friesian horses. You see them in some of the movies these days—these beautiful, black Friesian horses. Something else about Friesland is that Peter Stuyvesant came from there. Mata Hari was born in my hometown. [Leeuwarden] has about a hundred thousand people, and has 130,000 by now. It was awarded the cultural capital of Europe a couple of years ago. This award goes to different cities at different times, but they did a lot of things in my hometown to make things look even better. That is Friesland and Leeuwarden.

00:03:11 I am from a family of six children. I'm number five of six. [There were] five girls and one boy. We had a lot of fun growing up.

We're all quite close together... We were involved in sports quite a bit. My brother was very busy with soccer next to his studies, and the girls were all in swimming. We got that at school, and then [we had] our gymnastics club. We were very active in gymnastics.

My father had his own business and traveled quite a bit. My parents especially were very open to other countries and loved to travel. I was brought up with this interested in other nations, other people, other nationalities, and traveling. From quite a young age, I knew that I wanted to study languages. I think I was thirteen or fourteen [when I realized that]. In high school, I was in program where all four languages were given—French, German, English, and Dutch—from age twelve to sixteen. There were also math and physics classes. It was quite a heavy program, so that was very interesting.

00:03:58 I think it was similar here in those days, back in the fifties and sixties. The choices for the girls were becoming a nurse, a teacher, or a secretary. You would work for a while, and then you'd get married and have children. Then you would have to stop working because you wouldn't have time for everything.

00:05:15 That was very much the case in my family. One of my sisters became a nurse and the others were secretaries. Besides that, I wanted to learn those languages because I knew I would get more interesting jobs when I grew older. That's what I planned from a young age already. There were not too many colleges that you could go to, but I had a plan. I found out that I could go to England. So, I went to England for a year or so. I was seventeen when I left. I went to an international school. Then I came back [to Holland] for another year. The thing that I still remember as being extremely important to me as a young girl was that there were all these kids from other countries. You have a preconceived idea that somebody from Turkey, Japan, or [another country] is a certain type of person. Then you find out that, no, that's not all [true]. We're all the same except we have different customs and let's celebrate those different customs.

00:06:32 That's exactly what happened in those schools where we got together. That, to me, was always very important—this celebrating and being interested other nations and other

customs. After almost two years in England, I went home. My father had passed away suddenly, so I went home for a year and did some work as a secretary or receptionist. Then I got a letter. We are in the sixties now, so you did everything by letter. Even a phone call would have been unusual. [I got a letter] from one of my best friends from school in England. She was from the south of France. She contacted me and said, “You wanted to learn more French.” I had also taken French in England. “I have a job for you if you’re interested. It’s in a hotel as a multilingual secretary. The owner of the hotel is French, but her manager is from Holland and he's going to stop by if you're interested. He’s in Holland right now.”

00:07:44 So, he did. [The manager] interviewed me at my house and next thing I know, I'm on the train to the south of France. I worked there one long summer, and then I would be home in the winter. It was seasonal work. I would take a long vacation and travel before going home. I saw many places in those days because I'd worked nonstop [during the summer] when you're in that kind of work. You don't have a day off, which I didn't mind at all because it was all so different. It didn't seem like work. It was interesting. I met a lot of interesting people there, again, from all over the world. Then a girlfriend would come down, and we'd travel to Spain, Morocco, and all these places that were most interesting.

00:08:35 Again, I'm around eighteen, nineteen, and twenty. I would be home for Christmas and work for a couple of months. I went back for a second summer and did the same kind of thing—I practiced my French, learned more, and again, made some travel at the end to eastern countries like Yugoslavia (when it was still Yugoslavia), Bulgaria, Greece, and Turkey. I came back and started looking for a serious job. I'd done my languages. I had wanted to do one year in England, one year in France, and one year in Germany. I never did make it to Germany because I went back to the other places. When I finished my international business degree, I chose German as my main language of choice. Then I started looking for a job. I wanted to have a serious job.

KR: 00:09:37 Can we pause really quickly? ... I'm sorry to interrupt your line of thought... Just to recap, you left Holland and went

to England. You came back to Holland, and then you spent a lot of time traveling and learning French?

TH: 00:10:16 Well, I came back from Holland and went to England because all my friends were there. They said, "You'd better come back and continue to study English and French." That second year, I stayed with the teachers as an au pair. I would stay in their house with the family. There were two teachers who were married. One was teaching English, and the other one was teaching French. They had a little four-year-old, and so I would take care of the four-year-old until they came home at three o'clock, and then I'd go to school. That's how we worked it out. And that was really a wonderful time to do it that way. I was with very, very nice people, and I could go to school in the afternoon and evening. I came back from England when my father had passed away. I was home for a year, and then I got that letter from my friend and went to France. That was for almost two years.

KR: 00:11:29 You said that the person that you went to work for interviewed you at home?

TH: 00:11:34 Yes, the person from the hotel.

KR: 00:11:36 Was that normal?

TH: 00:11:37 No, but it so happened that he was home [in the Netherlands] because the season hadn't started yet. Tony Schoemaker was his name. My friend in France knew him and knew the hotel in Lourdes, France. He happened to be in Holland because he too was Dutch. My friend said, "I've got a prospect here. [I know] somebody who may want to fill your [job] opening." He called and set an appointment. After two long summers in Franc, I then looked for a "serious job," as I called it. All the others were not very serious, I thought. I did have some earlier jobs in between getting "the serious job." I worked for Teleac for a little while. This is through what you call overload now, so you could start a job quickly.

00:12:51 Teleac was educational television and I worked at a PR [public relations] department there. Then the other job actually was at the University of Delft. The future husband of a friend of mine helped me get that. It had to do with the student council and they needed a secretary, so I helped out

there for a while. I found that friends are very important. Not that you have friends only to help you, but it so happens in the world. I did that until I applied at KLM [Koninklijke Luchtvaart Maatschappij/Royal Dutch Airlines]. I had some interviews there. At that time, I also saw an ad in a business newspaper for this American company that was starting an office in Amsterdam at Schiphol Airport.

00:13:53 They needed somebody who was multilingual, who could speak French, English, German, and Dutch. I thought, “Well, that's exactly what I have.” It was at the airport, and I wanted to be close to the airlines. Well, there you go. I applied, and the interview, which was also unusual, was at the Hilton Hotel. That happened to be just two blocks from where I had a studio at that time. I was interviewed by Ron Hagenson, whose name you will know because he's been very active at Medtronic and the [Bakken] Library. Kees Portanje also interviewed me. He was the Dutch representative for Picker. Medtronic was working with Picker at the time. Medtronic had 160 people and they were all in the United States. They opened their first office outside of the United States in Amsterdam. I had never heard of Medtronic or pacemakers, and neither had anybody else practically.

00:15:05 They showed me a pacemaker, which was mercury and zinc battery operated pacemaker. I seem to remember that sales were about \$5 million. They were ready to go international, even though they had been warned in the past that the market would never be very large—there would never be enough people that needed a pacemaker. Anyhow, we started off at Schiphol Airport. It was very, very interesting. My first job was to get a phone installed. In those days, it was hard to get a phone installed. I was by myself. I had a key, and the office they had rented was at Schiphol East. The new Schiphol Airport, where you go to these days, had just opened across the tarmac. You had all these empty buildings from the old airport. They had found three rooms and rented those.

00:16:13 On my first day, I opened the office. It was dusty and I was waiting for the furniture. There was nobody there. Ron Hagenson was to be my boss. He was sent out to Holland for two years... After my interview, he had gone back home to Minneapolis to pick up his wife, their four-year-

old, and their three-month-old baby. They were all in their early thirties. I was in my early twenties. That was the beginning of Medtronic International.

- KR:** 00:16:55 This was about the late sixties or early seventies?
- TH:** 00:16:57 It was June 1st, 1967, when I started at [Medtronic].
- KR:** 00:17:01 Okay, wow! I can't remember the first date of my first job [All laugh].
- TH:** 00:17:09 I remember the first day. When I tried to get a telephone, they told me, "Well, it will be three weeks." I remember going to the office for the PTT, Post Telegraph and Telephone. I said, "Well, no, but this is a company that does work in the medical field and it's a matter of life and death. We need a telephone sooner." We got a telephone [Laughs].
- KR:** 00:17:33 So how are you communicating with folks in the States?
- TH:** 00:17:36 Well, that's the other thing I've been thinking about. We were communicating by phone, and we also had a telex. The telex had the little yellow strips with all the little holes in it. Well, that was futuristic. It was really something. We had telexes in those days, and then it was the phone—that's how we communicated. But I'm still amazed at how we did it all. Now everything is instant... We were very busy in those days. I mentioned that the Picker Corporation was the distributor for Medtronic pacemakers. One of the first things Medtronic did was to get direct salespeople in every country. We had about sixteen to eighteen countries and we opened offices in all those countries... My job was setting up sales meetings in the beginning and getting meetings together.
- 00:18:49 I also met Earl for the first time in those days. I didn't meet Earl right away in that first interview, but I met him a few weeks later when he came over. He took me out to lunch at the airport, and I was very impressed by him. He had such a calm and quiet [demeanor]. He was interested in everything and did a tour with his family through Europe. I remember him telling me that he decided on Holland. What I seem to remember is that he had a soft spot for Holland. Of course, the economic situation was advantageous to start a company or to have an office there. His grandfather also

came from the south of Holland, from Zeeland. Also, [most people] speak English in Holland, so it was easier to get started there. He talked to me about [Medtronic's] mission statement. I was very impressed by this kind and wise gentleman. That was my first introduction to him. Of course, over the years, I got to know him more and more when I worked for five years in Amsterdam. Many times, I was involved in meetings and in interpreting sessions. Our staff grew. I think by the time I left, we had about thirty or forty people.

00:20:33

It was a very busy time. I worked with Ron Hagenson for two years, and then he went home to Minneapolis. Chip Allen was the second manager for two years. And then Dr. Rohrer was the third one. By then, I was the Personnel Manager there. In 1969, two years after we started at Schiphol, we opened the factory in Kerkrade, Limburg. One of the big plans was to have a factory in Holland, which was accomplished within two years. In 2019, they celebrated the fiftieth anniversary.

It was a wonderful time... I thought I would stay with the company for two years and then I'd be bored. That's how you are when you're in your early twenties [Both laugh]. You think you know it all. Well, I never got bored with Medtronic because they were always growing, and things were always changing. Change was what it was all about. We had such nice people. I think the atmosphere was always so good, and especially from the top management—that would be Earl, of course. Tom Holloran also came frequently, and I remember Manny Villafana stopped by once. He was still working for Medtronic then. Anyhow, I have very fond memories.

It was a very busy time. I worked with Ron Hagenson for two years, and then he went home to Minneapolis. Chip Allen was the second manager for two years. And then Dr. Rohr was the third one. By then, I was the Personnel Manager there. In 1969, two years after we started at Schiphol, we opened the factory in Kerkrade, Limburg. One of the big plans was to have a factory in Holland, which was accomplished within two years. In 2019, they celebrated their fiftieth anniversary.

KR:

Wow. Were you there for that?

TH: I was invited to that, yes. That was a wonderful celebration, again, of Earl and everything that had been accomplished there.

Going back to the Schiphol office and Dr. Rohr... He decided, and it was accepted by management, that we needed to move to Paris, France. The small office moved to Paris. But in the meantime, I had been offered a job to come and work for Earl Bakken here in Minneapolis. I took that offer, although it was a big decision.

KR: Why did you choose Minneapolis over Paris?

TH: ... Why did I choose Minneapolis over Paris? First of all, I wasn't sure if I wanted to go to Paris with the group. In typical European fashion, you didn't just leave your home and your country for a job that suddenly moved. I wasn't sure if that was the place for me. I had lived in France. I had done what I had wanted to do; I learned a language. I couldn't really be helpful in France. They really needed French people, I felt. I was not convinced I should go there. Then in the middle of everything and having nothing to do with [the decision to move to Paris], I got this call from Minneapolis to say, "Mr. Bakken is coming next week and he'd like to talk to you." That's when he offered me a job to work for him, which was of course a big decision too. It's not just across the channel, but across the Atlantic. I didn't have to think about it too long. Again, I thought, "For two or three years it'll be great and then I'll go back" [All laugh].

KR: 00:24:13 How were the conversations with your family about your decision to move?

TH: 00:24:21 I talked to my mother, and I remember when one of my sisters was moving to the south of Holland. It was about a five-to-seven-hour drive. I remember saying to my mother, "Hillie will be a seven-hour drive [away], and I can fly in about that time too." We were always, in Holland especially, very open to those kinds of moves too. If you don't like it, then you come back. But try it out. Don't say no right away. This was different for me than going to France. I really knew Earl Bakken by then, and what a wise gentleman and a great person he was too. That really made a difference also.

KR: 00:25:17 You had a really independent life in the sixties, at a time where that's not necessarily the case for a lot of people.

TH: 00:25:28 I did. I found that out later [Laughs].

KR: 00:25:32 It's beautiful that you just traveled and did what you wanted to do. That came about because you know all these languages.

TH: 00:25:42 Exactly, it made all the difference. It made all the difference... In England, I met this wonderful couple and could be an au pair there. It wasn't going to an expensive school at all. You just go to the colleges there that offer what you need. That worked out wonderfully, plus what I already mentioned in getting to know so many different people from different countries all over the world. That I'll never forget, and I would recommend it to everyone. I really would recommend that exposure.

KR: 00:26:23 As you are navigating this new business opening and are you making this transition to Minneapolis, you also mentioned that you helped them set up a lot of meetings in Europe as they were getting off the ground. Can you talk to me about any sort of potential failures you might've had or any hiccups you might've encountered?

TH: 00:26:49 I remember some of the first sales meetings that we set up, where we got to know all these people, there were mostly men in those days. There was only one lady who was in sales there. But in any case, the first ever meeting I set up was in Amsterdam. Part of the meeting was for relaxation. We had rented a boat to go through the canals of Amsterdam and have dinner there. It was supposed to be lovely, but there was a fog so bad that you couldn't see the beginning of the boat or the end of it. But we had a good meeting. Another meeting that I will never forget was two years later, in 1969, in Geneva. And by [that time] we had quite a big group. I still have pictures of that group.

00:27:49 One of the things I remember was when I was in a small meeting with the officers, Charlie Cuddihy, Earl Bakken, and Tom Holloran. They were discussing, "Are we going to be just a nice small company that we are today, or are we going to be a growth company?" I thought, "Gee, can you just decide that? To become a growth company?" So, I'm

listening and taking notes. Number one was to make all the [European] offices direct Medtronic sales offices. But I will never forget again, as a young person who really didn't know a whole lot about business in that respect, that you can make those decisions of, "Oh we're going to be a growth company," just like that. That's another of my memories from that time.

00:28:48 [I had nothing to do with the move from Amsterdam to Paris]. I learned that you can write plans to make it sound like [moving to Paris] is what you have to do, when it really wasn't. It didn't last very long in Paris. It went to Belgium, and then it ended up in Switzerland where is now in Tolochenaz. But that was a move where you thought, "Why was that done?" in retrospect.

KR: 00:29:49 But your move to Minneapolis was successful?

TH: It was very successful.

KR: 00:29:57 Tell me about your first few years here in the Twin Cities.

TH: 00:30:02 When I arrived here, it was January. I stopped to see my best friend and her husband, who was a civil engineer. His job was on Saba [municipality of the Netherlands in the Antilles Islands] to build a harbor, which is quite impossible with the rocks. But anyhow, I stopped there for a short vacation before going on to Minneapolis. And I remember being on the plane leaving Saba and flying via Saint Martin and Puerto Rico. I ended up with some gentlemen from GE [General Electric]. We got to talking and they were interested in where I was going. They were very, very nice people from GE. They heard I was going to Medtronic in Minneapolis. Medtronic, of course, was still small, but what they mentioned to me was, "Do you know where you're going?" I said, "Well, yeah. I'm going to Minneapolis." "Do you know how cold it gets there?" [Both laugh].

00:31:03 So anyhow, so here I arrive, and it is the coldest day of the winter, minus twenty or minus thirty degrees. You can hardly breathe. But what I really liked about the winters, and still do—I prefer cold weather over hot weather—was that the sky was blue. Now in Holland, in winter, you have so many gray days and there's not a whole lot you can do. Here you had all that snow. I learned how to cross-country

ski and do [those sorts of] things almost right away. But what I really like about the winters here is the blue sky and the sun. It's bright. I remember that it was hard to breathe until I got used to it, and you better have a warm car.

00:31:55 In my first weeks at work, Earl took me to the bank. I called him Earl here, but in Europe, and I always called him Mr. Bakken. I also said Mr. Hagenson when referring to Ron. That was the culture that went with respect [in Holland]. They were, especially Mr. Bakken and Mr. Hagenson, very sensitive to our cultures and they weren't trying to change it to their culture. I've always been impressed by that... But the minute I came here, I was comfortable calling him what everybody else was calling him, which was Earl. This was with great respect. He took me to the bank so I could get a loan to get a car, and others helped me find an apartment. That was what I did for the first week, more or less. Then the work started.

KR: 00:32:53 This was about early seventies then?

TH: 00:32:54 This was 1972. By then, [Medtronic] had about 650 people and they just started the manufacturing plant, Rice Creek. We were at the St. Anthony Plant that has now been sold... I worked for Earl, not for just two or three years, but twenty years until he retired.

KR: 00:33:23 Tell me a little bit when we met, you had mentioned that after Earl retired that you still wanted to work. You moved into a different role at Medtronic. Can you tell me about that?

TH: 00:33:35 I worked for him until he was already retired, but then he stayed another three years [in Minnesota] before he finally left for Hawaii. That then became his residence over there. He had been telling me all along, "Now you look around and if you find something, you go. Okay?" I had some discussions with personnel, but one day I heard about this opening in the patient relations area. This was a totally new area, and patients were starting to call. This is a continuing story throughout my career—suddenly, there is a need for certain things, and we better answer those needs. I thought that would be an area I would be interested in, could learn more about the products, learn more about the patient, and be closer to the patients in this respect...

00:34:50 And I thought, “Well, I need a little bit of practice.” It had been twenty years since I interviewed. I asked for an appointment, interviewed, and then I was hired. I had three weeks to say goodbye to Earl, so that was the hardest. That was really hard. We had a party, and I had somebody who worked with me all along. Karen Larson, who worked for Ron Hagenson, backed me up. She had been on maternity leave. I contacted her and said, “Are you ready to come back? It would be perfect.” That’s what happened. She could take over for the years that Earl was [retired from Medtronic], but had many, many other things that he got involved in.

00:35:45 He needed somebody who knew the work that needed to be done. I went to patient relations on the cardiac side and worked there for about eight years. Then the neuro area was really growing and mushrooming. They had a need for somebody. I’d done a few educational things with them, and then they offered me a job there. It was a wonderful move. I worked there for the last ten years [of my career at Medtronic].

KR: What did you do for them?

TH: I was there in the patient relations. Again, it started with one or two people. Now they must have forty or fifty people in tech services and patient relations. Patients would call in more and more. Not only would they call, but then the internet started. I remember the first days of the internet; we would have three internet questions per week. My goodness!

00:36:44 Now, it’s three internet questions per half second probably. Most of the questions were about educating patients. We did not get into medical questions, and we would always refer them to their physicians. It would be special questions, or they weren't comfortable, or they needed to know more. We developed the department—not just me, but the managers there—to [create] questions and answer brochures about what to do and what not to do with your pacemaker. “Can you use a chainsaw?” “Can you use this?” [Both laugh]. We also did physician referrals across the globe. By that point, we had offices around the globe that all needed to be set up. I worked with the legal department closely. If there was a situation that could become difficult, then they would ask me to get in touch with the patients.

00:37:48 I appreciated that work very much. I had learned from Earl too, but also, people needed to be listened to. Then you try and help them. The other thing that I was very aware of was that when you talk to a patient in the field, you let the local rep know right away that you've been in touch so that they don't get blindsided, and they can discuss things with the physician involved. So, that was another circle. If devices came back for analysis, I would work with the engineers and make sure that the results were going back to the appropriate people—the rep, the physician, and the patient eventually. All that grew, but it really started with just simple [patient] questions about, “What do we do? This is new to me, and I'm scared.”

KR: 00:38:49 Do you have any specific memories of patients that you worked with or specific stories?

TH: 00:38:57 I remember one of the first patients. I was still in Earl's office. A very important day at Medtronic was the Christmas program. We would invite patients with different products and their physicians to talk to the employees at our Christmas program. Earl started this way in the beginning, and one of the first patients I met was Sheena Sims. She was from Argentina and had a heart ailment. Her father had read about the work that was being done in Minneapolis by Dr. [C. Walton] Lillehei, so they got in touch with him. She got a pacemaker, and [the Christmas party she went to was] years and years later. She was an adult, a lovely lady, and was invited to the Christmas program with Dr. Lillehei.

00:40:06 This must've been in the eighties. I got to meet them, and she lives in Washington right now. That was just one of those memories you don't forget. She had had that device for so long and it was done because of Dr. Lillehei and how it all started. That was one of the beautiful memories. Another one was about a young boy, he was sixteen or seventeen and needed a defibrillator. I always stayed in touch with him. He came with his parents and had one of the first defibrillators. But over the years, he had more defibrillators, of course, and got married. He had children and stayed in touch. Every Christmas I would get a card with a picture of the family. He is now one of the administrators one of the main hospitals in Kansas City or Overland, Kansas.

00:41:07 So again, there is this continuing story of some lovely people and great patients I remember. The other thing that all started with the Christmas program... was that it always very inclusive. When we had offices all around the world, we added other world religions because our employees were [global]. [That extended to] the Christmas program, where they read Christmas texts and then added other religions too. I was always very pleased to see that there was an inclusion and that everybody got their chance to talk about and bring wisdom from the different areas. I think that's continuing today. It was broadcast, I think videotaped, and brought round to all the other offices. Although in many of the locations, they had their own [Christmas program]. I know in Holland, they do that at the factory. They invite the patients and get their stories.

KR: 00:42:27 Yeah, that's lovely.

TH: 00:42:28 I've always been very impressed. There was choir and they sang, and then you get the different stories and wisdom from the different areas. Also, that brings to mind, when I first came to St. Anthony, we had a meditation room. It had all the books of the different religions there. I don't know if they still have it, but in any case, I liked that a lot.

KR: 00:42:57 I don't think that's something that's common today.

TH: 00:43:03 Certainly not in those days.

KR: 00:43:04 Listening to you talk, I can see why you stuck around, despite thinking you would only be there for a couple years.

TH: 00:43:15 Yes. I was married in the meantime too, so I grew even more roots in any case. I have wonderful friends here. I'm no longer married, but I feel at home. How many years has it been? Over fifty? I still go back and forth to Holland regularly. And of course, now with WhatsApp and everything else, it's become so easy. I remember in the beginning I would be homesick from time to time, and I would think, "If only Holland was in Iowa. That would be nice. Then it would be perfect." But also, when I think of my family, I have nieces and nephews [all over the world]. One nephew just came back from living in Lima for ten years. My niece lives in New Zealand after living in Kenya.

They moved to New Zealand because it became too dangerous there. Another nephew lives in the south of France, and another one lives in England. We are a global family these days, it has become easy.

KR: 00:44:31 I have a question that isn't on this list, but you mentioned the difficulty of getting a phone set up, the telex, and the internet with your use of WhatsApp. I'm curious if you wouldn't mind sharing more about how you navigated these new technologies. Even the pacemaker. You've seen a lot of new technologies emerge in the world. Would you mind talking about that a little bit?

TH: 00:45:09 I am really surprised when I think back. I remember using an electric typewriter when I worked in a hotel in France. I thought, "I don't want that. It's way too quick. I make mistakes." And then in no time, of course, you're used to it. That's such a good question. When you look back, you think, "How did we manage all this?" I do know that Medtronic would send us to classes at the science museums. They would have computer classes. But now that I'm retired, I'm way behind. I was trying to type something the other night and I'm thinking, "I'm making mistake. I don't know how to do this anymore, how to format." You just went from one adjustment to the next and didn't think too much of it. Now it's WhatsApp—how easy and very economical too.

00:46:09 You can just call and send you [messages]. That's how I stay in touch now with most of my family and friends. But also, we are inundated with information. I remember when I first lived here and I wanted to call Holland, I could do it on a Saturday morning when I was off. I had to place a call and the operator would call you back in an hour or two hours to be able to talk. Then you would be rushed because it was so expensive. You couldn't just sit down and talk at leisure. [There were] huge, huge differences.

KR: 00:46:49 How did that also impact you as you worked for Medtronic, both in Europe and the United States, if there was so much international business going on? How did that impact the business calls that you had to make?

TH: 00:47:04 It was very helpful that I knew the other languages. Most people, especially in top management, would only speak English. There were still lot of people that did not [speak

English] in those days. The business language was in English, so the letters and telexes would be in English. I do remember being asked to go on a trip with Earl and other scientists when they were working on the isotopic pacemaker. That was before I came [to Minnesota], so it must've been 1970 or 1971. That was the plutonium pacemaker. Medtronic worked with Alcatel on the power source, which was Plutonium-238.

I was asked to go to interpret if need be. When we went to Alcatel, I remember they had very tight security. There were quite a few people who were French, and then some Medtronic people. Peter Mulier was in that group and Earl too. There was a lot of talk the whole time by the French people. It's a different culture. They're more excitable, I think, compared to Earl at least. Earl's a listener. It's wonderful how he always listens. He listened to everything, and then they were negotiating. In the end, when he started to speak, everybody calmed down. I always felt he was this wonderful mediator, and he had proposed good things after having listened— “How can we work together? How can we do this?” They did implant the isotopic pacemaker. Madame Labatut was the first patient. Dr. Laurens and Dr. Piwnica were the cardiologist and the surgeon. Madame Labatut later came [to Minneapolis for a visit].

Later, when I worked in the patient relations area, there still were some patients who had that isotopic pacemaker. They stopped making it, first of all, because it was too complicated to keep track of the power sources. Also, because the lithium pacemaker came out finally. I think it was around 1977, or thereabouts.

KR: 00:50:12 You mentioned the plutonium pacemaker. Can you talk a little bit more about that? Do you know anything about that pacemaker?

TH: 00:50:21 Well, it lasted a long, long time. In reality, the half-life might have been forty or fifty years. But the other thing was it had leads, of course they broke down over time, and would still have to be replaced. And by then, we had the lithium pacemaker. I don't know how many have been implanted, I don't recall, but maybe a couple of hundred or more. We could not continue doing that, and there was no reason to do it. It would have been a problem in those days. We didn't sell pacemakers like we do now, because again,

they never foresaw how many people needed pacemakers in those early days.

- KR:** 00:51:10 Yeah, it is quite a business.
- TH:** 00:51:13 Then there were other devices too. When I was in neuro patient services, we had a deep brain stimulator and a pain stimulator. There were so many new developments. This was where Earl comes in. He was always thinking, “What else can we do? What else do patients need? What is needed right now?” The other thing that I was always impressed with was that he always hired the right people. He said, “I don't know everything.” So, he would hire people that would know more than he did or be specialized in other things.
- 00:51:55 When I first worked for him, we had office management meetings every month. They were over two days at Spring Hill. I remember, because I was in all of them taking notes. I did the minutes for those meetings. What impressed me about Earl was that he listened to everyone. And in those days, everybody was young, still in their thirties or forties. There were so many ideas floating around, and he gave everyone the time to talk about what was going on. In those days, one of the many big decisions was made to start a battery division in Minneapolis with production in Puerto Rico. Many big decisions were made in those day-long meetings through 1972, 1973, and 1974.
- KR:** 00:53:03 You were in the room for a lot of these conversations. It sounds like you had a lot of contact with doctors, engineers, and with other folks who were leaders in at Medtronic. I'm curious if there were any moments where you also contributed ideas about what they would do next or how they would move forward on things?
- TH:** 00:53:24 Not so much on the technical side... In those days, it was still pretty much the men who were in those functions as the scientists, but that has changed. I didn't have enough knowledge in those scientific areas to contribute. But the last few years of Earl's life, we were still in touch. I went to Hawaii every other year, and he would have books ready and articles. Over the last few years, he was very preoccupied with women in management, women in STEM [science, technology, engineering, and mathematics], women as scientists—the idea that we need to do more.

And that has happened, the Bakken Society, for example, started years ago for the scientists. There was a whole wall, and they were all men. But now there are more women. It was very logical in those days. Like my own background, you didn't go to the engineering and science universities.

00:54:33 My brother went to the University of Delft and became a civil engineer. There would be maybe two or three women in those classes, if at all. Well, that has changed completely today. No, [women] do much, much more. [Earl] was very strong in advocating that we need more women on the board, in management, and in science. Does that answer your question?

KR: 00:55:13 It does help... Can you remind me, how long were you at Medtronic?

TH: 00:55:22 Forty-two years and two months, or so.

KR: 00:55:27 Give or take. In your forty-two years of expertise and wisdom that you gained from being at Medtronic, what do you think it takes to be an innovator in medicine and technology from your perspective?

TH: 00:55:42 Well, I only have to think of Earl and many of the people around him. It is to have an open mind. Earl was never the kind of person who set out to start a big company. He started out with the idea, "What can I do for people?" That's his whole mission statement to alleviate pain, restore health, and extend life. It's all about helping people. In more ways than one, because he also believed in education and has done a lot for education too. Being ethical was another thing I have so appreciated. It was just totally honest, and we would always get an answer. There was never going around a question. It was always straight and honest. When I think back, it was really great to work for a person like that and with people like that.

00:56:57 He was always thinking and he always had a list of things to do. He would come into the office, and he would already have this little notebook that was always full of to-do lists. Then he would print out many lists. He had a hundred-year plan. Most people have a five-year plan. He had a hundred-year plan where he had all his dreams. You'll see it in some of his books that you have [at the Bakken Museum]. He was always thinking, but he also had such a great sense of

quiet humor and fun. So even as a child, he would have fun thinking up a robot or other things that were interesting. That continued... As far as being an innovator, he had that interest and ongoing curiosity of, "What else is there? What else can we do to help?" He was very strong at that. He wanted to meet the people who had been helped by the devices—the people who gained years to their life. He had these positive ideas, so he would stimulate and energize other people by being that way.

KR: 00:58:35 Yeah. That's lovely. I think that's a lovely answer to how we think about innovation in medicine today. You spent a lot of time talking about a deep admiration for Earl. I'm also kind of curious if there are any other people in your life as mentors who helped you become the independent young woman that you became?

TH: 00:59:06 I don't really know. It just went that way. I was the fifth of six children. At number five, I could see what the older sisters did and that was great. One would do this or that, and then the other didn't. I thought, "Well, I'm just not going to talk about it. I'm going to see what I can figure out, and then I'll present it." That was a stimulus too, having examples of how to or how not to do something as child number five. But yes, Earl was [a mentor] when we started working [together], but there were many good people [at Medtronic]. There were great teachers too. I remember my English teacher was one of my favorite teachers.

01:00:02 My French and German teachers were good as well, but my English teacher stands out for me. It was so clear. The English teacher made things very interesting. Then there were a lot of strong women in education that I have wonderful memories of. I had a great schoolteacher when I must've been seven or so. It was right after [World War II]. She had lost her husband. She had a son, but she would invite us kids to come for Sunday dinner. There we were, at seven years old or so, going there to have Sunday dinner with her and her son. That was very special. It was things like that, where they would get the kids to the house. I think we were all very impressed. I remember taking apart some toy and then I didn't know how to put it back together again. Her son helped.

KR: 01:01:09 Wow. It sounds like there were several people over the course of your life that helped propel you on your path.

TH: 01:01:19 Yes. And again, I think languages were important to me at the time. It has been proven that it was needed in those days.

KR: 01:01:28 I rarely meet anybody who even knows one other language, let alone four in total.

TH: 01:01:37 Thanks to high school again. You were tested out, so you had A, B, and C. The B was the languages plus math and physics. It was a little harder, but that's what you tested into. And I liked the languages. They don't do that anymore. They don't have that kind of curriculum. It [can be] less now. You may have two [languages]. If you study to be a physician or the sciences, you may have Latin. That was not in my package.

KR: 01:02:15 How did you feel about physics? I'm curious.

KR: 01:02:18 You feel about physics?

TH: 01:02:20 Physics? I loved it. I did like it, yes. Again, I had a good teacher because if I didn't understand it completely, they would give you the time. You could ask questions. And I did physics on that level. We also got math and algebra in those days.

KR: 01:02:40 It also sounds like some of the qualities that you admired in the teachers also came out in Earl.

TH: 01:02:46 Yes, I think so. Earl was open-minded. Although he was quiet, he never missed a thing and was respectful of other cultures. Even in Hawaii. He did so much there, but he adjusted to their culture.

KR: 01:03:09 That's lovely... You've covered a lot of these last few questions, but I am curious what you might say about why Minnesota is such a unique place for innovation?

TH: 01:03:30 After I've lived here awhile and have seen what's going on, I think the medical arena here is wonderful. Earl did a lot of that too in the beginning with MMCI [Minneapolis Medical Center Incorporated] and bringing hospitals together. I'm not sure if that still exists, but there's a wonderful [culture]

of working together. The healthcare is very, very good in Minnesota. Then the people are kind and easy to work with, I think.

- KR:** 01:04:08 What is MMCI?
- TH:** 01:04:10 Minneapolis Medical Center Incorporated. Earl was involved with that in the early years that I worked for him. I don't think it exists anymore. Of course, there's Medical Alley. He was instrumental to getting that started. After I came here, [Medtronic] was not into the lithium batteries yet. Some of the Medtronic people were impatient. They wanted to start [using lithium batteries] and [Earl] wasn't ready to do that yet. He was more cautious. Manny Villafana, Anthony Adducci, Jim Bausert, and another person split off and started CPI [Cardiac Pacemakers, Inc.] That's now Boston Scientific. The names changed a few times. Villafana also started St. Jude. There really was nothing too bad about that. You can't be the only one. You want to have competition too. All that happened in the early seventies.
- KR:** 01:05:42 I remember that happened right around when you arrive.
- TH:** 01:05:45 Right after I arrived, I remember that.
- KR:** What aspect of your career are you most proud of?
- TH:** 01:06:09 I'm most proud that I have been able to adapt to different cultures, but also to different departments and to different areas. I adapted and was comfortable with all kinds of people, it doesn't matter who. I'm proud of having survived [Both laugh]. There were a lot of ups and downs too. But there has mostly been ups. One can adjust to a lot of change and not give up. That's another big thing. Of course, there's going to be times where it's not easy and people may have to be laid off, but I always think, "Don't give up, don't quit. It always will get better eventually."
- KR:** 01:07:12 Do you have any other questions?
- AS:** 01:07:18 I wonder what your various job titles were?
- KR:** 01:07:23 Yes, do you remember what some of your different job titles were over your forty-two years?

TH: 01:07:29 Yes, I think so. Let's see. I started out as Multilingual Secretary [when Medtronic was at] Schiphol Airport. The titles had different meanings in those days, and they have changed [over the years]. Later I was Administrative Assistant at Schiphol and then it was Personnel Manager. When I came [to Minnesota], I was Executive Secretary and then Executive Administrative Assistant. Anyhow, the names and titles changed. That became less important to me. Executive Assistant was the last title I had with Earl, I think. In patient relations in the cardiac [division], I was Patient Relations Specialist. While in the neuro [division] I became a Principal Patient Relations Specialist.

AS: 01:08:37 Well, thank you...

KR: 01:08:55 Is there anything else that you would like to add?

TH: 01:08:57 I think it's delightful to be at the Bakken Library. It's wonderful. I went over a few things the other day, and I remembered that when Earl started to give more talks, he would have props from Denis Stillings. It was little by little, but it began to fill a room. I came across notes from my job description at one time that I was paying the bills for the Bakken Library, but it wasn't here. They didn't exist yet, but it was for the little place we had [at Medtronic]. I'd totally forgotten about that. But then later, when it really became larger and very meaningful, Earl bought the place here. He loved it here. He loved his museum. It's great to be here again too.

KR: 01:09:56 ...It's wonderful that you point out that you here when the museum opened. Do you have any fond memories of those sort of first years of the museum?

TH: 01:10:13 ... In the early years, Dorina Morawetz was here. I forget everybody now, but Elizabeth was also here. Dorina would organize meetings, and so I would sometimes be here with Earl just for a luncheon. She would make these spaghetti luncheons that were out of this world. We would sit here in the porch area. But the other thing that I remember that was such a nice thing to do at the Bakken Museum was to have the Sunday afternoon chamber music from the Bakken Trio. They still exist. That was, again, through Dorina Morawetz. She knew people from the Minneapolis Orchestra. It was just delightful. There were other events and meetings that were held here. It was very nice. I know

we've had a Halloween party here once, many years ago. There are some pictures left from that, I think, somewhere. I have fond memories of the Bakken Library. Then you have these wonderful gardens, and it's named after Earl's mother, the Florence Bakken Garden. That's his mother's name. And his mother, of course, was very instrumental in all his interests. She provided so many things for him so he could tinker in those early childhood days.

- KR:** 01:11:57 Thank you for indulging that question. We've been talking for almost an hour and a half.
- TH:** 01:12:06 Is that? Oh, my goodness [Both laugh].
- KR:** 01:12:09 This is here I start to wind us down. Is there anything that you would hope that I would ask about that we didn't get to today?
- TH:** 01:12:22 I don't know. We've been talking so much [Both laugh].
- AS:** 01:12:25 What about the story of your friends?...
- TH:** 01:12:34 One of the things I do when I go home is always have lunch or dinner with my two early childhood friends. We grew up in the same street. We knew each other since we were babies and toddlers—Elly and Ietje. We always get together, and it's become more important over the years. I heard from my friend Elly last year that she was going to get a pacemaker, but they were not able to insert the leads because of scar tissue. The small Micra pacemaker had just been approved in Holland for implantation, so we talked about that. They called me and they talked with their doctors and with Medtronic people, so she was one of the first recipients of the Micra pacemaker. My first interview with Medtronic, this was the pacemaker they showed [Motions to picture with larger, 1960s model pacemaker].
- 01:13:42 This is what my dear friend in Holland got [Motions to Micra pacemaker.] It's very small and as big as a vitamin.¹ It doesn't have leads. That brings up against the memory of Earl Bakken telling me in one of my first meetings with him, way back fifty some years ago, that he could see that in the future we would have a small pacemaker that didn't need leads. It would be like a button attached to the heart.

¹ Elly's interview with Medtronic is available online at: <https://www.medtronic.com/nl-nl/patienten/behandelingen-en-therapieen/pacemaker/elly-met-micra-pacemaker.html>. Website was last accessed in March 2024.

While he was still alive, he saw the first model of the Micra pacemaker. It really confirmed what his vision was—something very small that didn't need leads and was inserted into the heart. We're all connected, and she was helped by this small pacemaker. And then, Medtronic Holland wrote a story. It's a wonderful patient story for different reasons. She had scar tissue and they could not insert the leads. She needed a pacemaker, and there was the Micra.

- KR:** 01:15:00 She was lucky that she had you call to ask.
- TH:** 01:15:02 Yes, I could at least confirm the information. I knew it was already on the website. It had been approved. So, I directed them to the website, and they could discuss it with their doctors and the Medtronic people in Holland. That worked out well, so she's happy she has the latest [pacemaker].
- KR:** 01:15:26 Well, thank you for sharing that.
- TH:** 01:15:29 Yeah, it's nice. She's one of those two closest friends to me. We went through high school together through grade school. We played together when you could still play in the streets.
- KR:** 01:15:48 So yeah, thank you for sharing that. And thank you so much for doing this interview for us. I'm really appreciative, and you just have such a beautiful story, and all of it starts with language. I just think that that's such a beautiful thing. That language kind of gave you this entry point to so many different parts of the world.
- TH:** 01:16:07 It really was true in those days. Now, of course, you can go to your iPhone and put in what you want to say in another language. But it's not the same. You also need to learn about the culture.
- KR:** 01:16:18 Exactly. Exactly.
- TH:** 01:16:20 It's huge.
- KR:** 01:16:21 Yeah, it's an excellent point. Thank you... I think Christian has something for us to do.
- CJ:** 01:16:30 Actually, if you could hold up that photo again. I just want to get a nice clear shot.

TH: 01:16:38 Which one? Do you want the English side...?

CJ: ...Okay, great. Thank you.

TH: 01:18:36 Another thing that I forgot to mention is that I'm still close to one of my best friends from my time at Medtronic in Holland. We play Scrabble every morning. She was the second secretary hired, and she too was multilingual. We are still in touch, and she was a wonderful colleague. She left Medtronic when the office moved to Paris and never found another company like it.

KR: Can I ask a quick question? Which language do you play Scrabble in...?

TH: We are not doing this to be competitive. I say I'm not, but I found out I am. We do one word in Dutch, one word in English. She's probably already on it.

01:19:39 My friend [Maude Meijlink] lives in the center of Holland. She had a daughter right after I left for the states, who was an Olympic skier [Bibian Mentel-Spee]. She studied law, but then she went with her love of skiing and snowboarding. She almost made it to the Olympics, and she was here in the States too. And then she got cancer in her foot, and she had to lose her leg. This was twenty years ago, but she never gave up snowboarding. She was back on the snowboard before she could walk again. She was a great example for all of Holland, because she worked so hard and she loved that sport so much. She got into the Paralympics. Snowboarding is on the Paralympics now. She proceeded to get the gold... But in the meantime, the cancer spread. And so, over the last ten or fifteen years, she had one surgery after another. She never gave up. She was always positive and optimistic. And her husband was her trainer by then too.

01:21:25 They're so well known in Holland. But she did pass just a year or so ago. She was the biggest example of being strong and just being an inspiration. But for twenty years, she also started a foundation to help children with disabilities to get them on the skis and snowboards. To show them that life is not over. She was successful with that, and it's still going on.

KR: 01:22:12 What's the name of the organization that she started?

TH: 01:22:17 It is the [Mentelity Foundation].² Her name is Bibian Mentel-Spee. Maude always stayed in touch through thick and thin, sickness, hardships, and successes. I remember when Bibian lost her leg, she had some terrible phantom pains... But anyhow, that's Maude, one of my dearest friends I met through Medtronic again. [Bibian] has one son. Many things are named after her because she was a threefold winter Paralympics gold medalist five times world champion, born in 1972 and died in 2021, already two years.

KR: 01:23:46 Okay, nice. Thank you so much.

TH: 01:23:50 Her mother called me after that surgery asking what [Medtronic] had in terms of pain stimulators. The phantom pains were so severe. She later took some medication that took care of it.

KR: 01:24:11 But you were able to share more about what Medtronic was working on with another friend, right?

TH: 01:24:15 Yes, that's right.

KR: 01:24:17 Wow. I love that your friends can call you and ask you questions about medical technologies.

² More about the Bibian Mentel Foundation can be found on their website: <https://www.bibianmentelfoundation.nl/en/>. Website was last accessed in March 2024.