

Oral History Interview
Walter C. Bucher
WH121

(Written transcript and digital audio)

On Friday, January 16, 2015 Walter C. Bucher was interviewed by Brenda Velasco at 11:00 A.M. at his home on 180 Middlesex Avenue, Iselin.

Brenda Velasco: I am going to be interviewing Walter Bucher who is a 90 years old gentleman from Iselin and he's got many fascinating experiences. I want to thank his granddaughter, Kimberly Mihalics, for coming because she is also here. We're going to hear her voice in just a minute but she facilitated the whole interview which I'm looking forward to hearing.

1. *Identify individual-name, section, and date of birth.*
2. *How long have you lived in Woodbridge?*

Brenda Velasco: Kimberly, introduce yourself and where you are live.

Kimberly Mihalics: I live in Woodbridge but I'm originally from Iselin. I grew up in this house for probably until I was about 13...from age 2 to 13.

Brenda Velasco: Wow, so there are a lot of memories in this house for you and Mr. Bucher....

Walter Bucher: My name is Walter Bucher. I'm 90 years old and I've been living in this town for ninety years.

Brenda Velasco: Were you born in this town?

Walter Bucher: No, I was born in Newark, New Jersey and my folks were building a house here before I was born.

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

Brenda Velasco: Why did your family move from Newark to Iselin? And this was Iselin at the time.

Walter Bucher: Well to get out of the city. They lived in Downneck Newark and they wanted a place of their own. My father bought one of those house kits from **Sears & Roebuck** in 1922 and put that house up here in Iselin.

Brenda Velasco: What was the address?

Walter Bucher: Over there?

Brenda Velasco: Was it on George Street?

Walter Bucher: George Place and the property was purchased from the *Newark Star Eagle Paper*. If you paid twenty-five cents, you got free property.

Brenda Velasco: Twenty-five cents...free property.

Walter Bucher: Yes, you had to pay twenty-five cents a week and all the Star Eagle section of Iselin was the same way.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, this is the Star Eagle section of Iselin.

Walter Bucher: No, that's where.....

Brenda Velasco: That's George Street because right now we're at your house which is 180 Middlesex Avenue. Okay, so that was in the Star Eagle section and you said your father built his own house from that **Sears**.....

Walter Bucher: Yeah, he bought a kit what they called... **Sears & Roebuck** was the name of the store and they had all catalogs back in them days and they sold these prefabricated house. And all the material was there with the plans and they delivered all the windows and doors and everything to the property and then my father built the house.

Brenda Velasco: Did he build it by himself?

Walter Bucher: Yes, but my uncle helped him out once in a while and my mother.

Brenda Velasco: So your mom was involved with that as well. Okay, which uncle.....

Walter Bucher: Uncle Charles from Keansburg, New Jersey.

Brenda Velasco: So you moved here in 1922 and there was no Parkway at this time.

Walter Bucher: No. Actually I moved in '24 when I was born. I would have been born on a kitchen table like my sister but my mother fell down the stairs and she had the baby in Beth Israel Hospital. To this day my mother used to say I don't think I paid a cent for you.

Brenda Velasco: You were cheap then. You were a free delivery.

Walter Bucher: Well they never paid the bill let's put it that way. Nobody had any money.

Brenda Velasco: So you've seen a lot of changes. When did you move to 180 Middlesex?

Walter Bucher: I built this house in 1952. My wife and I put this up and I think we moved in '53. We had a lot of help building this house.

Brenda Velasco: A family affair.

Walter Bucher: Yes. This house cost me about six thousand dollars to build back in them days.

Brenda Velasco: Six thousand dollars to build in 1952. Well its worth far more and then the memories that you have-they're priceless so.

Walter Bucher: My wife did all the flooring in the house. She was a great worker.

Brenda Velasco: You married well.

Walter Bucher: I lost her in June. Sixty-three years of marriage.

Brenda Velasco: Wow!

Walter Bucher: I kind of miss her now.

Brenda Velasco: She was your partner. She helped you a lot but you got a beautiful granddaughter right here.

Walter Bucher: I got good grandkids. I got two boys and two girls and everybody agrees.

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

Brenda Velasco: Since you've lived here so long what physical changes have occurred? Okay, let's look at the houses.

Walter Bucher: Actually most of the houses were built when I was young. Most of the houses were Cape Cod built in the '40s and '50s and the changes probably some of the houses were sold and ripped down and had new houses replaced on them by new owners.

Brenda Velasco: New owners, you've seen a lot of the older homes torn down and rebuilt or demolished and then rebuilt and they're rebuilding them much bigger, too. Do you remember the size of this particular lot?

Walter Bucher: Yeah, 100 X 100.

Brenda Velasco: 100 X 100 right on Middlesex Avenue and how about when you lived on George Street, do you remember?

Walter Bucher: We had quite a lot...I think it was 200 X 100.

Brenda Velasco: That was huge.

Walter Bucher: Yeah, we had like a little farm up there.

Brenda Velasco: That was on George Street then.

Walter Bucher: Yeah.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, when you say that was a little farm what do you mean a little farm?

Walter Bucher: Well we raised chickens, ducks, pigeons, rabbits....

Brenda Velasco: Did you sell them or.....for food?

Walter Bucher: We sold them and then my mother and father had what you call Bucher's Grove up there.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, Bucher's Grove I remember reading about it.

Walter Bucher: They catered to the Italian/American society, German/American society, Greek/American society and my father had the biggest barbeque you could imagine. For a dollar and a half you'd get three pieces of chicken and all the beer you could drink.

Brenda Velasco: Are you kidding?

Kimberly Mihalics: You used to make the beer too right?

Walter Bucher: Yeah, my father made the beer.

Brenda Velasco: Wow!

Walter Bucher: And by the way she'd get the beer from **Oliver's Tavern** too down on Oak Tree Road.

Brenda Velasco: So how many people would come?

Walter Bucher: Well we'd have fifty, sixty people maybe.

Brenda Velasco: That's a lot of cooking and a lot of beer.

Walter Bucher: Well my father had a barbeque that was twenty feet long, four feet wide and three hundred pounds of charcoal.

Brenda Velasco: Three hundred pounds?

Walter Bucher: Yeah.

Brenda Velasco: That was never ending.

Walter Bucher: You know they burned the house down one time.

Brenda Velasco: So what happened when the house burned down?

Walter Bucher: Well, no, it didn't burn down but you know it caught.....

Brenda Velasco: But the house caught on fire.

Walter Bucher: It was too close to the wood.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, that was some barbeque that day.

Walter Bucher: That was in the '30s.

Brenda Velasco: In 1930?

Walter Bucher: From the '30s to end of World War II.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, around 1941. World War II you weren't having.....

Walter Bucher: Yeah. Well my mother was German and, well, all of the Italian/Americans who disbanded, the German/Americans Society disbanded because of the World War II.

Brenda Velasco: They were Axis powers, yeah.

Walter Bucher: Well that was the last of Bucher's Grove.

Brenda Velasco: The streets were basically the same? You had George Street that was all paved and everything.

Walter Bucher: No, the township used to come once a year and used to put crushed hollow tile on there and they used to have the scraper and the roller. They had no black top until just before the war I guess they put the blacktop on.

Brenda Velasco: That's Oak Tree Road?

Walter Bucher: Oak Tree Road and Correja Avenue. We were off Correja Avenue on George Place.

Brenda Velasco: How about services, did you have water?

Walter Bucher: We had well water, we had outhouses until 1936 and then my father and uncle put a **Sears & Roebuck** bathroom. And we had to drill a well and put it in. It was still well water until my mother and father sold the house.

Brenda Velasco: When did they sell the house?

Walter Bucher: Quite a long time ago.

Brenda Velasco: After World War II?

Walter Bucher: Yeah, probably.....

Kimberly Mihalics: Was it when mommy was married?

Walter Bucher: No, she was probably five, six or seven years old. I think it was in the '60s she sold the house. It was sold for \$6,800.00. Back in them days they weren't getting much for houses.

Brenda Velasco: No, because it was in the '70s we had the spike in this area and then by the '90s these homes tripled and quadrupled.

Walter Bucher: After World War II they built the Westbury Home and up here off Oak Tree Road where the airport was....

Brenda Velasco: Yes **ShopRite**....

Walter Bucher: The old **ShopRite** Hilltop.

Brenda Velasco: So you really saw it expand as it expanded.

Walter Bucher: There was an airport up there.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, we're going to talk about the airport later because I want to hear about your stories about the airport. So did you have any stores here?

Walter Bucher: Well there was **Retkwa Corner Store** on Trento Street and Correja Avenue. Mrs. Retkwa had a butcher shop plus on Oak Tree Road they had a hardware store, paper store, butcher shop and like what you'd call a candy kitchen where you could get an ice cream soda or banana split.

Brenda Velasco: Okay candy store and that hardware store is that where **Eagle's** was...**Eagle's Hardware**?

Walter Bucher: No it's Indian owned now. There's no hardware store there now.

Brenda Velasco: I know that.

Walter Bucher: On Oak Tree Road by the movies there...

Brenda Velasco: Yeah, by the movies.

Walter Bucher: That was **Barrack's Hardware Store**. Mr. Barrack was a nice guy. He was a Jewish guy but he was nice.

Brenda Velasco: And you had the movies too then right?

Walter Bucher: We had the movies. For ten cents we'd get in the movies. Certain times you'd get a dinnerware set.

Brenda Velasco: Oh, those free dinnerware sets?

Walter Bucher: Yeah, you'd get a plate, a cup or saucer until you'd get the whole set. Every week you got a piece.

Brenda Velasco: Ten cents?

Walter Bucher: Yeah.

Brenda Velasco: Do you remember any movies you saw there?

Walter Bucher: Well Buster.....

Brenda Velasco: Buster Crab?

Walter Bucher: Buster Keaton he was with the guy that had the space ships back in them days.

Brenda Velasco: Buck Rodgers?

Walter Bucher: You know it was whatever shows...you know some great movies we show there.

Brenda Velasco: That was a big industry at that time.

Walter Bucher: Sometimes I didn't even pay ten cents I used to sneak in. The guy said I don't remember you paying. I said yeah, yeah I paid.

Brenda Velasco: I don't even want to hear about that. How about the houses of worship? What were the churches around here?

Walter Bucher: St. Cecelia's was here. That was moved from the old (WW1) Army Hospital 3 from Colonia

Brenda Velasco: That **Quonset Hut**.

Walter Bucher: No, it was a regular church move but after a while they put the **Quonset Hut** up.

Brenda Velasco: Oh, okay, and then later the **Quonset Hut**.

Walter Bucher: They moved that by horse and buggy in World War I to St. Cecelia's. Then there was the Protestant Church....

Brenda Velasco: First Presbyterian, okay.

Walter Bucher: Yeah, that's where I used to go when I was a kid. That was the only churches around at that time.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, so they moved the old church from the old hospital...

Walter Bucher: I think it was **Army Hospital No. 3** in Colonia by Freemans.

Brenda Velasco: Yeah, that's where it was.

Walter Bucher: It was for amputees and then it was abandoned after three....

Brenda Velasco: Yeah, after about two years or so. But they did a lot of bone transplants there. This was the leading edge. In fact **Kessler** was trained there under Dr. Albee and later **Kessler Institute**....

Walter Bucher: Yeah I think mostly it was like amputees and stuff like that there.

Brenda Velasco: And it was right off by the railroad stop there so that was good. How about schools? What school did you go to?

Walter Bucher: School 15.

Brenda Velasco: And that's no longer so you have to tell me where School 15 was.

Walter Bucher: On Pershing Avenue.

Brenda Velasco: And what grades did you attend there?

Walter Bucher: 1st grade to 8th grade and graduated 8th grade there.

Kimberly Mihalics: And you didn't speak English when you started school right?

Walter Bucher: No, when I first went to school I spoke German only. The teacher sent a note home that said, stop your son from speaking German. And I can't speak a word today.

Brenda Velasco: What a loss.

Walter Bucher: My aunt used to tell me you disappoint me.

Brenda Velasco: Because probably from being in school....

Walter Bucher: Well my mother didn't want to speak German in the house.

Brenda Velasco: Too bad.

Walter Bucher: And it's a shame.

Brenda Velasco: Yes.

Walter Bucher: There could have been two languages you know.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, especially you're in World War II.

Walter Bucher: That's what it was they thought I could be an interpreter. I said all I know is a couple of curse words.

Brenda Velasco: They don't want to know that. Okay, where did you go after 8th grade then?

Walter Bucher: Then I went to Woodbridge High.

Brenda Velasco: Woodbridge High on Barron Avenue.

Walter Bucher: I didn't graduate from there. That was World War II. The whole class went into the service. Then I went to Newark Tech.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, let's go back to your service. You were in the Army?

Walter Bucher: Yes, I was in the 3rd Division... World War II.

Brenda Velasco: What year did you go into the Army?

Walter Bucher: Beginning of '43 I think.

Kimberly Mihalics: March of 1943.

Walter Bucher: I wasn't in the Army too long.

Kimberly Mihalics: November of '45.

Brenda Velasco: Well the war will be over by that time so.

Kimberly Mihalics: Well yeah.

Brenda Velasco: And I know that you were in Italy.

Walter Bucher: Yeah, I was in North Africa and Italy. I got wounded in a town called Cassino.

Brenda Velasco: Monte Cassino?

Walter Bucher: Yeah.

Brenda Velasco: That was a bad, bad battle.

Walter Bucher: I was on first patrol there.

Brenda Velasco: Wow, you were lucky to survive because....

Walter Bucher: I got wounded five times.

Kimberly Mihalics: On Christmas Day.

Walter Bucher: Christmas Day 1943. That was the last time I had an act of service. I spent a year in the hospital after that.

Brenda Velasco: My gosh! You're six months over in Italy and then you....

Kimberly Mihalics: Sent back to the states to do six months?

Walter Bucher: I was in Italy in different hospitals for six months and then I came back here to Deshon General Hospital in Butler, Pennsylvania.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, Butler, Pennsylvania the Veteran's Hospital there. But you also won some metals too.

Walter Bucher: Yeah.

Brenda Velasco: You won a Bronze Star....okay you read it to me. Oh you don't have your glasses. Because I want everybody to know how lucky we are and that you survived.

Walter Bucher: This is some of my literature.

Brenda Velasco: Okay and this was the Bronze Star.

Walter Bucher: Bronze Star that's here.

Brenda Velasco: And you won the Purple Heart.

Walter Bucher: Purple Heart.

Brenda Velasco: Combat Infantry Badges, my gosh! Let's count...one, two, three, four, five, six, seven....

Walter Bucher: That's the one we got from New Jersey.

Brenda Velasco: Wow, you have quite a collection.

Walter Bucher: Yeah.

Brenda Velasco: That's quite a legacy to give to your grandchildren.

Walter Bucher: This one here was a Combat Infantry Badge. You get ten dollars a month extra when you win that. That's what I looked like when I was a younger guy.

Brenda Velasco: Handsome.

Walter Bucher: That's what my wife said, I was okay.

Brenda Velasco: Your wife said you were okay. Well she was pretty good because she was helping you build this house.

Walter Bucher: Yeah, she was a good person.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, we're going to take a break, we're going to go back to the questions, and we're going to go to Question #5.

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

Brenda Velasco: What public buildings or property were there at this time that you lived in Iselin?

Walter Bucher: Well let's see they had the post office.

Brenda Velasco: Where was the post office?

Walter Bucher: It was on the corner of Correja Avenue and Oak Tree Road across the street from the theatre.

Brenda Velasco: Right across from the theatre then.

Walter Bucher: Yes, like on an angle though and they had the library, Iselin Library, used to be on Oak Tree Road about three stores from the hardware store.

Brenda Velasco: So this side of Oak Tree Road then.

Walter Bucher: Yes this side. Very small library at that time and there was no such thing as Merrill Park.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, Merrill Park did not exist at that time.

Walter Bucher: We had **Cooper's**.

Brenda Velasco: Ah, **Cooper's Dairy**.

Walter Bucher: Well they had like a little baseball field that we used to play on and we had a firehouse.

Brenda Velasco: And where was the firehouse?

Walter Bucher: On Harding Avenue.

Brenda Velasco: Wow, because it's not there now.

Walter Bucher: No, they're on 27 off Auth Avenue right?

Brenda Velasco: Yeah, you have that one and then you have the one...

Walter Bucher: Across the tracks.

Brenda Velasco: Across the tracks, right but that's now. Okay, so you went to School 15 on Pershing Avenue.

Walter Bucher: Yup.

Brenda Velasco: That's about it then for that question I think.

Walter Bucher: Then I went to Newark Tech.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, you went to Newark Tech and where was.....

Walter Bucher: Plumbing and heating for three years.

Brenda Velasco: And what was your major there?

Walter Bucher: Plumbing and heating.

Brenda Velasco: Can't do without it and how did you get there? Did you commute by train or....?

Walter Bucher: Sometimes by train and I rode my motorcycle over there.

Kimberly Mihalics: You had a Harley-Davidson.

Walter Bucher: I had an old Harley-Davidson in 1945.

Brenda Velasco: Do you still have it?

Walter Bucher: No, I sold it unfortunately. It would be worth a lot of money.

Brenda Velasco: Oh yeah and where was Newark Tech located at this time the school?

Walter Bucher: I think it was Norfolk Street in Newark or either...

Brenda Velasco: Okay, it was in Newark though so that was quite a distance.

Walter Bucher: Yeah, maybe Norfolk Street. I don't even know if it's there anymore. I haven't been in Newark for years.

Brenda Velasco: Well they may have moved or changed names. Okay let's go down to Question #6.

6. What did you do for recreation?

Brenda Velasco: What did you do for recreation?

Walter Bucher: Well I like to fish, I like to hunt and I love my garden.

Brenda Velasco: And what did you grow in your garden?

Walter Bucher: Tomatoes, cucumbers, cherry tomatoes and peppers.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, you mentioned that you shot an 8 point buck.

Walter Bucher: Yeah, I shot an 8 point buck...I shot a lot of deer. This is my last one. I was in Pennsylvania.

Brenda Velasco: So you were going hunting in Pennsylvania then.

Walter Bucher: Yeah and that was December 2nd. That was in the contest.

Brenda Velasco: That was a 10 point Buck.

Kimberly Mihalics: No, she's talking about the 8 point one that we put in the paper.

Walter Bucher: Oh.

Brenda Velasco: But this is a 10 point Buck...that's unusual.

Walter Bucher: Yeah, this is from this year.

Brenda Velasco: This is from this year?

Walter Bucher: Yeah.

Brenda Velasco: December 2nd, 2014?

Walter Bucher: Yeah.

Brenda Velasco: My God!

Walter Bucher: I was in a contest....

Kimberly Mihalics: He was almost the oldest and then somebody else was ninety....

Brenda Velasco: Somebody beat you?

Walter Bucher: Yeah, he was 93.

Brenda Velasco: But a 10 point Buck.

Walter Bucher: Yeah.

Brenda Velasco: That's quite a rack.

Walter Bucher: Yeah.

Brenda Velasco: So when you went hunting and you shot those.....

Walter Bucher: 8 pointer is the one I got.....

Kimberly Mihalics: In Englishtown.

Walter Bucher: My first year was....she has it in her house. It was an 8 point buck; my first Buck.

Kimberly Mihalics: In Englishtown right? You got it in Englishtown?

Walter Bucher: No, that one was done in Columbus, New Jersey by the Delaware Water Gap.

Kimberly Mihalics: The biggest one you got was in Englishtown and weighed 153 lbs.

Walter Bucher: Yeah, that was a big one.

Brenda Velasco: You're quite a hunter then and where did you go fishing then?

Walter Bucher: Well we went off Keansburg and the Islands and then trout fishing I went to Blairstown.

Brenda Velasco: Did you go for the shad?

Walter Bucher: No, trout.

Brenda Velasco: Just trout, okay.

Walter Bucher: We used to go to a lake in Spotswood for largemouth bass and pickerel.

Brenda Velasco: You were quite the sportsman.

Walter Bucher: If my knees didn't give way I would be out there today doing something.

Brenda Velasco: Too cold today. But when you were younger what did you do? Did you have a bike to ride?

Walter Bucher: We rode bikes to Newark Airport and Hadley Airport in South Plainfield. On Sunday they used to have the parachute jumps there.

Brenda Velasco: Where at Hadley?

Walter Bucher: Hadley Airport. We used to ride our bikes all over. Well we didn't have any money.

Brenda Velasco: Right, but you had leg power and it was free as long as the bike was working.

Walter Bucher: A two dollar bicycle I bought.

Brenda Velasco: Two dollar bicycle?

Walter Bucher: Yeah, from a neighbor. We didn't have money. My mother finally gave me two dollars so I could buy it.

Brenda Velasco: And you took off. Okay, let's get down to Question #7.

7. What was the focal point of your community?

Brenda Velasco: What was the main focal point of your community growing up in Iselin?

Walter Bucher: Well that's a tough question because everybody was trying to make a decent living back in them days after the Depression.

Brenda Velasco: That's right you were growing up during the Depression.

Walter Bucher: And we had no money but we didn't lack for food because we raised everything.

Brenda Velasco: You raised the rabbits you raised the ducks and chickens.

Walter Bucher: We had chickens galore and then Retkwa who I told you about she used to give us beef bones for soup for nothing. Back then everybody had a brown bag with your name on that bag and if you bought a dollar's worth.....she put down because we had no money to pay and.....

Brenda Velasco: It was on credit.

Walter Bucher: On credit...everybody had a bag with their name on it and then when you got a dollar or two you'd go down there and she's take it off and give you a balance.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, this was Mrs. Retkwa. I think her daughter or somebody works for the library, Retkwa.

Walter Bucher: That might be her sons.

Brenda Velasco: Jean Retkwa.

Walter Bucher: It might be her granddaughter because I think both the sons are dead. She didn't have no daughters so it has to be her granddaughter.

Brenda Velasco: But she was the one that owned that butcher shop you said right?

Walter Bucher: Yeah.

Brenda Velasco: You know what I'm going to email her and tell her that I interviewed you today because she would probably know your name. Okay, but you kept yourself busy.

Walter Bucher: Yeah, I've been busy all my life until my knees got bad. I can't do the things I used to do you know.

Brenda Velasco: It comes with age but your mind is sharp.

Walter Bucher: Yeah, so far.

Brenda Velasco: Very sharp. I'm going over this interview with you and you've got a great memory.

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

Brenda Velasco: What did you like about living in Iselin?

Walter Bucher: It was a small town and everybody knew each other at that time. I think it was a great town to grow up in at my time of growing up here.

Brenda Velasco: You felt comfortable here.

Walter Bucher: Yes.

9. Did you experience any significant happenings in Iselin/Woodbridge – construction, accidents, sports events, riots, discrimination, etc.?

Brenda Velasco: Question 9, significant happenings in Woodbridge.

Walter Bucher: Well we had the Shinn Woodbridge Airport on Oak Tree Road and Wood Avenue.

Brenda Velasco: What was the name of the airport?

Walter Bucher: Shinn Woodbridge Airport on Oak Tree Road and Wood Avenue.

Kimberly Mihalics: You used to fly out of there didn't you?

Walter Bucher: Yeah.

Brenda Velasco: Yeah that's what I wanted...you flew out of that airport.

Walter Bucher: I didn't have my license yet and I flew out of that...I got my license there in 1946.

Brenda Velasco: Right after the war you got your license then your pilot's license.

Walter Bucher: Some woman told me I had to fly.

Brenda Velasco: Bea Haydu.

Walter Bucher: What?

Brenda Velasco: Bea, her first name was Bea. She was one of the leading women aviators after World War II and she worked out of that airport. Haydu. I'm going to give Kimberly the email.

Walter Bucher: Her last name was Falk.

Brenda Velasco: Her last name was Falk?

Walter Bucher: Bernice Falk (Haydu)

Brenda Velasco: Alright, then that was somebody different but I'm going to give you the name....

Walter Bucher: I'll think of it, I'm not sure, but she was a member of the Woman's what do you call it?

Brenda Velasco: Auxiliary? (WASP – Women Air Force Service Pilots)

Walter Bucher: The Woman's...they fly the planes over to Europe and she became an instructor. She's the one that told me I had to fly.

Brenda Velasco: Wow! Do you still have your license?

Walter Bucher: Yes ma'am.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, you're not going to get rid of your license.

Walter Bucher: I can't fly anymore because I had a minor heart attack and they won't renew my physical now.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, but you have your license.

Walter Bucher: I still have my license.

Brenda Velasco: If you could possibly, because we're having this at the Main Library on January 31st, if we could just scan that license.

Kimberly Mihalics: Do you have that somewhere? You can look for it.

Brenda Velasco: You got time to look for it if you could find it.

Kimberly Mihalics: It might not be at this time.

Brenda Velasco: No, not at this time.

Walter Bucher: I could find my license but a picture frame of a copy....it's a copy of my license.

Kimberly Mihalics: Okay, that's fine.

Brenda Velasco: That's fine.

Walter Bucher: It you want to go down the cellar it's over by the

Kimberly Mihalics: Well we can do it another day.

Brenda Velasco: Anytime but we're trying to get as much of the pictures and the records and everything of Iselin and Menlo Park Terrace on January 31st.

Walter Bucher: Back in them days we were known as George Street, Iselin...it says George Place. You know they changed it to Place after and then....

Brenda Velasco: So you liked flying, how long did you fly?

Walter Bucher: Quite a few years. I flew six or seven years when I was married and I tried to get my wife to fly with me but she was afraid of flying so she used to wait for me while I was flying. I used to fly out of Hadley Airport because the Garden State Parkway took Iselin (circa 1951).

Brenda Velasco: Yeah, and it also took the airport in Colonia too.

Walter Bucher: On Lake Avenue.

Brenda Velasco: You got it.

Walter Bucher: Westfield Airport. I flew out of there too but...

Brenda Velasco: You did fly out of Westfield okay. If you have any memorabilia from that just give it to Kimberly and....

Walter Bucher: All that stuff is lost in that box. I'm surprised that I have this yet that I found years ago.

Brenda Velasco: Oh, look at this Woodbridge Park, the dedication, 1946 October 20th "Welcome Home Ceremonies". This is for all the veterans.

Walter Bucher: Yeah.

Brenda Velasco: Oh wow, look at all the Nagy's. Let's find your name. You would be at the beginning. Molnar's, oh Montecalvo's, look at all told names. Aaroe, Donny Aaroe, I interviewed him. Aquila, look at all these old names. Albertson...

Walter Bucher: I'm the one that has that mark there somewhere.

Brenda Velasco: Okay Bucher, Barbato...

Walter Bucher: You'll probably recognize a lot of those names.

Brenda Velasco: I am. These are all Woodbridge names. Bucher, you're over here.

Walter Bucher: I probably had a mark somewhere. I think it's just W. Bucher I think on it.

Kimberly Mihalics: There you go.

Brenda Velasco: You're right there.

Kimberly Mihalics: By the big pencil mark.

Walter Bucher: Oh yeah.

Brenda Velasco: Oh wow, what an experience. This is terrific. Okay let me just write down what the...

Walter Bucher: All the people don't have this. I was just going through my stuff. This is one of the things I saved when we were building this house that I took away from my mother's house.

Brenda Velasco: Good thing you did...I'm sorry.

Walter Bucher: All the other stuff, all the pictures we had from World War II in my Army days, the only thing we saved was something like that when I was in the military.

Brenda Velasco: Oh wow, look at how young you were.

Walter Bucher: That's my mother and father and my sister and me there.

Brenda Velasco: Your mom was beautiful.

Kimberly Mihalics: Is that at your house?

Walter Bucher: No, that was on George Place.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, this is your sister you said.

Walter Bucher: Yeah this is my sister Eugenia.

Brenda Velasco: Eugenia is very pretty. What a handsome family.

Walter Bucher: I wasn't a bad looking guy back then.

Brenda Velasco: I said a handsome family. I made a blanket statement. Come on, come on.

Kimberly Mihalics: Would you want me to bring this on the 31st as well?

Brenda Velasco: Yes and I gave you the paper for it.

Kimberly Mihalics: Yes, right here already.

Brenda Velasco: Everything, everything that we can acquire.

Walter Bucher: This is...one of my neighbors wrote that for me.

Brenda Velasco: Oh, Helen Miller Devour wrote this poem for you. Dedicated to Private Walter C. Bucher, your neighbors remember you. How nice. Wow, you got some good memories. You had some good neighbors.

Walter Bucher: Yeah, she was great. She was a nice neighbor.

Brenda Velasco: Kimberly why don't you read this poem aloud, okay.

Kimberly Mihalics: Alright. Your neighbors remember you. You were the boy that took life in stride, the boy that carried his books at his side. Too late for the school bus, you didn't care. There was always something better to do somewhere. That car wouldn't start with a crank. You'd shake it to see if there was gas in the tank. Your neighbors remember you. You're the boy that lived on the hill. You answered the call of a very good will. There was something to do that had to be done. The shots came your way and you were the one. To take everything that comes in your life with stride. Your neighbors remember you to thank you with pride. By Mrs. Helen Miller Devour.

Brenda Velasco: Wow!

Walter Bucher: She was a great woman.

Brenda Velasco: That's pretty moving.

Walter Bucher: Brings tears to my eyes when I read that.

Brenda Velasco: Yeah, well it said you were a little mischievous, too. You were a character. So let's get back...we mentioned your war experience, we mentioned your flying, anything else, construction? Because when you came back from the service what did you do? You went to Newark.

Walter Bucher: Went to Newark school and after that I worked for a plumbing company in Plainfield, New Jersey for quite a few years, maybe ten years, and then got a job from a fellow from New Jersey for plumbing and heating. I worked there a long time and then I got a job with Kelch Plumbing in South River. I worked there twenty-three years I guess.

Brenda Velasco: Do you have pension?

Walter Bucher: No, no pension. The only thing I put money aside for my pension. Small companies didn't give you nothing. You had to pay for your own insurance. What I was going to tell you about, when I was a kid six or seven years old, there is a brook that ran from School 15 down toward Oak Tree Road and there was a mill there with a wheel....

Brenda Velasco: Like a grist mill?

Walter Bucher: Yeah, like a grist mill. There was a brook running down from School 15 onto Pershing Avenue heading down toward Oak Tree and that building was there on, I can't remember the street that it was close by but it was heading toward like Oak Tree Road. There was a murderer in the 1930s. They called it the Lady in Red Murder. Her name was Drennan. She killed her lover.

Brenda Velasco: She killed her lover, wow! And she was from Iselin?

Walter Bucher: Yeah, she lived in Iselin. Well they didn't know who she was until after a while...apparently the neighbors saw a lady dressed in red and they called her the woman dressed in red murder. She was acquitted, I think, in '36 or something like that (1937). Then in 1936 I was a Boy Scout and we walked from Green Street in Iselin to Route 27 to the Edison Tower when it was dedicated.

Brenda Velasco: Do you have any pictures of that?

Walter Bucher: It was all in that box. We even had the old...my father had an old movie camera like it was 8 mm. and all that that was all gone too. That was in the box. Because my father was in the Navy for fourteen years and they used to have a parade up Oak Tree Road every year 4th of July and Memorial Day.

Kimberly Mihalics: He was in World War I right?

Walter Bucher: Yeah, he was in World War I.

Brenda Velasco: Was the parade on Green Street?

Walter Bucher: Yeah, from Green Street all the way down Oak Tree Road up to Wood Avenue I think we went.

Brenda Velasco: So he would march in it and then eventually you would march in it.

Walter Bucher: When I was a Boy Scout I marched in it but after the service we had a dedication where the firehouse is down there. I don't know if you remember that by St. Cecelia's corner there, there was a World War II memorial there with all the names.

Brenda Velasco: Right where 27 and Oak Tree Road intersected?

Walter Bucher: I think it was Auth Avenue and 27. All the people like my mother...everybody paid ten dollars and we all had our names in bronze but when the built that firehouse they ripped it down. I don't know what happened to it.

Brenda Velasco: Did they move it to the park?

Walter Bucher: I don't know whatever happened to it.

Brenda Velasco: Because there was a triangle there but I don't know if that triangle is still just grass lands because that is where they used to have the ceremonies. Do you remember?

Kimberly Mihalics: No.

Brenda Velasco: You're too young.

Walter Bucher: The only thing I know is that across from the township on that triangle she had a brick put there with my name.

Brenda Velasco: Good, yes the Sailors and Soldiers Monument.

Kimberly Mihalics: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: I'm glad of that and that's not going to be moved.

Kimberly Mihalics: Okay, good.

Walter Bucher: You know it's hard to get to that without trying to get hit by a car.

Kimberly Mihalics: Especially when you have bad knees.

Brenda Velasco: But did you get a picture of it?

Walter Bucher: I wanted to see it right in....

Kimberly Mihalics: I think they sent us a picture.

Brenda Velasco: Did they send it?

Kimberly Mihalics: Yes.

Walter Bucher: I'd like to be in the picture with the whole group of guys in there. I probably know some of them guys.

Brenda Velasco: You probably do because it's World War II. You know who would....Audrey LaPenta.

Kimberly Mihalics: Yeah, I think once it was installed they sent picture.

Brenda Velasco: Yeah.

Walter Bucher: I think I got a picture of your brick lying down.

Brenda Velasco: That was a nice gift.

Kimberly Mihalics: Yeah.

Brenda Velasco: Because your father was in the Navy after World War I he marries your mother now your mother was German. Did she face any discrimination?

Walter Bucher: Well she came over from Germany to Ellis Island and my aunt had to sponsor her, her whole year. She lived with my Aunt Elsie for a year and through her husband (he was a brew master from Germany) introduced my father to my mother at that time. They got married a couple of years later.

Brenda Velasco: So that's how your father knew to make beer. There was a brew master some place.

Walter Bucher: He made great beer and made great whiskey.

Brenda Velasco: My grandmother made whiskey too. She made schnapps.

Walter Bucher: Everybody on top of the hill there was what they called bathtub jaded gin.

Brenda Velasco: That was also Prohibition at the time.

Walter Bucher: My father had a still down there and I kick myself when they sold the house that I didn't go down the cellar...

Brenda Velasco: You didn't get the still.

Walter Bucher: It was way in the crawl area. I should have took that.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, that's behind us. Okay, can you think of anything else to mention for Question #9?

Walter Bucher: Well there was a train wreck in Woodbridge, I remember that.

Brenda Velasco: That was in 1951. Were you there? Were you involved with that?

Walter Bucher: The only thing I went down to see the wreck. That was in '61 wasn't it?

Brenda Velasco: No '51.

Walter Bucher: '51?

Brenda Velasco: Yeah, that was '51. So you were out of the service...you were young.

Walter Bucher: Yeah, in '51 I was married a year.

Brenda Velasco: So you got married in 1950?

Walter Bucher: July 16th, 1950.

Brenda Velasco: July 16th, 1950 that's your wedding anniversary.

10. What do you like about Woodbridge/Iselin today?

Brenda Velasco: Okay, you're still here.

Walter Bucher: I'm still here, yeah. I'm in pretty good shape but my knees are bad.

Brenda Velasco: But you stayed in Woodbridge and you stayed in Iselin.

Walter Bucher: Probably they'll have to carry me out of this house.

Brenda Velasco: Good, okay, but you like it.

Walter Bucher: Yeah.

Brenda Velasco: And that gets you to Question #11.

Walter Bucher: I got good memories here because I worked for two years....Cutter and I built this house. I worked and every night I worked until eleven o'clock here and on the weekends my wife and I we worked every weekend.

Kimberly Mihalics: Tell her about the recycled wood.

Walter Bucher: Well that wasn't the house that was the garage.

Kimberly Mihalics: Oh the garage.

Brenda Velasco: So you used recycled wood for the....

Walter Bucher: Well my garage is built from...when World War II was over they built these Veteran's homes they were like little bungalows like...it looked like Army barracks. They had a kitchen and bathroom and all and the Veteran's would rent them for like fifty dollars a month. I built the garage in '57....they had them in Perth Amboy by the Dunlop Homes too there somewhere and they ripped them all down and her mother was only about three years old and we decided to take a ride to look at a game back there past Newark and we went past this place and they were ripping these places down and I stopped the guy and said, I see the pile of wood how much are you selling that wood for? He said the 2X4 are five cents and the 2X6 are ten cents. They had nails in them so my wife and we...I had a plumbing truck and it was a fifty-two pound truck and I loaded it up to the ceiling and we pulled all the nails out, we saved all the nails. And we went back for the second time and loaded up again and that garage was built by the old, I don't know what they called it, barracks home or whatever it was.

Brenda Velasco: Alright, we know what you're talking about. That was a lot of work though to pull out all those nails.

Walter Bucher: My wife and I saved all the nails up too and used the same nails over and when I got my permit the inspector came down and said you can't buy wood that good in that day. He could smell the wood and he said I know the smell is good.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, so Question #11.

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

Brenda Velasco: Do you still have family members living....

Walter Bucher: Yeah, well Kimmie lives in Woodbridge, my son Brian lives....

Kimberly Mihalics: On Eagle.

Walter Bucher: Eagle Street, that's their father but he's married and he's got two sons with his wife....

Kimberly Mihalics: And then his other son lives here with his daughter.

Walter Bucher: My son lives here with me with his daughter Brittany, she's around her somewhere I guess.

Kimberly Mihalics: And then my mother she lives in Avenel.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, Kimberly's mom and what's your mom's first name?

Kimberly Mihalics: Diane. She lives in Avenel.

Brenda Velasco: So you still have a lot of family around here.

Kimberly Mihalics: And then my aunt, his daughter Lisa and her family live in Maryland.

Brenda Velasco: They're still on the East Coast but a lot of you still live in Woodbridge that's very good.

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

Brenda Velasco: Are there any other stories that you can think of or events that we haven't discussed, Walter or Kim? I think we covered a lot but we may have missed something.

Walter Bucher: I can't think of anything. The big thing was like the murder of the guy, the woman in red. That was a big thing in Iselin because Iselin, New Jersey, where the hell is Iselin, New Jersey?

Brenda Velasco: Right and that's an odd name too you know.

Walter Bucher: And Woodbridge didn't like Iselin you know back in them days.

Brenda Velasco: Look they didn't like Colonia, they didn't like Fords....

Walter Bucher: They told us we were too rowdy or something, I don't know but we had a lot of good people here in Iselin. You know Iselin back in my days grown up was like farmland here you know. I think we had one store on Oak Tree Road that was like a grocery store. You didn't have **ShopRite**, you didn't have **Acme**, you didn't have **Wegmans**.

Brenda Velasco: No.

Kimberly Mihalics: Definitely not **Wegmans**.

Walter Bucher: They had only these small stores, **A&P**...

Brenda Velasco: They were Mom & Pop stores.

Walter Bucher: **A&P** did have a store in Iselin on Oak Tree Road and they used to have the old coffee grinder.

Brenda Velasco: Oh yeah!

Walter Bucher: And they'd grind the coffee for you.

Brenda Velasco: Yeah, *Eight O'Clock* that was the name of the coffee.

Walter Bucher: That was a long time ago.

Brenda Velasco: That was a small **A&P** then.

Walter Bucher: And **A&P** that's all they had was a stinking little store and look at what they become.

Brenda Velasco: Well that's it then and I thank you both for letting me visit.

Walter Bucher: Yeah, a lot of things if I can think about it I could probably come up with some other stuff but you know we had no money and Mr. Barracks owned the store and I always wanted to, since I was ten years old and there were no houses on this street and I used to shoot squirrels down here and this guy owned the Greek restaurant on Oak Tree Road and Middlesex Avenue he used to buy the squirrels from me and give me fifty cents and I would go down to the hardware store, Mr. Barracks, and I would buy five bullets for a nickel apiece and I'd go back and get more squirrels. That's how I got my spending money. I don't know if you're an animal lover but that's how I grew up.

Brenda Velasco: That was a different time and you could do it.

Walter Bucher: And my father...we had a 100 X 100 garden and I had my old shotgun right by the window there and my father would wake me up in the morning. And I would hear a shot and he would say I just caught a rabbit eating my tomatoes, go pick him up and skin him out and we'll have him tonight.

Brenda Velasco: Because rabbits can wreak havoc in the garden.

Walter Bucher: Oh yeah, woodchucks too.

Kimberly Mihalics: That's why your favorite meal is hasenpfeffer.

Walter Bucher: My mother made the best hasenpfeffer in this world.

Brenda Velasco: Rabbit stew?

Kimberly Mihalics: Yeah. We tried to find him some for his ninetieth birthday but they don't have hasenpfeffer around here.

Brenda Velasco: My daughter-in-law is from Ecuador and she'll make rabbit stew.

Kimberly Mihalics: Oh really.

Brenda Velasco: But it's different than the way the Germans make it.

Walter Bucher: Oh yeah.

Brenda Velasco: Yeah, but it was good. Well I thank you both.

.....

After the formal interview concluded, Mr. Bucher recalled that he bought all his Boy Scout uniforms from **Christensen's Store** on Main Street in Woodbridge.