

Oral History Interview

George Fink

WH103

(Written transcript and digital audio)

On May 2, 2012, George Fink was interviewed by Brenda Velasco at 12 Noon at the Henry Inman Library.

Brenda Velasco: I'm fortunate to interview a longtime resident, George Fink of Iselin and his wife Winnie of Iselin. They live at 245 East Louis Place.

1. Identify individual-name, section date of birth.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, George you're first.

George Fink: My name is George Fink, Sr. I live at 245 East Louis Place, Iselin, New Jersey.

Brenda Velasco: In what year were you born?

George Fink: 1928.

Brenda Velasco: So you were born before the Depression and lived during World War II?

George Fink: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: You're one of "the greatest generations" then.

George Fink: You're right.

Brenda Velasco: Very fortunate. Winnie, I'm going to ask you to identify yourself as well.

Winnie Fink: My name is Winifred Fink.

Brenda Velasco: And in what year were you born?

Winnie Fink: 1928.

Brenda Velasco: And where did you grow up?

Winnie Fink: Milltown.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, so the main focus is going to be on George now, but you add any comments.

2. How long have you lived in Woodbridge?

George Fink: All my life in Iselin.

Brenda Velasco: You told me except when you went into the service, right?

George Fink: Yup.

Brenda Velasco: What years were you in the service?

George Fink: 1945.

Brenda Velasco: 1945.

George Fink: To 1949.

Brenda Velasco: To 1949. What service were you in?

George Fink: Navy.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, 1945 to 1949. So you came in at the end of the war then?

George Fink: Yes, right.

Brenda Velasco: And where were you located? Where were you stationed?

George Fink: Pacific, aboard a ship amongst other places.

Brenda Velasco: And what was the ship?

George Fink: USS Adria (AF 30).

3. Why did you or your family move to Woodbridge?

Brenda Velasco: You said you weren't born in Iselin but your parents moved there. Do you know why they came to Iselin?

George Fink: All I know is that my grandmother bought a house on Fiume Street. We lived there when I was a youngster and then we moved to different places in town.

Brenda Velasco: But always in Iselin?

George Fink: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Where did your grandmother originally come from then?

George Fink: Germany.

Brenda Velasco: Do you recall what year she moved.....

George Fink: No, that was before my time.

Brenda Velasco: When your grandmother and grandfather came from Germany did they immediately come to Iselin?

George Fink: I have no idea. My grandmother came from Germany and my grandfather came from Ireland.

Brenda Velasco: You are a rare combination then. So you've got Irish background and German background and Iselin is where you lived.

4. What physical changes have occurred over the years in the area you lived? –houses, streets, stores, houses of worship, schools, etc.

Brenda Velasco: When you came you said you lived originally on Fiume Street for a while. Were there a lot of houses back then?

George Fink: Not like there is today of course, but there were houses. I mean I guess you can say Fiume Street and the next street up was the last street and then you were in the woods.

Brenda Velasco: What street was that after Fiume?

George Fink: I don't remember the name of it. (Diaz)

Brenda Velasco: Okay, and then there were woods. Did you have paved streets?

George Fink: Nope.

Brenda Velasco: Did you have sidewalks?

George Fink: Nope, it was a country town: strictly country. Our neighbors had cows in their garages believe it or not.

Brenda Velasco: That's a long time ago.

George Fink: Yeah.

Brenda Velasco: And what about your house where you grew up on Fiume Street? Did you have vegetable gardens?

George Fink: No, in the adjoining lot we had fruit trees and grapevines. We had chickens at one time, a whole bunch of them. We used to sell eggs.

Brenda Velasco: How big was the property, do you recall? Was it as big as the property you have now on East Louis or was it smaller?

George Fink: Maybe 60 X 100 because there were two different lots. That was my grandmother's house.

Brenda Velasco: Did you have well water or did you have.....

George Fink: No, we had city water. I got well water now in my house.

Brenda Velasco: Well it's one of the best waters to have. I just got rid of mine about ten or fifteen years ago.

George Fink: I'm not getting rid of mine.

Brenda Velasco: No, nice and cold especially on a hot summer day; it's the best. What services did you have?

George Fink: Electric, sewage and I guess we had gas I don't remember really.

Brenda Velasco: And you had the police protection back then?

George Fink: Woodbridge Police. We had our own fire department.

Brenda Velasco: Which was volunteer, right?

George Fink: It's still volunteer. They might have two paid firemen there, I'm not sure.

Brenda Velasco: Which firehouse served you? Was it the one on Green.....

George Fink: This side.

Brenda Velasco: Auth Avenue by St. Cecelia's. (Iselin District #11)

George Fink: But that's not where they originated.

Brenda Velasco: Where did they originate?

George Fink: One block off Oak Tree Road. I can't remember the name of the street.

Brenda Velasco: Alright, but it was this side of the train tracks.

George Fink: Oh, yes.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, west of the train tracks.

George Fink: And there was a reason for that.

Brenda Velasco: Well, you tell me.

George Fink: You got two fire departments in Iselin and the reason for that was because of the railroad. You had to go over the railroad not under it and if there was a fire on this side and there was a train coming somebody couldn't get here or get there whichever. So that's what brought two fire departments in town.

Brenda Velasco: That was because it was a grade crossing.

George Fink: With the gates. Because I could remember my grandpa, I'd be in a wagon and he'd take me down to see the trains. They were all steam engines not electric. He used to wave to the guy and they'd throw me a piece of coal.

Brenda Velasco: Well, quite often that coal would also heat your house.

George Fink: Sure, we'd pick it up.

Brenda Velasco: What about the stores?

George Fink: Well, we had a little local store right on Trento Street and Correja Avenue, which was also known as **Retwa**. He was a postmaster for a while in Iselin.

Brenda Velasco: So he sold stamps?

George Fink: No, no stamps.

Brenda Velasco: No stamps? Okay, but the mail.

George Fink: Nope, you went to the post office.

Brenda Velasco: So what type of store was this then?

George Fink: Just a general grocery store.

Brenda Velasco: So you could buy eggs.....

George Fink: Eggs, milk, bread, cold cuts, some canned goods.

Brenda Velasco: So you had a general grocery store which wasn't too far from you then, right?

George Fink: One block. We'd walk across the empty lots. It was on Correja Avenue.

Brenda Velasco: Right, Correja and Trento.

George Fink: Yeah.

Brenda Velasco: Did you have any other stores in the area?

George Fink: Down on Oak Tree Road. Oh I'm sorry there was one one block up from Correja Avenue. We had another one up there called **Grossman's**.

Brenda Velasco: What did **Grossman's** sell?

George Fink: It was more or less a candy store.

Brenda Velasco: Did it have a soda shop too-a soda fountain?

George Fink: No, no fountain.

Brenda Velasco: Just a candy store?

George Fink: Yes. Then we had another one by the name of **Kocheck's**.

Brenda Velasco: And what did **Kocheck's** sell?

George Fink: That was like a butcher shop plus a few groceries.

Brenda Velasco: So these were all within walking distance of your mother?

George Fink: Oh, yes. We had no buses or transportation.

Brenda Velasco: So you walked for her?

George Fink: Well, I was smaller. I used to go to **Retwa's** for her which was only the next block.

Brenda Velasco: Did you have a movie house back then?

George Fink: Yup, it's in this book.

Brenda Velasco: And that was on the corner of Correja and Oak Tree Road. Did you attend the movie house?

George Fink: Yeah, when we could afford it.

Brenda Velasco: Do you remember what the movie house cost back then?

George Fink: Probably a nickel or a dime. It wasn't much I'll tell you that.

Brenda Velasco: No because you're growing up during the Depression.

George Fink: That's right, money was tight.

Brenda Velasco: Do you remember if they just showed one movie or.....I'm making you go back in time now.

George Fink: I know you are. It's running blank up here today. They'd have a main feature, coming attractions and maybe a cartoon.

Brenda Velasco: How about houses of worship?

George Fink: Presbyterian Church on Oak Tree Road, St. Cecelia's on Oak Tree Road and Middlesex, and there was another little church across the track that I don't remember the name of it. It's still there.

Brenda Velasco: Faith Fellowship?

Winnie Fink: On the corner by the firehouse. The firehouse is here and it's up the corner.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, Winnie I think that's by Cooper Avenue around there.

George Fink: Yeah, around there. It was one block in off Middlesex Avenue and one block off of Oak Tree Road. It was Green Street not Oak Tree Road.

Brenda Velasco: That's right Green Street.

George Fink: Because when you hit the railroad it changes.
Brenda Velasco: It changes names which confuses people all the time
George Fink: It sure does.
Brenda Velasco: I never figured out why they did it but.....
George Fink: They did it because of the railroad.
Brenda Velasco: Alright.
George Fink: Think about that. You had the railroad and you had two streets, they didn't join until they put the overpass in. I can remember that.
Brenda Velasco: Do you remember when they did that overpass?
George Fink: In the '30s. Just for a point of interest I can remember when they poured that concrete. They would cover it with canvass, big canvass covers over the concrete so it would dry. I roller skated down it on top of the canvass.
Brenda Velasco: Did you make any marks?
George Fink: Yeah, but you can't find them. You can see where your skates went believe it or not.
Brenda Velasco: Oh George.
Winnie Fink: You're getting in trouble.
Brenda Velasco: Yes, you are; you're one of those.
George Fink: Too late now.
Brenda Velasco: How about schools?
George Fink: School 15 Pershing Avenue. The other school was on Green Street on the other side of the tracks.
Brenda Velasco: That was School 9?
George Fink: I don't remember. I never went to that one. I only went to 15.
Brenda Velasco: What grades did you attend?
George Fink: Through the eighth.
Brenda Velasco: Did you go to kindergarten there, too?
George Fink: Yeah.
Brenda Velasco: Kindergarten through eighth grade.
George Fink: Then you went to high school; I went to Voc's.
Brenda Velasco: And where was the vocational school?
George Fink: New Brunswick.
Brenda Velasco: In New Brunswick then. Okay, so that was grades nine through twelve and what was your.....
George Fink: I didn't finish.
Brenda Velasco: Did you specialize in a certain area because I know you went into the Navy probably after you left school.
George Fink: I was going in for electrician but never followed it.
Brenda Velasco: Then by the time you're in high school World War II breaks out, Am I correct?
George Fink: Yeah.
Brenda Velasco: And then you left high school to.....how did you enlist in the service?
George Fink: I just went to the recruiting station in New Brunswick and enlisted.
Brenda Velasco: The Navy recruiting station, let's not forget that, and that was from 1945 to 1949 you said, right?

George Fink: Yeah. Then when I came out of the service I stayed in the reserve program. I retired from the reserve program in 1981 to 1982.

Brenda Velasco: So you were in the reserves a long time.

George Fink: I spent a total of thirty-seven and a half years in the Navy.

Brenda Velasco: Wow! Did you go to Lakewood then for training?

George Fink: For boot camp?

Brenda Velasco: Yes.

George Fink: Sampson, New York.

Brenda Velasco: You went to New York?

George Fink: Sampson, upstate New York. They shut that down in 1946 and the Air Force went in there afterwards, I don't know what year though. Now Sampson is a State Park. It's gorgeous, we've been there.

Brenda Velasco: So you have different memories. You were there with him too Winnie, right?

Winnie Fink: Not then.

Brenda Velasco: No, no, no, when you went to visit as a State Park.

Winnie Fink: Oh, yeah.

George Fink: We camped there. We had conventions there with the MCHA.

Brenda Velasco: What was the NCHA?

George Fink: National Campers and Hikers Association.

Brenda Velasco: My husband went to the Navy for boot camp. It was on the Great Lakes.

George Fink: Great Lakes, that's it. I've been there.

Brenda Velasco: He was there and then he became an electrician in the Navy. I think we covered everything here. Do you remember anything from school, K through 8?

George Fink: Nothing special.

Brenda Velasco: Okay. Then we're going to go to Question 5 and some of that we've touched on but this deals with public buildings.

5. What public buildings/property were there? Post office, library, parks, firehouse, schools, etc.?

Brenda Velasco: Where was the post office?

George Fink: Originally the post office was down on Correja Avenue one block off Route 27. The postmaster's name was Hassey. It was in the front part of his house. Then the post office started moving all over town.

Brenda Velasco: Until right now it's on Middlesex Turnpike finally.

George Fink: Yes, right.

Brenda Velasco: But it's by the railroad.

George Fink: Yes, backed up to the railroad. Which that building they're in was originally something else, it wasn't the post office. Where the post office is now, the office, there's two parts down there you know. You got the office where you go in and buy stamps and they sort mail and everything in the other building.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, I didn't realize that.

George Fink: The part where they sell the stamps at one time was a florist. I don't remember the name but it was a florist.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, you go back a long time then.

George Fink: I keep trying.

Brenda Velasco: Alright, and the library?

George Fink: It used to be on Oak Tree Road.

Brenda Velasco: Was it a separate building or somebody's house?

George Fink: No, separate building.

Winnie Fink: It used to be in back of the Presbyterian Church.

Brenda Velasco: Where was it Winnie?

George Fink: Behind the Presbyterian Church.

Brenda Velasco: Behind the Presbyterian Church.

George Fink: That's where they went there.

Brenda Velasco: So it's moved around a few times and now it's down by Indiana Avenue. It's a beautiful facility that you have. How about parks?

George Fink: What parks?

Brenda Velasco: Okay, because Iselin doesn't really have any.

George Fink: We had no parks.

Brenda Velasco: So where did you play then?

George Fink: In the street, empty fields or empty lots. If you go back you'd have to go back to Correja Avenue and it would turn to Charles Street on top of the hill. We had a ball field up there that the guys made; I didn't because I was too young, the older guys. They used to play baseball up there.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, so you had to make up your own but you had plenty of empty property at that time.

George Fink: Oh, yes.

Brenda Velasco: Were there homes on East Louis when you were growing up?

George Fink: Nothing: woods. I was the third house on the street.

Brenda Velasco: 245 was the third house on Louis then?

George Fink: Right.

Brenda Velasco: It was all woods.

George Fink: Yeah.

Brenda Velasco: Alright, we went over the firehouse and we mentioned the schools that you attended so that gets us sort of down to Question #6.

6. What did you do for recreation?

George Fink: You did whatever you could do. I mean you'd get the guys and you'd play football in an empty lot someplace or baseball. We would go swimming up in Colonia.

Brenda Velasco: Where did you go swimming in Colonia?

George Fink: Cone's Pond.

Brenda Velasco: That's not the one.....

George Fink: Not the one you see now, that's Freeman. We used to go swimming in Freemans until, I wasn't there when it happened, a guy went out there in a tube and he didn't know how to swim and fell off and drowned. After that no more swimming in Freemans: fishing yes, but no swimming That's when we went over to Cone's which was more of a round lake or round pond which ever you want to call it.

Brenda Velasco: That was further up New Dover Road.?

George Fink: No, it was on New Dover Road as you look where it comes in, the brook underneath New Dover Road. That takes you right to it; that's where it came from. Then again nothing around there but woods and the only other thing that you can remember way, way back World War I there were a lot of ruins in the hospital.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, in that area: Midwood.

George Fink: Yes, all through there.

Brenda Velasco: In fact we're having a tour of Colonia this Sunday, 11:30 A.M. and 2:00 P.M., and they'll be discussing the ruins, Dr. Albee who did the first bone transplants and rehab, the concept of rehabilitation. It was all done in Colonia right after World War I. And he also trained Dr. Kessler from **Kessler Institute** so this was all out of Colonia, that part of Colonia at that time.

George Fink: There was one spot there, I don't know the names of the streets, it was like the main street and it ran along, you had that brook with the ravine where the brook comes through; well the street went along that. There was one spot there it was square and it was a big wide spot which was all concrete. We used to go roller skating there.

Brenda Velasco: Was this on the other side of Chain O' Hills?

George Fink: This side.

Brenda Velasco: This side of Chain O' Hills.

George Fink: This side of the ravine too.

Brenda Velasco: And that's Sucker's Brook we're talking about.

George Fink: Yeah.

Brenda Velasco: Sucker's Brook which is the South Branch of the Rahway River. Okay, you went roller skating there?

George Fink: We used to go roller skating. It was square, a nice big wide spot towards the street and then it had like.....

Brenda Velasco: Was it close to New Dover Road then?

George Fink: Really not that far from New Dover Road. It's probably still there but somebody built a house around it or something.

Brenda Velasco: Everything is built up now.

George Fink: I know.

Brenda Velasco: Alright, anything else that you did for recreation? Did you have a bike?

George Fink: Yup, that's how we got around.

Brenda Velasco: That was your main means of transportation then.

George Fink: As a kid, yeah, because we used to go swimming at Cone's. We'd take the bike and go down there.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, so that was how you got there; your mom didn't drive you?

George Fink: Are you kidding.

Brenda Velasco: Did your mom drive at all?

George Fink: Yeah, she drove. She had a big Jordan. That was the name of the car, Jordan. It was like a big tank.

Brenda Velasco: I'm sure. But she learned to drive then.

George Fink: Yeah, she drove. Of course, my father drove.

Brenda Velasco: Did your mom work too?

George Fink: No.

Brenda Velasco: She was a stay at home mom then.
George Fink: Yup.
Brenda Velasco: How many siblings did you have?
George Fink: Me, my brother Richie, my sister June and my brother Bill.
Brenda Velasco: Okay, so you had four.
George Fink: Counting myself.
Brenda Velasco: She had four children; you had three siblings.
George Fink: Right.
Brenda Velasco: When you moved in the house you had no bathroom.
George Fink: No, we had an outhouse.
Brenda Velasco: You had an outhouse.
George Fink: Yeah, in the backyard.
Brenda Velasco: In the backyard. Well I've used them, too.
George Fink: No electric, not in that house. This is on Iselin Parkway, the first house.
Brenda Velasco: This was your mother's house.
George Fink: Yeah, my mother and father. Kerosene stove for heat, kerosene stove to cook and kerosene lamps for lights. That was the second house on the street.
Brenda Velasco: What was the.....
George Fink: Iselin Parkway.
Brenda Velasco: Do you remember the exact address?
George Fink: I don't remember the number.

7. What was the focal point of your community?

George Fink: Oak Tree Road between Correja Avenue and Middlesex in the middle. That was the whole business district.
Brenda Velasco: Did you ever have a bakery there?
George Fink: Yes, **Herbert's Bakery**. They put out good stuff.
Brenda Velasco: Was it a German bakery?
George Fink: I don't know.
Brenda Velasco: So you had a self-contained community.
George Fink: Really, yes.
Brenda Velasco: You had the stores there, you had a butcher store, you had a candy store, you had.....
George Fink: Well when you were on Oak Tree Road.....I can't even remember what they had down there. There was real estate on that street. Gene Tomasso was one of the realtors, you know him?
Winnie Fink: Barbershop.
George Fink: Two barbershops. **Ciccione's** was one of them and **Marcel and Son** was the other.
Brenda Velasco: You really didn't have to leave Iselin. How did you get to school in New Brunswick by the way?
George Fink: School bus.
Brenda Velasco: They came and picked you up?
George Fink: On 27. We had to walk down to 27. They bused you.

8. What did you like about living in your section of Iselin?

George Fink: Where I'm at now?

Brenda Velasco: Yes, well that part.

George Fink: Well, where I'm living now used to be nothing but woods. I'll take that back. We had on Charles Street a guy who lived there who raised bees for honey and there was another house across and then there was nothing until Iselin Parkway and then there were two houses originally on that street. Then my uncle built a house up the street on the other side of Charles.

Brenda Velasco: Was that your mother's uncle?

George Fink: No, it was my father's brother-in-law, Tom Anderson. Then you had Mirabella's house and one block up from my street there was one house in there. I don't remember who lived in there. Then there was nothing until you got up to the top of the hill whichever way you're coming. If you're coming from New Dover Road going it would be on the right hand side. There was a house way in the back; Booker lived in there. They were the only houses from on top of the hill to New Dover Road.

Winnie Fink: What about the man that walked his cow on.....

George Fink: That was on the corner of Fiume and Correja. We'll get to that.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, because that's interesting to know about a man walking his cow up the street.

Winnie Fink: Every day.

Brenda Velasco: Winnie, when you moved in 1950, you're married to George, you didn't see people walking cows at that time

George Fink: Yup.

Brenda Velasco: Still? Wow!

George Fink: Drella, he lived on Fiume Street and Correja Avenue. He had a cow in the backyard and he made a barn out of the garage.

Brenda Velasco: So he walked his cow up Correja Avenue?

George Fink: Yeah, and he'd stake it so it would feed. But he wasn't the only one.

Brenda Velasco: So there were others, too?

George Fink: On Trento Street, on the west side, we had a guy who had a horse in his backyard. On the east side we had another man with a cow and down the end of the street, which was a dead end, at the time we had Paulie Anderson with his horses.

Brenda Velasco: So it was like farmland.

George Fink: Yeah, well it was still woods.

Brenda Velasco: But you had all these animals there.

George Fink: Yeah, across the street from the Scrippens they had chickens and ducks. A lot of people had chickens.

Brenda Velasco: They were your eggs.

Winnie Fink: Your supper.

Brenda Velasco: Supper, breakfast, lunch: whatever.

George Fink: Before your time, too.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, it was before my time. We moved here in '67. Okay, but you have good memories of Iselin growing up.

George Fink: I think so.

Brenda Velasco: It sounds like a great place to grow up.

George Fink: It was because you knew everybody. If you did something wrong, watch out when you got home. That's all I could say.

Brenda Velasco: And everybody found out about it, didn't they?

George Fink: Including your pop. When I was a kid I used to go up to the Country Club. On the thirteenth hole, which runs right alongside where the bridge is, I don't know what street that is, there used to be two water ponds in front of the green. We used to fish balls out of there for the rich guys that were playing golf. Then I caddied up there.

Brenda Velasco: Do you play still?

George Fink: Nope, never played golf. Caddied and everything else but never played it. Well, I used to go to Fords to the bowling alley and set pins.

Brenda Velasco: Right, they had a big bowling alley in Fords.

George Fink: They used to pick us up by the movies in Iselin and take us over there and bring us home. Just setting pins, never bowled.

Brenda Velasco: It was a way to make income.

George Fink: Well, if you want to call it that.

Brenda Velasco: It gave you some money to go to the movies then.

George Fink: That's about it. Let me tell you when you set pins you worked hard because a lot of time the leagues would bowl and when they bowled, the bowling alley is actually shut down except for the leagues. They'd have an early league and late league but sometimes you had to jump alleys so you were taking care of two alleys setting pins and putting the balls back in so they get going again. They didn't have automatic pin setters.

Brenda Velasco: You were it.

George Fink: Here's the bowling alley, right, and right in the end here was a slot and you jammed your foot and you stepped on the pedal and little spikes would come up. That's where the pins went because there were holes in the bottom of the pins. You worked your fanny off, I'll tell you that.

Brenda Velasco: And you had to move fast because you had these industrial leagues.

George Fink: There were all kinds of leagues.

Brenda Velasco: Some of them from the factories in the area?

George Fink: Oh, I don't know where they were from.

Brenda Velasco: Because a lot of them had teams and everything and it was very popular then. Now we've had resurgence in bowling and it's coming back.

George Fink: And whether you know it or not at one time Iselin had an airport.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, at the top of Oak Tree.....

George Fink: Oak Tree Road and the Parkway. The reason that airport got shut down was because of the Parkway. The Parkway cut off the end of the runway and the FCC or FAA or whoever they are said no more flying because I flew out of there. I wasn't the pilot; I flew out of there with friends.

Brenda Velasco: Do you have a log book or any pictures of that?

George Fink: No, not me. They had a log book but not me. They had a log book but I didn't; I was only a passenger.

Brenda Velasco: We also interviewed somebody who flew out of the Colonia airport.

George Fink: I don't remember that one.

Brenda Velasco: It was called Westfield but it was.....

George Fink: Oh yes, I remember Westfield.

Brenda Velasco: It was Colonia/Clark, it wasn't in Westfield. So we had at least two airports. Interesting, very interesting.

George Fink: Do you remember that you had Hadley Airport too?

Brenda Velasco: And that was in South Plainfield.

George Fink: I guess it was.

Brenda Velasco: So you liked flying then?

George Fink: It was alright.

Brenda Velasco: You didn't fly out of that one.

9. Did you experience any significant happenings in Woodbridge-construction, accidents, sports events, riots, discrimination, etc.

George Fink: I was in it.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, so tell us about the construction.

George Fink: Well, I built a lot of houses in Woodbridge Township.

Brenda Velasco: Not just Iselin but.....

George Fink: And Edison. Oh yeah, I worked in Sewaren. I worked in Port Reading, Woodbridge itself and Colonia. I did a lot of houses here in Colonia.

Brenda Velasco: And whom were you working for?

George Fink: At that time I was with Frank Davis.

Brenda Velasco: Did he have a special company name?

George Fink: Frank Davis; I had my own company after that.

Brenda Velasco: And what was your own company called?

George Fink: My name.

Brenda Velasco: George Fink?

George Fink: Yup.

Brenda Velasco: For specifications this was after you left the Navy?

George Fink: Oh yeah, after we got married even.

Brenda Velasco: And you had to supply money.

George Fink: Well, I had to feed her.

Brenda Velasco: I don't think Winnie was the only one you had to feed, right? You had a family; you were going into family now. Why do you think all this housing was coming about?

George Fink: People wanted to get out of the city.

Brenda Velasco: So what did Iselin have at that time?

George Fink: We had nothing.

Brenda Velasco: You had the Parkway.

George Fink: That didn't come in until after 1950. That's what bought a lot of people down here because we had a lot of people who lived in Woodbridge Oaks which was one of the developments that was up on top of the hill. A lot of Newark people, people out of Newark and Irvington were in that area.

Brenda Velasco: Because the Parkway connected and Woodbridge Oaks was off Oak Tree Road at the top.....

George Fink: And the Parkway at the top of the hill. I did work in there; I didn't work no developments. I did work one development, Lynn Oaks, over here on New Dover Road and that didn't last too long because the guy went bankrupt.

Brenda Velasco: Do you remember who that person was?
George Fink: No.
Brenda Velasco: What were the homes going for at that time?
George Fink: \$16,000.00 or something like that; maybe a little bit more.
Brenda Velasco: That was in the 1950s when you were building.
George Fink: Yeah, I know. I built a lot of houses that are the same as mine; the same size, the same layout and everything.
Brenda Velasco: Okay, let's hear the size of your house.
George Fink: 28 X 36.
Brenda Velasco: This is the one on East Louis?
George Fink: Yup.
Brenda Velasco: How much did your house.....
George Fink: I did it myself so I can't give you.....I guess my house cost me about twelve thousand dollars.
Winnie Fink: You had to dig a well.
George Fink: Yeah, I had to put a well in and a septic system.
Brenda Velasco: Right, you had the septic system back then. You didn't have the plumbing.
George Fink: No, there was no plumbing.
Brenda Velasco: But you didn't have an outhouse.
George Fink: No, they wouldn't let us have one.
Brenda Velasco: But your mom on West Iselin Parkway.....
George Fink: She had an outhouse until they had it tied into their sewers. When the sewers came through it was mandatory.
Brenda Velasco: Now you also mentioned your taxes when you built your house.
George Fink: One hundred and twenty-nine dollars a year.
Brenda Velasco: Do you recall what your mother paid for her house on.....
George Fink: My father built it. Well, see when they moved in there it was a little three room house there. Somebody else owned it. There was no basement and you couldn't even get in the attic. Again they had kerosene lamps and kerosene stoves and stuff like that. The house was just too small. My father was working for **Friedman Trucking** in Highland Park or New Brunswick and they had what they called a dunnage. Do you know what a dunnage is?
Brenda Velasco: No, what is it?
George Fink: That's when they packed a loaded truck and they had to secure it so it didn't slide around. Then they took boards and lumber to brace everything up. When they got done, the bracing was left in the truck after deliveries and they'd come back to the yard. He would bring it home and that's what my house was made out of dunnage and secondhand beams and stuff like that. That wasn't a big house. We had a kitchen, a little spare room, an attic and the living room.
Brenda Velasco: How many bedrooms did you have?
George Fink: You heard it.
Brenda Velasco: That was it, okay.
George Fink: The little room off the kitchen was the bedroom for my mom and pop.
Brenda Velasco: Anything else that you can recall growing up? We mentioned the construction; you were involved in the construction industry of houses.....

George Fink: No riots, no discrimination. Sports, no there were no sports just a bunch of guys who get together and play ballgames of football or whatever. Accidents – I can remember when the lady in red shot this guy down there on Oak Tree Rad.

Brenda Velasco: Wow!

George Fink: I can't remember the name. She was very upset or something and she shot this guy. She was known as the lady in red. (Margaret Peggy Drennan 1937)

Brenda Velasco: How long ago was this?

George Fink: In the '30s.

Brenda Velasco: And this was in Iselin.

George Fink: Oak Tree Road.

Winnie Fink: You can find that out in the paper.

George Fink: Probably if you go to the archives I guess for the newspapers you can find it.

Brenda Velasco: Yeah, lady in red.

George Fink: We used to have the *Perth Amboy Evening News* in town which we don't have no more. Now it's the *TNT* or something else.

Brenda Velasco: *Home News Tribune*.

George Fink: And I think they stink.

Brenda Velasco: Well, you and my husband.

George Fink: I mean seventy-five cents and you have more paper on this table than they give you.

Brenda Velasco: But that was the main paper, the *Perth Amboy Evening News* for you.

George Fink: Yup, I mean you had Harry Klein down on Oak Tree Road who had the newspaper store and he used to get the *Ledger*, *New York News* and the *Times*.

Brenda Velasco: Where on Oak Tree Road? How far down was he?

George Fink: He was on the corner of Oak Tree Road by the church.

Brenda Velasco: By the First Presbyterian Church.

George Fink: Nope.

Brenda Velasco: Oh, that's **Klein's**.

George Fink: Yeah.

Brenda Velasco: I know where it is.

George Fink: Middlesex Avenue. He didn't start there though.

Brenda Velasco: Where did he start?

George Fink: On that corner that used to be Judge Tomasso's house. That's the only thing I can tell you his name, Judge Tomasso: Gene Tomasso's father. It was his father. Then there was another building which had two stores and living above. Klein started in one of the stores. It was only a little.....it wasn't even as big as this room. That's where Harry Klein started then he eventually purchased the lots next door, knocked the houses down and built a big store there which is now subdivided for the Indians.

Brenda Velasco: I think **V&P Butcher Store** used to be in that area too.

Winnie Fink: He came from Newark or something.

Brenda Velasco: No, that was my father-in-law: Velasco & Perez I believe. He came from Elizabeth and then before that it was Spain so you had a mix of people there.

Winnie Fink: There was a butcher shop there: two brothers.
Brenda Velasco: They were friends but they were both Spanish.
George Fink: Well two brothers had that store and that's the ones that built the original **ShopRite**.
Brenda Velasco: Oh, okay.
George Fink: They were from South River.
Brenda Velasco: **A&P** was there, right.
George Fink: Right, you had an **A&P**. You remember that Winnie.
Winnie Fink: Oh, yeah. I'd walk down there many a time.
George Fink: A matter of fact, the **A&P** where it was at in between was an alley way and then when they brought the so called relief food during the Depression that's where they would stack it in that alley way: the routine cabbage. I'll never forget that. That's what they would pass out during the Depression.
Brenda Velasco: That was the alley way by **A&P**?
George Fink: Yup, across the street was **Quigley's** but then Gus Knocknail had that gas station before **Quigley's**.
Winnie Fink: I never heard those things.
George Fink: You know Tom Quigley?
Winnie Fink: Yeah.
George Fink: Before him because Quigley used to work for Gus.
Brenda Velasco: Now that was the gas station?
George Fink: Yup, it's still there. It's not a gas station through it's a garage.
Winnie Fink: The drugstore.
George Fink: Yeah. I went to school with his son Angelo.
Brenda Velasco: And that was school.....
George Fink: 15. The library used to be on Oak Tree Road one or two houses off Correja Avenue on Oak Tree Road. Then of course you had the hardware store.
Brenda Velasco: Oh, the famous **Eagle Hardware Store**?
George Fink: Well, it wasn't **Eagle** then.
Brenda Velasco: That was a great hardware store.
George Fink: Tom used to run that.
Brenda Velasco: Tom who?
George Fink: He works in the school. I don't remember his last name.
Brenda Velasco: That was a super hardware store. We used to come from Colonia to **Eagle Hardware Store**. Can you think of anything else for Question #9? I've picked your brain, George.
George Fink: Keep trying. Ain't much brain up there anymore.
Brenda Velasco: Oh, there is! You've retaining quite a bit.

10. What do you like about Iselin today?

Brenda Velasco: Okay, you're still in Iselin today.
George Fink: Yup, I'm not going no place; I'm too old to go anyplace else.
Brenda Velasco: You're one of the original residents then.
George Fink: Yeah, we're the oldest ones on the street. Not in age but in longevity living here. When we moved in, there were woods across the street.
Brenda Velasco: Not anymore.

George Fink: No, no, no. As soon as they brought the sewers in, that was the end of it.

Winnie Fink: It's not a noisy neighborhood.

George Fink: It's very quiet.

Brenda Velasco: No, you've got a very nice neighborhood. That whole area is nice and quiet.

George Fink: A lot of Indians now.

Brenda Velasco: Yeah, but you have a quiet atmosphere.

Winnie Fink: They are quiet.

George Fink: Yup, very quiet.

Winnie Fink: You don't hear.....

Brenda Velasco: No, and you don't live too far from the Parkway either.

Winnie Fink: A block and a half. Well, you can hear it.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, but you have the trees and the shrubs to deaden the noise.

Winnie Fink: You still hear it because they got the big wall there and the cells vibrate off the wall and it comes over it: big concrete wall. It's only on the one side of the Parkway, I could never understand that. It's on the eastside.

Brenda Velasco: The eastside and you don't have it on the westside however in Colonia you had it on the westside. At one time there was no fence when the Parkway was first built I was told and you were having people walk across it in Colonia.

George Fink: I used to ride on the Parkway before it was paved. You'd get a big dust cloud following you.

Brenda Velasco: Oh, your mom loved that. That was with your bike?

George Fink: No, with a car.

Brenda Velasco: Oh, okay.

George Fink: I was driving. The Parkway went in through there in 1950 or 1951, something like that.

Brenda Velasco: Because you could just come on and this part there is no toll.

George Fink: And there never will be. Between the bridge in Perth Amboy and what is in Clark or Rahway line someplace up in there.

Brenda Velasco: Clark/Rahway/Linden line there is no toll.

George Fink: No, only after that.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, we're lucky.

George Fink: I don't use the Parkway believe it or not if I can help it.

Brenda Velasco: I will use it to get from Colonia to Fords sometimes because it's the fastest way to get to Fords rather than the local streets.

George Fink: I will too.

Brenda Velasco: And you agree, right Winnie?

Winnie Fink: Right, yes.

11. Do you have any family members still living in Woodbridge today?

George Fink: No, just us.

Brenda Velasco: You are it?

George Fink: My son lives in Avenel and my daughter is in California.

Brenda Velasco: How about the uncle you had that also lived in your area?

George Fink: Well, at one time, if you want to go back into the thirties, my father's whole family lived in Iselin at one time. His mother and father lived in Iselin, his brother lived in Iselin, Aunt Marge and Uncle Al lived in Iselin.

Winnie Fink: Marge and Al were down on the other side.....

George Fink: Yeah, different parts of town. My father's mother and father lived on Iselin Boulevard which people don't know as Iselin Boulevard which is now Bird Avenue one block off 27.

Brenda Velasco: I know where Bird Avenue is.

George Fink: It's only two blocks long. That was Iselin Boulevard.

Brenda Velasco: I never heard of it referred to as Iselin Boulevard.

George Fink: I know a lot of people never heard of that.

Brenda Velasco: So you had a lot of family growing up?

George Fink: At one time, yes.

Brenda Velasco: And they all moved out?

George Fink: All gone.

Brenda Velasco: Or did they die?

George Fink: Either that or they died; they moved away.

Brenda Velasco: So you're it and your son is in Avenel.

12. Are there any other stories or events that you would like to discuss that we haven't covered that pertains to Iselin?

George Fink: Well St. Cecelia's with their carnivals or with their fairs. That goes back a long, long ways. That was a big thing in town.

Brenda Velasco: That was a big event.

George Fink: That's right. It lasted a week.

Brenda Velasco: And did you attend them?

George Fink: We used to go to the fair. I was in the Boy Scouts out of the Presbyterian Church. That's where we had our meetings.

Brenda Velasco: And Carl Christensen was out of the Boy Scouts, too.

George Fink: Who?

Brenda Velasco: Carl Christensen, he was the plumber. He's a fireman in District #9 but he lived on the other side of Route 27 off Cooper Avenue.

George Fink: Don't remember the name.

Brenda Velasco: Well, he's not a Boy Scout anymore either.

George Fink: Neither am I. **Cooper's Dairy**, I worked there.

Brenda Velasco: Wow!

George Fink: I was the bottle washer. I had to put the bottles in the machine. They washed the bottles out when they were filling it up with milk. And we did have another dairy in town, **Berger's Dairy**, which is now where Merrill Park is. Sure John didn't mention that in his book, I'm surprised.

Brenda Velasco: Well he's going to come out with a third book.

George Fink: You think so?

Brenda Velasco: I'll mention the things he (John Miele) missed.

George Fink: Yeah, I'm surprised. I don't know how he missed the airport though; that was a big thing in Iselin.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, it was.

George Fink: Because you know why it was a flying school up there. That's where a lot of guys as World War II veterans learned how to fly there because they had a school there.

Brenda Velasco: Was this, the Iselin Airport, where they trained the Air Force men to fly there during the war?

George Fink: No, no, no, no. That airport wasn't there until after the war.

Brenda Velasco: Because I met a man called Kurt Hofschneider who flew out of Westfield Airport. Bernice Bee Falk Haydu was a female instructor at Iselin Airport; he met here so she has background on the Iselin Airport. She was an instructor there after World War II.

George Fink: I don't remember her.

Brenda Velasco: But you weren't a pilot, you were just a passenger. Winnie, you think we covered everything?

Winnie Fink: I think you got it all.

Brenda Velasco: You knew John Miele growing up?

George Fink: Well, not growing up but I knew him when he was in the business. He did my foundation.

Brenda Velasco: So your mother's house didn't have a basement on Iselin Parkway but you have.

George Fink: Now, yeah.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, then if we have nothing more to add.....

George Fink: I can't think of any unless you do.

Brenda Velasco: Winnie.

Winnie Fink: No.

George Fink: My kids went to school in Iselin, both of them.

Winnie Fink: I only came there in '50.

Brenda Velasco: Right and you came married so you weren't growing up anymore. You were going to be the mother of the children. Alright, well then I thank you both for participating in the oral history project and sharing your memories, especially George.