Edward Leiss

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Abstract: Edward F. Leiss (1909-2004), the son of Joseph Leiss Sr. and Bertha Leiss, was born in Edison as one of nine children. In 1911, Mr. Leiss and his family moved to Metuchen where his father worked for the Reading Railroad. Mr. Leiss graduated from Metuchen High School in 1928; he was an excellent athlete that participated in high school baseball and football. He was also an avid golfer that had a part-time job as a teenager at the Metuchen Golf and Country Club cutting the fairways. In addition, he played semi-pro football with the Metuchen Triangles. Following his education, Mr. Leiss served as a grocery clerk and manager before joining the Metuchen Police on a part-time basis as a marshal in 1934. He was promoted to police clerk in 1936, and became a full-time patrolman a year later. He became sergeant in 1942, and was promoted to lieutenant in 1953. Mr. Leiss was appointed chief of police in 1965, where he served until his retirement in 1975.

Mr. Leiss was a member of the Young People's Democratic Club and the Sunrise Field and Stream Club. In 1955 and 1959, he won the county amateur golf championship. Mr. Leiss married his wife Mary A. Seluck in 1941 and they had one daughter, Judith Ann (Leiss) Kochy. He won the Metuchen Citizen of the Year Award in 1975.

In this interview, Mr. Leiss discusses his early childhood, education, religious upbringing, athletic endeavors, early misdemeanors, and his cabin getaway. He also talks extensively about his career in the Metuchen Police Department, including changes to the department over the years and interesting incidents and crimes that occurred during his time on the force.

R. Terwilliger: This is Ruth Terwilliger. Today's date is February 21, 1978 and we are interviewing Edward Leiss, former chief of police in Metuchen, New Jersey. [recording paused]

Ed, maybe we'll start in by talking about where you were born? What section? It wasn't actually Metuchen, it was Edison, right?

E. Leiss: **Well, it was known then as Raritan Township and then later, of course, it was changed to Edison. And it's on Talmadge Road in Edison where the present [Edison] Moose Lodge [1978] is [at 410 Talmadge Road]. That's where I was born.**

R. Terwilliger: Yeah. And you were one of nine children?

E. Leiss: One of nine.

R. Terwilliger: And I think I remember you saying you were about third in line. You had an older brother or two older brothers?

E. Leiss: That's right.

R. Terwilliger: And how long did you live out at that–on Talmadge Road?

E. Leiss: Well, we moved when I was two years old. So being born in 1909, I would say about 1911 when we came into Metuchen.

R. Terwilliger: And where did you move in Metuchen?

E. Leiss: It was near the Reading Railroad. I guess best described as between the Reading Railroad and Norris Avenue.

R. Terwilliger: All nine of you lived in this one big house at that address?

E. Leiss: Well, I don't recall. I think it was only seven of us left when we moved into Metuchen.

R. Terwilliger: And what did your father do for a living?

E. Leiss: He [Joseph Leiss Sr.] worked for the Reading Railroad.

R. Terwilliger: For the Reading Railroad. Then I guess you went to Franklin School when you started school? Did you have kindergarten at the time you started?

E. Leiss: Yes, yes. In the Franklin School, they had right from the kindergarten to graduation, senior.

R. Terwilliger: Uh-huh. Do you recall any of those early years in school? Can you remember the names of classmates or teachers?

E. Leiss: Well, I do know that I was in school while Ray Herb (one known as Ray Herb), who was our homeroom teacher and history teacher. He also did a little coaching in the baseball and football. I also remember Elmo Spoerl, who was a principal. The principal prior to Spoerl, who was there when I started school, was T. G. Van Kirk.

R. Terwilliger: Oh yeah. I wanted to ask you a little bit, before we get into your high school years, a little bit about being a young boy in this town. Did you have to do anything to help with family chores? A family that large, I would think that there'd be help needed from youngsters. What was your mother [Bertha Leiss] like?

E. Leiss: Well, to get back to whether we had to work, in fact I got a part-time job at the Metuchen Golf and Country Club [at 244 Plainfield Road, Edison]. It wasn't known as the Metuchen Country Club; it was just a golf club, or a golf course.

And I recall after school, I would go there and sit on a mower just with a horse and I used to just go around and cut the fairways. The course then was alongside of Christol Street. It was surrounded–well, it was then where Norris Avenue and Mason Street or Mason Avenue [Mason Drive], Buchanan Street [Buchanan Road]. And then after I graduated from school, I got a job there also taking care of the course, cutting greens, and helping build the new nine holes on it where it presently is. So we were a family where the finances weren't too good. So we all had to chip in. And I remember when I worked full-time at the golf club, if I made twenty-two dollars for the week, twenty of it went to my mother and we kept two dollars.

R. Terwilliger: Um-hm. But you did this willingly. I mean you knew that that kind of help was needed.

E. Leiss: Yes, there was no question. All of the boys did the same thing. Well, I don't remember what they did in their jobs, but we always pitched in and helped whenever we could.

R. Terwilliger: And when you think back of being a young boy, I'm talking about now, this is grade school and probably early teens, would you say that they were happy years? Did you ever feel like you were missing something or that you wished for things you couldn't have or you couldn't do?

E. Leiss: Well, I guess I was no different than the other young fellows. Well, when you saw somebody that seemed to be much better off than you, you sort of wished you had some of that. We used to like to roller skate and ride bicycles, but we couldn't afford them. And I recall that we used to give little gifts to somebody that owned a bicycle so we could have a ride on the bicycle around the park or something like that. [laughter]

R. Terwilliger: Um-hm. But you would say generally, if someone asked you to describe your early childhood, that you were happy for the most part?

E. Leiss: Oh yes, I don't think we missed anything.

R. Terwilliger: Were there good strong family ties?

E. Leiss: Yes, there was.

R. Terwilliger: You were a close family then?

E. Leiss: Very.

R. Terwilliger: You were very supportive of one another?

E. Leiss: Right.

R. Terwilliger: And then, you had this part-time job or whatever you want to call at the golf course. Do you think this kind of spurred your initial interest in playing golf, was working and watching these men playing golf?

E. Leiss: **Oh, definitely. Not only that, but on my weekends and holidays, there would be a pro there from Plainfield [Country Club]. I think his name was Marty O'Loughlin. And during the week sometimes, he would give lessons in the summertime to the people there. And they'd call on me to go chasing the golf balls for them. And I would watch and listen while the pro was giving the instructions to whomever he was teaching, and I think I learned a lot from that. Plus the fact that when we made our first little golf club out of a piece of cherrywood, we did some playing. And the first time someone gave us the golf club, a real golf club, we just thought that that was a terrific gift.**

R. Terwilliger: Oh, I can imagine. You spoke to me before when we were doing our initial interview about this first golf club you kind of designed out of a twig. I wish you'd tell me again exactly how it was made.

E. Leiss: **We would cut off a branch of a tree, maybe the thickness of a [unclear] golf shaft today. And then where the branch grew out of a thicker part of the limb, we would cut that off and it would be maybe a forty-five angle or maybe a little more than that. And then we'd trim it, take the bark off, and we cut it down, shape it down on the face of the club. And the more we shaved it down, the more we could raise a ball by lofting, is the word I'm trying to think of. And we would play with that from tee to green, and we'd put with it and everything else.**

R. Terwilliger: I think that's amazing, you know thinking about having a whole bag full of clubs today that you could really play some admirable golf with something you designed yourself. I wanted to ask you–I mean I don't want to belay the subject of golf right now, but we'll get back to it. But while we're talking about it, the disciplines of a good golfer. I mean what do you think it requires to be a good golfer? Do you think it's–I don't want to answer for you – but I mean being a beginner golfer myself I'm really interested in talking to you about it, that you know to me it's nothing but practice, practice, practice. But do you think like golfers are born or are they made?

E. Leiss: **Well, first, as we–if I may use the phrase "the golf bug has to bite you." And you have to really like the game because I think a person doing anything that he really likes to do, he can learn quicker. And from watching better golfers and doing practice as you said, I can't give you another answer than what you said. It's practice, it's practice. You just can't lay off the game. You have to keep at it all the time. And after a while, it gets–everything is done automatically.**

R. Terwilliger: So you really don't believe to be a good golfer, you can be a Sunday golfer as they call them.

E. Leiss: **Yes. Some golfers, they just get to one point and that's where they stay. I think the crux of the whole thing is when a young fellow, a young boy, starts playing golf and just works his way up. And we learned a lot as caddies. And my brothers and I were one of the first caddies at the golf club. And we used to see some pretty good golfers there. And we learned from them, and we practically lived on the course and this is what makes golfers. And I think if you looked back in the history of some of the present golfers, you'll find that they did a lot of living on the golf course too.**

R. Terwilliger: Yeah. Can you remember the names of any of these old timers, that perhaps some people in Metuchen might recall the names, that you caddied for as a young boy?

E. Leiss: **Well, there was a Vanderpoel. It was a Fred Whitaker, Frank Hay, Phineas Jones (who was at one time the mayor of Metuchen), Walter Williams, Ted Dana, the Rowland brothers, Clinton [phonetic], and I can't think of his other name. Then a little bit later in years, there was Tom Smith, and Frank Dunham, and John Billing [phonetic]. Hunt was–the man by the name of [Alonzo Clark] Hunt, who lived right at the turn of [625] Middlesex Avenue where the present Foodtown was–Doc Hunt, I believe he was.**

R. Terwilliger: Yes, Doctor Hunt, right. That's quite a list of them anyway. Well, as I said, we'll get back to this. But we were about the point of where I thought maybe it might be interesting to talk a little bit about your high school years because on top of being a golfer and along with that or prior to it, you were quite an athlete that you played baseball and football in high school. Was there an organized baseball team in the high school when you went into it?

E. Leiss: **Well, it was organized and we had a pretty good ball club. Although again, finances were not very good. In fact, I remember playing a football game against South River and on the jersey that I wore, it was a big–in letters (gold letters)–"Eureka!" [laughter] I don't remember where I got it from, but it was just a case of, if you could get a better shirt than the other fellow, that is what you wore. But we were known as the Metuchen High School.**

R. Terwilliger: So this was not something that was supported by the Athletic Department of the high school. Most of the money that went into equipment came from private interest?

E. Leiss: **Well, I think that had a lot to do with it. If they had a budget, it was very small because they just didn't have enough to go around to help each man with the whole full uniform.**

R. Terwilliger: Yeah. And was this the same for the football team?

E. Leiss: **I was talking about the football team. We faired, it seems, a little bit better in baseball. We were able to have uniforms with "Metuchen" written on it.**

R. Terwilliger: You know just from the few things you've told me about the kind of person you were and how early you started out to work, there seems that you had sort of an inborn competitive spirit that had to be satisfied. Do you remember having these feelings of wanting to win? Was this important to you as a young man?

E. Leiss: **Yes, I believe that was the upmost. You know wanting to win, whether it be golf, whether it be football, baseball, or even hockey. This was our goal we looked for. We hated to lose. But like they say, you can't win them all. And we took it in stride.**

R. Terwilliger: And do you feel that these experiences as an athlete kind of, maybe it laid a little bit of the groundwork for the kind of person you were for the rest of your life? Do you think athletics teach something to a young man about morality or living right in this world?

E. Leiss: **Definitely, absolutely. I think the problems would be minimized today with young fellows if they really went through athletics, some part of it at least. Because I think that is what makes the man.**

R. Terwilliger: Well, you know I don't mean to sound like I'm flattering you, but it certainly seems to have been a proven thing in your own life because to me you are not ever a man who set your goals so high that they couldn't be attained. But you seem to have an order that you went through your life with and did what you wanted to do with it. And to get back to the sports, I would like you to tell us a little bit about this semi-pro football that you played. That was in no way connected with high school football? Now this was a private sort of group of young men that got together and formed this club here in Metuchen?

E. Leiss: **Yes. I think the first club we formed was known as the Metuchen Triangles, and all local boys. And we just played because we loved to play the game and it was fellows, a lot of the fellows, we graduated together. And in those days, we played for the present Campbell School [which] is today on Durham Avenue. And we drew quite a nice crowd. You don't see too much of that tight football anymore unless, I would assume, because of your pro football. And we had games with towns around like New Brunswick; Iselin; Fords; Perth Amboy; Plainfield; South Amboy; Jersey City; New Rochelle [New York]; Stapleton, Staten Island [New York]; the New York Giants.**

R. Terwilliger: Yeah. That's the one I wanted you to mention, and that's the New York Giants we know. I mean this is <u>the</u> team.

E. Leiss: **Yes. This was an exhibition game, the first game of the season, and it was played in Perth Amboy City Stadium. And I believe the year was–well, we played two games. One was in [19]33 and [19]34, or it could have been [19]32 and [19]33. I'm not quite sure.**

R. Terwilliger: And did you win the game?

E. Leiss: **No, we lost both of them. [laughter] I recall the first score was 42-7. We managed to get a score. And I do feel that if the Giants wanted to put on a little bit more pressure, they could have made the score higher.**

R. Terwilliger: Well, then it sounds a little bit like–do you think you were outclassed a little bit?

E. Leiss: **No question about it. We were playing against mostly college graduates who–that was part of their life, pro football where the heart of the game was just fellows that–each one had his own type of work to do during the day and then he'd play on Sundays and we practiced sometimes under lights at night. So there was no question we were outplayed, but it was an experience that I would never forget.**

R. Terwilliger: And there was no fear on your part? I mean when you got there and you saw probably the equipment these guys had and the size of them. And after a couple of plays, I'm sure you knew right where they were at. You weren't afraid?

E. Leiss: **Well, I'll never forget when I walked out of the locker room and against the wall on the other side of the locker room, the Giant team just stood there and I mean**

they looked like giants, Canadian. [laughter] I weighed then, I guess, around, oh, 185-90 pounds. And these fellows, they were taller and bigger it seems. And I thought, *Well, we're here to play football*. And after the first whistle, why we got so that–well, as a young fellow, you don't have no fear, especially if you are playing an athletic game that you love.

R. Terwilliger: Yeah. And what position did you play? I forgot to ask.

E. Leiss: I played fullback. They called it fullback. Today, they got different names for it.

R. Terwilliger: Yeah. What's the difference today?

E. Leiss: Well, you know today you have an offensive team, you have a defensive team. In those days, when you went in as a fullback, you wound up the game offense and defense and that's where you are. We didn't have substitutes like you could substitute a whole team. And this is the way we had to do it and you played the whole–

R. Terwilliger: You played both ways.

E. Leiss: Both ways, offense and defense. And you played the whole game unless unfortunately you got hurt or something.

R. Terwilliger: And you're always able to play? I can't believe you could play a whole game! You must have been exhausted in the end?

E. Leiss: Well, when you like doing something, you don't think about being tired or exhausted. You don't.

R. Terwilliger: And I wouldn't have wanted to have been your mother to feed you! This must have been a tremendous thing for her to have to feed boys like yourself and your brother.

E. Leiss: Mother didn't want me to play football. And I played against her wishes. In fact, I'll never forget an incident that happened on the Campbell School Field where we had a football game. And there were quite a few people there, and we lived right nearby. And I had the wind knocked out of me and I laid there trying to get my wind back again, when I heard somebody say, "Your mother's coming!" [laughter] Across the field, I said, "Get me up and let's call the signals," because I didn't want her to see me laying there or I had never played football again. But it's one of those things and she always used to say, "Well, I know you are playing football, but don't ever come home crippled."

R. Terwilliger: Yeah. Well, you know I can understand her feelings that we mothers have a way of worrying about our boys. And especially then, I mean just from the pictures you showed me, some the equipment were just not there and you know that must have really been quite dangerous. I'm surprised you didn't get your neck broke or something in some of those plays.

E. Leiss: Well, I had a few bangs, and perhaps I suffered with them even today. Once in a while, it might be from that, it might not be. I don't know.

R. Terwilliger: How about you and your dad? Did he come and watch?

E. Leiss: No. He watched one game and I recall after the ball game, he said, "I don't know how you fellows play football. Somebody picks the ball and runs with it, and then everybody else jumps on top of them."

R. Terwilliger: [laughs] So he never really had an interest in football?

E. Leiss: He didn't care for it, no.

R. Terwilliger: Well, you graduated from Metuchen High [School] then, right?

E. Leiss: Yeah, ma'am.

R. Terwilliger: And what year was that?

E. Leiss: Nineteen-hundred-twenty-eight.

R. Terwilliger: Nineteen-hundred-twenty-eight. And probably Mr. Elmo Spoerl was still principal of the high school at that time?

E. Leiss: Yes, that's right.

R. Terwilliger: And you mentioned that some of the teachers were Ray Herb. And high school teachers, do you recall any others?

E. Leiss: Well, there was Miss [Beatrice] Kuntz. And there was an English teacher, Miss–was it Fulson [phonetic]? I'm not quite sure. And then one of the lower grade teachers was Brewster, Miss [Kate] Brewster.

R. Terwilliger: And you enjoyed your high school years then?

E. Leiss: I sure did.

R. Terwilliger: Did you have girlfriends?

E. Leiss: Oh, did I have girlfriends? [laughter] Yes, but it was a little different, little different today.

R. Terwilliger: I wanted to ask you about the social life? Were you shy then?

E. Leiss: Well, you might call it that. [laughter] I'll just give you a little incident. When I walked this girl home one time and after we got her home, she walked down to the railroad bridge at Clive Street today. And we sat there on the bridge for a while before I left her and she kissed me on the forehead. And I ran all the way home, believe it or not! [laughter] Now if you call it shyness, that's what it was. And today, it's quite a different story.

R. Terwilliger: Yeah. But don't you think there was some value to that, taking time to get to know a person. Today young people seem so open with one another that–you know from just my own experience of raising children that they seem more relaxed with one another

than I can even remember from my high school days being with boys that they don't seem to worry so much about looks or shape or that kind of thing. It's more of what is inside of a person than the kinds of things we worried about. But on the other hand, there seems to be a great deal about how you two getting to know somebody.

E. Leiss: **You're right. Now it could be that religion had something to do with it too. I try to be a good Catholic and I think in the past thirty or forty years, I may have missed church less than five times. That doesn't make me an angel. But I sure think that if more people, and I don't want to sound like I am getting into religion, but if more people, young people, if they went to church, regardless of what church they're–whatever their religion may be–it helps.**

R. Terwilliger: I didn't realize you were Catholic. And was there St. Francis [Church] there when you were here as a boy?

E. Leiss: **Yes. Although Father [Arthur D.] Hassett was the priest then, as I remember.**

R. Terwilliger: That was prior to Monsignor [John J.] Foley then, right?

E. Leiss: **Oh yes. I think Monsignor Foley, I think, replaced Father Hassett.**

R. Terwilliger: And you didn't go to Catholic schools though? You went to public schools, right?

E. Leiss: **That's right. We didn't have a Catholic school in those days.**

R. Terwilliger: That's true. It was built after that. But did they have any sort of religious instruction?

E. Leiss: **Oh, the regular Sunday school every Sunday after church. You had to be there for your Sunday school.**

R. Terwilliger: And do you remember taking it very seriously? I mean was there–especially in our time of Catholic religion, I also am a Catholic–that things, fear tactics with young kids, you know there was such thing as mortal sin, and by golly, you know you really believed it!

E. Leiss: **Very true, very true. It seems that I always had the feeling that I was blessed with good health and that I couldn't spend just that one hour or almost an hour in church just one day a week, then I felt as though something was wrong with me. And I got so that church came first, and then as soon as the Mass was over, I would run up to the golf course. [laughter] That was my Sunday.**

R. Terwilliger: And so there has been also this balance in your life that it's been–you know that has been a very deciding factor on the way you live your life was partly religion then. I will say, as you said, you don't want to sound like a religious fanatic, but it definitely had its guidance through your life.

E. Leiss: **Yes, it did.**

R. Terwilliger: And you married in the Catholic church [unclear]?

E. Leiss: **Yes, I did.**

R. Terwilliger: Um-hm. We don't want to skip ahead, I want to make sure our tape is still running, number one. [looking at tape recorder] Oh, we are in very good shape. But you told me after you got out of high school that you went into a little bit of the food management business. Was that right out of high school?

E. Leiss: Well, it was for the American Stores Company, which is now the Acme [Supermarket] stores. And I worked as a grocery clerk under a manager. And I guess all told, I must have put in six to eight years in this. I wound up as a manager of a grocery store in Carteret, New Jersey.

R. Terwilliger: And what made you decide to become a policeman then?

E. Leiss: Well, to be honest with you, in those days, our department in Metuchen was very small, and it wasn't a question of, like it is today, when a little boy or girl is asked, "What would you like to be when you grow up?" [laughter] It just so happened that I was sitting with a friend of mine in the diner that used to be at the corner of Main Street and Middlesex Avenue next to the Shell station, and having a cup of coffee. And our former chief, God rest his soul, came in for a cup of coffee and during the conversation, he says to me, "Ed, how would you like to be a policeman?" Well, it caught me by surprise because I hadn't thought of it. And this must have been in 1934. So I quickly answered and said, "Yeah, I think I would like it." And he says, "All right. I'll get to you a little later and let you know." And it wasn't long after that where I was appointed as what was then known a marshal. And I would get paid three dollars per eight-hour shift when I worked. And I would be called in perhaps when somebody was sick, one of the members was sick, or somebody had the day off or vacation.

R. Terwilliger: This is nothing like the special policemen of today?

E. Leiss: Well, it's similar to the special policemen. The marshal had a little more jurisdiction than the ordinary policemen, but we kept it to our own local municipality, our work. And that was in 1934, and I remained a marshal for the [19]34, [19]35, and [19]36. January [19]36, I was appointed as a police clerk known then, of which I was police guard. I had a uniform and everything else. I did regular patrol duty. I did a lot of–

R. Terwilliger: And now this was a full-time job as a police clerk?

E. Leiss: Yes, yes. And then of course, the next year, I was appointed a regular patrolman as they are called today. And I had my rounds of patrol motorcycle, bicycle in fact.

R. Terwilliger: You talked about that a little bit. [laughs]

E. Leiss: I feel as though I was the first and only policeman that ever went on patrol in Metuchen on a bicycle. [chuckles]

R. Terwilliger: Was that something the chief dreamed up or how–I can't imagine seeing a policeman riding a bicycle on his rounds. Or was it lack of money for another car?

E. Leiss: **Could be? Again, finances were low and the police commissioner then was the present–he is still living–Paul Fenton. And the commissioner and the council and the chief got their heads together, and I guess that's where they came up with the bicycle patrol. So it lasted one day to my knowledge. [laughter] And there was no more bicycle patrol after that.**

R. Terwilliger: And as I recall, you told me that there was no special training to become a policeman. It was sort of a trial and error kind of beginning.

E. Leiss: **You were just more or less told what you had to do. And we did. Of course, we didn't have crime in those days like you have today. And the difference in the patrolmen then and now is that you have to practically be a lawyer to be a patrolman.**

R. Terwilliger: Right. Yeah, I understand that, that you have to be so … [recording ends]

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 1]

R. Terwilliger: Testing, one, two. [recording paused]

[recording begins mid-sentence] … repeat again, in case we lost that on the last part of the tape. How long you were patrolman?

E. Leiss: **Well, from about 1937 to 1941. I was promoted to a sergeant then.**

R. Terwilliger: At that time, when you became sergeant, did you ever have any idea that you would be chief someday? Was it your ambition to be chief someday?

E. Leiss: **Well, not really. There was a faint hope. But when you have a little department, I was the eighth man when I went on the police department. There were seven of them, and I was the eighth. And it just seemed as though everybody would become chief before I did, and it would depend on how long you would be a chief. Of course, Willard B. Hutchinson was a chief then. And he left in 1942, if I remember the date correctly. And Enos Fouratt took over. Well, he was a young fellow then too. So Enos Fouratt kept it from 1942 to 1965, which is quite a few years. And when you go on as a young fellow, as a chief, then the chances are if you hold your own, you'll put on a lot more years then you would if you went on [unclear].**

R. Terwilliger: Well, then you were probably up through the ranks from sergeant to was it, lieutenant or captain?

E. Leiss: **Well, in 1953, we lost our lieutenant, who was then Costen Manziano. He died with a stroke. And I was appointed as a lieutenant then. And of course, I went into plainclothes. That didn't mean that I didn't wear a uniform anymore. Often times, I had to come in uniform because of one of the fellows sick or maybe a vacation time or what have you. And in those days, I went out on the corners in hot weather and cold weather to do school traffic duty also.**

R. Terwilliger: Yeah. That's something I want to talk to you about is before we talk about you being captain, I recall as a young girl walking up to Franklin School, that for years you were a cop on the corner there. And did you enjoy that duty with the kids every day?

E. Leiss: **Oh, I loved [unclear], get along with the kids and they got along with me. And it seemed like we didn't have any problem at all. They looked forward to seeing a policeman on the corner. And believe me, they'd wait right there until you told them to cross.**

R. Terwilliger: Well, I remember that kind of respect you talk about. I mean the policeman was someone that you had a great deal of respect for and you listened to as a young person. And I think even as a teenage person, that if you were ever brought home by a policeman for anything you did, your parents supported that.

E. Leiss: **Absolutely.**

R. Terwilliger: Where I think that's the difference today. A policeman brings a kid home and the parents are against the policeman, not the kid. You know I shouldn't be doing this kind of talk, this is your talk. But don't you feel that's true that there is that difference.

E. Leiss: **Yes, he was much more respected then. And the parents would always side with the policeman. There were rare occasions, of course. But as a rule, I know my mother always used to say, "Don't you ever come home," before I was a policeman, "Don't you ever come home with a policeman." And we remember that all of our boyhood days.**

R. Terwilliger: Well, tell a little story about the time the police went to your house looking for you.

E. Leiss: **Well, I'd like to tell the other story first. I don't even know whether I told you in the interview. But there was a group of us, the boys that always stuck together, we played football, baseball together. And one of them, Marshall Allen, I'll never forget, had a little accident with an automobile and the case came up in court. And of course, we all sat in the present courtroom by the way. And we listened to the fellow that he had an accident with. And from what Allen told us about the accident, this fellow apparently was lying. At least, we felt that way. That isn't the way we heard the story. And of course, Allen, we had a good friend of ours, I will never forget Judge Washington Wilson–**

R. Terwilliger: [offhand comment] That's my son.

E. Leiss: **–was the judge at that time. [recording paused]**

R. Terwilliger: Okay, can you pick it up?

E. Leiss: **Well, getting back to the court case again, I felt that this man was not telling the truth of this fellow. And Judge Washington Wilson was on the bench and Chief Willard Hutchinson was next to the judge at the desk, and I raised my hand up in a clenched fist, meaning that this man is lying. I didn't say anything, and all of the sudden, I looked at the Chief of Police Hutchinson and he looked in our direction and he put up his finger as if he wanted to see one of us, and he kept it up. And in the meantime, court continued. So finally, he looked as though he was**

pointing at me, so I pointed to myself, "You mean me?" And he said, "Yes, you!" And I know court was stopped. [laughter] And he called in Officer [Charles] Frohm at the time and I'll never forget, he says, "Take this boy and put him in jail." I was put in a jail; the door was slammed on me. [laughs] Today, you don't dare do that because I was a minor. And I stayed in that jail perhaps maybe two or three minutes. And believe me, in those two or three minutes, I had a lot of thinking about my parents and what they would say. So finally they called me out and brought me before the judge. And he asked me my name and I told him, wanted to know my mother's name, I told him. He knew my mother. In fact, my mother in those days used to wash and iron his shirts. "Well," he says, "what you did–." I didn't really realize why I was put in there, but I assumed that's what it might have been. He says, "That is called contempt of court. You can't do those things."

R. Terwilliger: Because of the raising of your fist?

E. Leiss: That's right. And I said to the judge then, "Well, we thought maybe this man was lying. And we weren't going to do anything." But he says, "No. That's contempt of court, you can't do it."

R. Terwilliger: Oh my gracious!

E. Leiss: Oh no, that's it. But I'll never forget that.

R. Terwilliger: So you might say that former chiefs of police spent some time behind bars. [laughs] Oh, that's a good story. But I also like the other story about the kids that broke into the boxcars. Oh no, you didn't actually do the breaking in.

E. Leiss: No, no.

R. Terwilliger: No, we want to keep the record straight. [laughs]

E. Leiss: It was a football game that we played as kids back of the present [First] Presbyterian Cemetery or the Presbyterian Center. And the night before it had rained, a very heavy rainstorm, and we played in the puddles and what have you. And during halftime, somebody was covered with the hedge that is there that separates the field from the cemetery, had been broken apart and covered up boxes, big boxes. And of course somebody would go over and take some branches away and we noticed the boxes would say "Camel Cigarettes," another one said "Shoes." And of course, one fellow would open it up and he'd take off with a carton or two cigarettes, and somebody would take some shoes. And of course, not being alone in this thing, I thought, *Well, I smoke*. So I took a carton of Camels. Not thinking what they were doing there and how they got there. We didn't seem to be interested in it. So I'll never forget that night. I came from the movies just after dark.

R. Terwilliger: This was the old Forum Theatre?

E. Leiss: The old Forum Theatre, yes. [laughter] Well, I don't think it was the Forum then. I believe it was the movies [Metuchen Theatre] there at [460] Main [Street] and Highland [Avenue].

R. Terwilliger: Oh, really? There was a theater there?

E. Leiss: That's right.

R. Terwilliger: I didn't know that. I'm glad I said that to you.

E. Leiss: I think it was there because I know I was only a little teenager then.

R. Terwilliger: I never realized there was a theater there, Ed.

E. Leiss: Yes, it was. After the theater, I believe there was a car dealer in there, Joe Thomason, was in there [Thomason Motors Inc. at 460 Main Street]. I don't know if it was right after the theater or not.

R. Terwilliger: Well anyway, that's where the theater was that you came from.

E. Leiss: Low and behold, when I got in the house, I saw two policeman, Charlie Frohm and I believe the other one was Jim Drake [phonetic] or George Breen. And of course, they asked me, "Hello Ed, how was the movies and who won the ballgame today?" And I thought, *Well, I told them who won*. He said, "What did you do with those cigarettes you took." And of course, I tried to say I didn't. "What cigarettes?" And he said, "Well, now we were told by so-and-so that you took several cartons of cigarettes." I said, "No, I took one carton." "Where is it?" I said, "I hid it under the building, building shack" as we call the building shack. And that was right at the corner of Clive [Street] and Mason Drive where the pond is. There used to be a voting building there where the Edison voters used to vote. So the officer said, "Do you want to go and get it?" And I said, "I'll go get it." And I'll never forget going to get it because I had to go across the golf course center, the first hole of the golf course, and then enter the woods. And we didn't have any flashlights. [laughter] But I managed to get through to this voting building and in the back end, I reached under where I had put the carton on a beam. Of course, I had already smoked half of one pack and I hid that before I walked in the house because I wasn't supposed to be smoking. And I brought that back. I told them that I already smoked one. I did a little lying, which perhaps I shouldn't have. And I didn't get anything for it, but I found out later that there was a train stop there and someone had broken into a boxcar that night and emptied out these cartons of cigarettes and shoes and put them in the hedge and then tried to cover them up. And I understand also later that that place was staked out by the police and they caught those that did the job.

R. Terwilliger: Well, my father was an old–I told you–Pennsylvania Railroad man and he told us several times that that was really a problem along when they used to sidetrack those freights, I guess, waiting for either to be picked up by another freight, but especially during hard times in the thirties and when things were hard to come by, they were often broken into.

E. Leiss: That was a big problem even after becoming a policeman at Grove Avenue on the railroad because at that time, there was just a crossing. There was no bridge. And they had these cigarettes thieves that would cut the hose, the brake hose, on the cars and you would automatically stop the train. And they had that train stop

just about at that crossing, and they had a truck there ready, and they'd load the truck before the engineer even knew what happened.

R. Terwilliger: That was big crime.

E. Leiss: That was a big crime then. Yes, it was.

R. Terwilliger: So anyway, we'll get back to your career as a policeman. You became captain?

E. Leiss: No, we had no captains then. I went from a sergeant to a lieutenant. And then in 1965, when Chief Fouratt retired, I was appointed.

R. Terwilliger: But you're skipping a whole lot. I want to ask you about–you are a plainclothesman from what you describe then. And did you do detective work? Were there different kinds of duties being a lieutenant than it was a patrolman?

E. Leiss: Well, it was like I would say a one-man detective bureau.

R. Terwilliger: You were the one?

E. Leiss: That's right.

R. Terwilliger: And how many were on the force then at that time?

E. Leiss: Eight of us. Well, no. Wait a minute. When I was made a lieutenant in 1953, oh, they must have had maybe twenty-five of us. [recording paused]

R. Terwilliger: So we were talking, it was an eight-man force, did you say?

E. Leiss: No, we're talking about when I became a detective in 1953 or that promotion to lieutenant, my guess would be that we must have had about maybe twenty of us on a department. I'm guessing now, but I would say somewhere around there. Twenty or maybe a little less.

R. Terwilliger: And you were the only lieutenant?

E. Leiss: That's right.

R. Terwilliger: What were the others then? It was all patrolmen, one lieutenant, and the chief?

E. Leiss: That's right. The chief, lieutenant, and we had about four sergeants, I believe, and the rest were patrolmen.

R. Terwilliger: And I'm sure as you upgraded yourself. At this time, you were probably in seminars, schools you had to go to. Wasn't police work becoming more sophisticated by now that you had to be trained in certain areas?

E. Leiss: Yes. Of course, today before you could become a patrolman, it is mandatory that you have some thirteen weeks, I believe, in police sciences, police schools. And when I became a sergeant, we had then seminars that would maybe be a one-day or two-day affair, perhaps three days. And as a lieutenant, I would go in

[unclear]. I went to some schools at the State Police Headquarters in West Trenton. And the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] lectures that they would have on, I made a lot of them and I guess most of my training was received from the seminars.

R. Terwilliger: You had mentioned to me that you really did have an opportunity as a young man for the possibility of going to college, and that you kind of could not because of some pressures that you had brought upon yourself by buying a car. [laughs] I wish you'd tell us a little bit about it. But I think it is important to know that on top of the fact that you were probably young and foolish and you probably would have made a terrific college graduate and could have gone on in what you are doing anyway, maybe on a different level or somewhere else, but it was your–through your athletic abilities that you were recognized for scholarships.

E. Leiss: **I guess I can begin by saying that, at the time, I was working in the grocery store, and I was transferred to Elizabeth. They had a pretty good-sized store there. And that afternoon I received a call from a Harry Levine, who perhaps you remember had a store in Metuchen on [400] Main Street, a newspaper store. And he knew me very well and asked me what time I got through work. And I told him, "At six o'clock." And he asked me if I won't take a train from Elizabeth to New York and go into the information at the Penn Central Station information desk and that there would be Oscar Lamparter there waiting to see me.**

Now I might mention that Oscar Lamparter was a local citizen [living at 28 William Street] who was quite interested in my athletic sports and so forth. And he met me at [New York] Penn Station and he introduced me to a fellow he had with him, who was a doctor, and both of them, I believe, were graduates of Fordham University [in New York]. It was about that time when they had–the Fordham had quite a football team where they had Seven Granites of Stone[1], they called them. And he took me directly to Fordham University. I recall we passed the basketball court and Fordham was playing Rider College [Rider University in Lawrenceville] in basketball at that time. And I was introduced to the head athletic priest and I remember Lamparter saying to the priest that "this is the boy I was talking about." And I remember the athletic priest saying, "What makes you think he'll make good?" And Lamparter replied, "Well, I'll raise you a $1,000 that he will." And he hesitated for a moment and said, "Well, let me change that. I'll donate a $1,000 to the college if he doesn't make it." So he asked me a few questions about football and I gave him the best answers I could. And he asked me to send some writeups of past football games that we played, and I had a friend of mine and he turned over some to me, and I sent them to him.

After about two weeks, I was asked again by Lamparter if I wanted to go ahead with this. In the meantime, I was promoted to a manager at a grocery store in Carteret, New Jersey. I had just bought a brand-new Chevrolet Coupe that cost my mother $600, of which I had to pay back each pay day. [laughter] And I felt as though I just couldn't do it. We needed the money at home and I just couldn't see it then.

R. Terwilliger: Have you ever regretted it?

[1] The "Seven Blocks of Granite" was the nickname for the 1936 Fordham University football team's offensive line, a college football power, under head coach "Sleepy" Jim Crowley and line coach Frank Leahy.

E. Leiss: **Yes, in a sense, I do. But I often wondered where I would have been had I taken up this opportunity. I might add that the college wouldn't have cost me hardly a penny because Mr. Lamparter was going to finance the whole thing. This is what this man thought of me.**

R. Terwilliger: That's such a beautiful story, and the fact, I mean having now become a little bit acquainted with your entire life, the potential was there. That's the sad part. I mean just seeing what you have accomplished with your life and how you have handled yourself as a person. And one of the rare things is the disciplines you taught yourself that–who knows what you might have been–but of course you can always look back in that respect. But on the other hand, I'm sure as a religious person too, you believe in God's will.

E. Leiss: **I do.**

R. Terwilliger: And I think that if it were meant to happen, it would have happened. And it wasn't and you've done very well, so it was just another interesting path you could have chosen. So now we have you all the way up to lieutenant and Fouratt retires, and you are finally going to become chief. How old were you then?

E. Leiss: **I believe 55.**

R. Terwilliger: And was there any problem? Was there ever any question that they might go outside the department and look for somebody else, or were they usually raised within the ranks in this town always.

E. Leiss: **I don't think it was really any problems. There were a couple other fellows on the department that had their fingers crossed and hoped that they could get it.**

R. Terwilliger: Do politics play a part?

E. Leiss: **I think there were some politics being played. But I have to say that in this town of Metuchen, the politics didn't play the game that I could mention other municipalities surrounding us. I know definitely that politics was really trying to get others in there in place of me, but when the commissioner said, "You have been appointed chief of police and from the job that you have done so far over the others."**

R. Terwilliger: Now was this something you didn't know until the actual–I don't understand the mechanics of it. Who makes the appointment of chief of police?

E. Leiss: **Well, the mayor and council. They agree on it, on who is going to be appointed, and then the announcement is made at one of the regular meetings.**

R. Terwilliger: Let me check our machine. [recording paused]

And who was mayor when you–was that [Donald] Wernik then?

E. Leiss: **No. The mayor was–**

R. Terwilliger: [Walter] Duff.

E. Leiss: No, he just died last year. The Irishman.

R. Terwilliger: Oh, Flanagan. Flanagan, Bob Flanagan [Robert Flanagan].

E. Leiss: Bob Flanagan was mayor.

R. Terwilliger: Yeah, he was tough. You know you didn't talk that guy into anything too easy.

E. Leiss: Well, he was a smart man.

R. Terwilliger: Yeah. So you made chief of police. Did you have any reservations about being police chief? Did you feel you had been prepared enough? Because Fouratt was–my god, he was chief for so long that it was kind of big shoes to follow.

E. Leiss: Well, not really because in those days, I was next in command. When the chief went on his vacation or if he didn't come into work for some reason, I was the acting chief. This is the way the ordinance read. So I learned a lot from him, and on my own.

R. Terwilliger: Does the chief have the option to run the department as he sees it? I'm sure there are certain guidelines you have to follow, but does a new chief come in and kind of change things around?

E. Leiss: Well, it's funny. Like everything else I guess, a new broom sweeps clean. When I went in, I didn't change things too much. I believe in education through policemen because you could see it was a future thing and we did organize so that we had a regular Uniform Division and we had a Juvenile Division along with detective work, Detective Bureau.

R. Terwilliger: Were these all new under your administration?

E. Leiss: We reorganized then so that we put–and of course, there were captains made, Charles Reeder and [Joseph] Perrino were made captains. And Perrino was put in charge of the Detective Bureau at that time; Charlie Reeder was put in charge of Juveniles, more or less. And Howard Reeder, he was a lieutenant then, but he was made captain shortly after. And he was in charge of the Uniform Division. And I believe it's still that way.

R. Terwilliger: So it appears that what you organized and did was a good working thing that they stuck with.

E. Leiss: Well, we had a little–you probably remember–a little–I don't know the word to use. One of the members of the council talked with–there should be some promotions made and it didn't come to me as a chief of police that I should know about these things, and there were quite little stories in the news media over it. And then of course somebody wanted to, out of the council, have a department review with someone out of Trenton. The mayor and council asked me if I had any objections of anything like this and I said, "No, I had none." In fact, I said, "I'll be glad to cooperate with him."

R. Terwilliger: When you say review, does this mean to come in and look over your records?

E. Leiss: They come in and usually it's a former state policeman that has retired or a captain or something like that. In fact, the one that came in was a retired state police captain, I believe. And he goes through the whole department from the chief right down to the last patrolman. And then he writes up a report.

R. Terwilliger: You mean evaluating you?

E. Leiss: Evaluating the whole department. And this evaluation report is given to the mayor and council. And then they decide on what should be done. And of course, the police commissioner and I, and we got together when we decided that a reorganization would be very good because at the time when I went on, as a chief of police, I was in charge of the Uniform Division, the Detective Bureau, the whole she-bang, let's use that expression. And whenever I went on a vacation and came back, I regretted it because the desk was just full of different complaints and what not came in. Now with the reorganization, that made it a little different. We had a man that was in charge of Uniform, and he was a good man, and any uniform complaints from Uniform Division went to him. And if it got big enough, it came to the chief. And the Detective Bureau, they had their own captain and their sergeant and the patrolmen in there and the juvenile and a detective so that these things wouldn't come to the chief at the last minute. And the chief's men had to make up the budget and each year, watch out for the maintenance of the cars. It was a terrific job. It wasn't easy.

R. Terwilliger: Well, it sounds like you know in a more today sophisticated-kind-of-world that the chief is more of an administrator. You know he's the one that kind of has to be able to delegate and see that things are carried out, plus carrying his own load as the chief. I mean I don't know how they could have handled it before you did some delegation down through the system.

E. Leiss: Yes. Of course when I first went on, it wasn't that kind of a job for the chief. In fact, when I went on at the desk, I worked I guess for about fifteen months from eight o'clock at night until four in the morning at desk. And my job was taking care of all the books, the arrests, the thefts, the accidents. Everything happened in the police department. And believe me, in the course of the eight hours I put in or even less some time, I caught up with it day-by-day. Today, there's so much of it. In those days, at the end of the month, we had maybe, say, thirty arrests where today you could have over thirty or forty arrests in one day. [laughter] That's the difference. [recording paused]

R. Terwilliger: Then you can no longer describe Metuchen as the quiet little community that it used to be. I'm asking you as a policeman now, not as a tax payer. But as a police chief, this town really requires a good strong police department.

E. Leiss: Oh, there is no question about it. You have–well, I guess they still have about thirty-five men. I don't know whether they got an extra–well, maybe thirty-six including the chief. But it's needed. And people want more than one policeman sometime or more than one patrol car. You know our little town here has some two square miles or perhaps a little over. And we have–the main drive that goes

through, of course, is Route 27 (Middlesex Avenue), [coughing] and of course, the Central Avenue and Middlesex Avenue. And of course, [Route] 287 is right on our outskirts. And our big problem is traffic, as you know, especially when people are going to work or coming from work. And you have to have men there at all times, especially train traffic. Our town is motor–a commuter town. And you have to take care of that traffic when these trains pull in. And of course, another little headache that we have is the school guards. These people demand a man or a woman school guard at every little corner in the whole town. It's almost impossible. And the answer is the parents should try to teach their children to go to the crossing where there is a guard. And usually there's one pretty close by, maybe you'll have to walk an extra block or so.

R. Terwilliger: I know I've heard people comment that we overprotect our children today. This fact of having a crossing guard at every possible corner where a child might possibly cross to get to the other side of the street, that you know why don't we teach children how you cross a street? That when it's safe to cross, or I mean I don't remember people helping … [recording ends]

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 2]

R. Terwilliger: I wanted to ask you, Chief, if you ever can remember any unusual police calls? Something that was maybe a little above and beyond the normal call of duty?

E. Leiss: **Well, yes. It's really a laugh, but it was around New Year's Eve one time, and a woman called the desk and asked if we had somebody around there that could babysit. [laughter] I said, "You want a policeman?" And she said, "Yes." I don't know how serious the woman was, but we go out of our way to do things sometimes, but we don't go to the point that we have to babysit. And especially at New Year's Eve. I guess another outstanding incident that happened when the railroad, the police called and said, "Look, apparently there is an accident up at Grove Avenue, the engineer reports." And I'll never forget that night because I worked with Charlie Reeder and I sent him over there. I said, "Apparently, there's an accident there. The train engineer thinks that he hit some person."**

R. Terwilliger: This when it was a bridge?

E. Leiss: **Well before, when it was a crossing; there was no bridge there. And this was, I think, around one o'clock in the morning. So Charlie Reeder comes back, calls back, he says, "I don't see anything here." And then we called the railroad police and he said, "No, they definitely hit somebody." So off we go again. Charlie Reeder and I both went up. And in those days, we had nobody to put it to desk and we had one of our taxi owners that would answer the phone for us. And we went over and sure enough, apparently one of our local residents decided that she didn't want to live any longer and she got right out in the middle of the fence trying–**

R. Terwilliger: Is that the Loom [phonetic] girl? Was that Loom [phonetic]? I remember reading this in the paper.

E. Leiss: **Loom [phonetic]. Yes, I believe that was the name. And apparently she got right in the middle of the past track there and all we had to do was call the coroner and pick up the pieces.**

R. Terwilliger: Did that happen very often? I mean that always seems so vulnerable, that railroad station where you see people–well, we just had it happen recently here where sort of going down and around, they go over across the middle.

E. Leiss: **Well, believe it or not, I was at Main [Street] and Penn [Avenue] one day waiting for train traffic, the commuter train to come in in the evening. And it was a sleety night, very cold and sleet, the roads were slippery, and it seemed the train was never coming in. All of the sudden, I heard the train coming up and as I looked up, just as I looked up, I saw the whole front of the train seemed like a big flame, explosion-like. And it didn't make a loud report. And then the train pulled in over the Main Street bridge and I heard the noise, the eeriest noise, I couldn't imagine what happened. Well, what actually did happen, the train had struck a car at the Grove Avenue crossing. The car had practically welded itself around the front of the engine and the gasoline tank exploded when I first saw, and then when it got over the Main Street bridge, it just made a U out of the automobile. The first thought, I went to the radio, of course, and called in and asked for the fire department, number one, because it was flaming in the front and then I said, "I'm going to go down there because I think something's–." And I'll never forget as I went down Grove Avenue, very slippery, icy, and I met this young fellow walking up and I knew him. Bill Sword [phonetic], I guess his name. He lived over in the end of Grove Avenue. He says, "You looking for an accident?" I said, "Yeah." He said, "That was my car." He said, "It skidded on the crossing and I got over the railroad track and I couldn't move my car." He says, "But I jumped out."**

R. Terwilliger: Oh my gosh!

E. Leiss: **So at least there was a happy feeling, didn't have to look for some body. But that's one of those weird things that–and that isn't the only one. I've investigated accidents up there where cars were hit, and believe me, I investigated an accident there once where the car was hit with an eastbound train and I found the car and it took me a half hour to find the driver that was some 200 feet out in the field where the tennis courts [at Oakland Park] are today.**

R. Terwilliger: Wow. Now you're talking about this, when it was still a grade crossing, when there were gates there and there used to a watchman or whatever that would open the gates at certain hours. I don't know whether he was there all the time.

E. Leiss: **That's right. That's right.**

R. Terwilliger: But I think he was there during the day when the kids sometimes came.

E. Leiss: **Well, there was a time when there were no gates at all either.**

R. Terwilliger: It was just open with a cross?

E. Leiss: **That's right.**

R. Terwilliger: Was it after a few of these accidents that they decided to put the gates up?

E. Leiss: Yes, yes. But that wasn't the answer either.

R. Terwilliger: No, no. And of course, it upset a lot of people up in that area when they decided to cut under it and make a bridge because it was a very, very quiet corner of Metuchen until that time. And you open another road and you have more through traffic, but you know that's been our problem.

E. Leiss: Well, not only does the bridge stop the accident problem there, but also that theft as we spoke about before, the cigarette business. [laughter] Because there was no place for a car to get up there now and empty a car and then take off.

R. Terwilliger: Yeah. Well, that used to be quite a little "Lovers Lane" too. I remember when I was in high school that was the favorite way to walk home from the Y [Young Men's Christian Association at 65 High Street] because it was nice and dark and pretty back in there. It was nothing but a two-car dirt track at that time.

E. Leiss: You want me to tell some of the things that I saw there.

R. Terwilliger: [laughs] Yeah! Sure.

E. Leiss: Would make nice taping.

R. Terwilliger: We can't tape it though, right?

E. Leiss: I know that.

R. Terwilliger: Well, you'll have to tell me some other time. I think we're sort of coming to an end in this, although I feel I could talk to you for another whole hour. I want to finish about some of your feelings about being the chief? How many years were you chief?

E. Leiss: Oh, I think about eleven.

R. Terwilliger: Eleven, and do you feel that you did a good job? I mean that's probably a hell of a question to ask for somebody, but you know.

E. Leiss: It is hard to answer. Down deep in my heart, I think I did what I could do and the reports that I hear now from some of the fellows that I worked with are good ones. So I feel as though leaving the department still friendly with all the policemen, I must have done something that they liked.

R. Terwilliger: Did you get on well with your–?

E. Leiss: I would say yes. I had my little problems and you probably read about, the news media really built it up to even bigger than the thing was. The one was with the

one policeman[2] and I can't even tell you on the tape here because of court orders, believe it or not.

R. Terwilliger: But let me ask you, was this the black policeman you are talking about?

E. Leiss: Yes. I did everything I could to get him on because we needed one in the town. And I had to do everything I could to get rid of him. This is the way, as simple as that.

R. Terwilliger: But we do have–what's his name?–Bill McDuffie [William McDuffie Jr.] now.

E. Leiss: Yeah, there is two of them on there. Two good boys, I'll tell you right now. And I don't think Metuchen will be sorry that they ever put them on.

R. Terwilliger: Well, that wasn't so much–as I understood it, from what I've read and heard from other people, that had nothing to do with the color of his skin. It was his person. I mean it could have been the black, white, pink, or yellow.

E. Leiss: Yes. But again, I say the news media made it look like it might have been some racial tones there. And of course, he tried to make people believe that it was. But it wasn't because color meant nothing to me. It never did.

R. Terwilliger: Well, we never really had–I'm sure we've had problems and as I've told you, even interviewed some of our black people and have asked them outright how they felt they were treated as black people.

E. Leiss: I have a lot of black friends and when they came to me afterward and told me that I did the right thing, it made me very pleased because I have a lot of black friends all during my police work. I always told them when they come in on any little complaint, "This door is always open to anybody. Just come up and knock."

R. Terwilliger: They were never any more problem than white families here in town.

E. Leiss: Oh, I had more trouble with the white families than I ever did with blacks. Believe me, I did.

R. Terwilliger: I would definitely believe that knowing the black people I've known through the years growing up here.

E. Leiss: The only thing I'd like to speak, you know I wasn't pleased with when I left, and don't you think it doesn't bother me now, maybe I was born thirty-two years too soon, but you see when I went on, there was no social security. And it came on about a year afterwards. And as a public employee, we didn't not pay into social security. So naturally, when it was all over, we don't get social security. But of course, there's that Medicare business. I have to pay that every month out of my

[2] Edward Leiss is referring to John Moseley, a black policeman who was dismissed from the Metuchen Police Department by the Borough Council in 1972. Moseley sued the Borough of Metuchen and the Metuchen Police Department for discrimination based on race, contending he was wrongfully fired and that his rights were violated by "not affording him a fair hearing, by not allowing him to call all witnesses, by uttering prejudicial statements during the presentation, by rubber stamping the decision of the chief [Edward Leiss] and captain [Howard Reeder], and by failing to investigate fully charges of racial discrimination."

own pocket. You know when you pay something once you retire out of your pension money, it hurts. Insurance policy that the bureau carried, that also I have to carry the burden of that or else drop it. And it seems to me that something should be done that I think policemen should be able to pay into it because I think there's some men on there today that will not get any social security. They're going to have pay their own–

R. Terwilliger: I never realized that policemen–

E. Leiss: Well, I never realized that I paid for them. [coughing] You know I thought that the borough was going to do something about it. In fact, they did do something about it, but apparently what the borough pays is the 20 percent that the Medicare does not pay. So I have to pay the 80 percent.

R. Terwilliger: Well, that's not true of all public servants then because you know I work in the library as a public servant paid by the borough.

E. Leiss: Well, public employee then as a policeman, and maybe I should have mentioned that today. And of course, there were some others. I don't know about the Public Works Department, I'm not sure about that. They're under Civil Service anyway, I guess, and we weren't.

R. Terwilliger: Yeah, that's the difference.

E. Leiss: But this thing always bothered me.

R. Terwilliger: Do you think that the department–I mean this is interesting because you know I never even thought about this at all. Do you think that the policemen here in Metuchen for the kind of life he has to lead, and you know he never knows one morning from the next what he's going to encounter as a human being that day, and as a policeman that he is compensated in his protection and retirement, that this is worth it to him?

E. Leiss: Well, he is compensated and protected while on duty. But once you get out, I just explained where you sit, you have to pay your own freight and after putting in forty years–

R. Terwilliger: But you have a retirement plan from the police department, don't you?

E. Leiss: Oh yes, yes.

R. Terwilliger: But this is not adequate in today's world.

E. Leiss: Well, with everything going up, your pension does not go up. They've got legislation in there now where they're hoping that maybe something can be done about it. The price of everything going up, maybe the pensions can go up, but I have yet to see it. And my rent goes up and my taxes go up and everything else [unclear] anybody else, but my pension stays at the same level.

R. Terwilliger: Do you think this–you know many of the policemen have little side jobs they do. I don't know whether that's legal?

E. Leiss: **They allow it in town.**

R. Terwilliger: Yeah. But mainly, I mean I've had them working here for me. And it's not so much that they want to do it, it's they have to do it.

E. Leiss: **Well, it's the biggest budget item in a municipality. But if you want protection and you want good protection, you have to pay for it. It's as simple as that. And today, the policeman makes a lot more than–**

R. Terwilliger: Than you did. [laughs]

E. Leiss: **I started off in 1936 and my salary was $1,200 a year!**

R. Terwilliger: Wow. And what is it today? This was as a patrolman?

E. Leiss: **As a patrolman. Well, as a police clerk. Then I got a raise from $1,200 to $1,500, and then of course, at different times when we got raises. The patrolmen today, I believe, starts at somewhere around $11,000 or $12,000. That's the difference. Of course, everything else is going up the same. I've bought a 1932 Coupe and it cost $600. And today you buy the same kind of Coupe, or the present car, and you might have to pay $5,000 for it. But those little things that are things that really bothered me. I just had the feeling. I don't want to sound like the borough owes me anything, I've enjoyed every bit of it.**

R. Terwilliger: Well, you're not only speaking for yourself, I mean you're speaking for–there has to be better protection.

E. Leiss: **There are others. And there isn't that many retired, retirement, retired men that have been there. Believe or not, right now, they have one retired. That is, I'm not talking about disability, I think there is a couple of them on there with disability pensions, retirement. But one man that retired several years ago, George Breen, of course he retired in those days, I guess, at half pay. And pay then was peanuts, if I may use the word. So his pension, he couldn't depend on it.**

R. Terwilliger: You wonder how a man makes out, I mean unless you've invested something or unless you have income property or you inherited something. How do you do it?

E. Leiss: **Now, I have to add something else to that, that came to my mind. When I went to the social security office, I asked a lot of questions and I said, "I'm retired now. Suppose that I'm over sixty-five, suppose that I go out and get a job, they will withhold social security." She said, "That's right." I said, "Well, what kind of benefit–how long would I have to work before I would get Medicare or something?" "Oh," she says, "you couldn't. You're over sixty-five." I said, "Yeah, but the government would take my money and I couldn't touch it." She said, "That's right." So even if, with being blessed with pretty good health, if I did go out and find something just so that I could get Medicare without having to dig down myself each time and pay for it, each month. And you pay a little more now. Years ago, you paid–the cost was somewhere around thirty-three dollars a month back in [19]75 or [19]74. Today, I'm paying pretty close to seventy dollars a month. And I have to have it.**

R. Terwilliger: Of course, you have to have it. It's protection. I mean even though, you know I can describe you as looking like you are in extremely good health and I would never believe you if you told me you were sixty-five years old. And you know I hope it continues for you.

E. Leiss: Thank you.

R. Terwilliger: So that we can beat the system in your own way by staying in good health, both you and your wife. It's been such a pleasure, Ed. You know I really feel great about finally having gotten to you. We didn't even talk about your cabin up in the woods in the way you like to go up there by yourself once in a while. I thought that was a beautiful story. Can we just talk a few minutes more about that?

E. Leiss: Yeah, sure.

R. Terwilliger: You know being a person who especially loves the outdoors and married to a hunter, I can appreciate these kinds of things. And I've always been a person who loves the woods. But how long have you belonged to this Hunting Club? I asked George [Terwilliger, husband] and he's been in that since–

E. Leiss: Well, we originated in 1938, and just a group of friends, and we built a little log cabin up there and we've taken care of it ever since. We've made it a little bigger.

R. Terwilliger: Where's the area?

E. Leiss: It's adjoining Stokes State [Forest] property in what they call above Branchville, New Jersey. You know in one direction, it's about three or four miles from the Pennsylvania border and we're about eleven miles from Port Jervis, New York. Now, I love going there and I go there practically every week. And even in the past week with the snowstorms and everything, I went up and did my share of shoveling snow, believe or not. [chuckling] And I was there in the cabin all by myself, and believe me, there's nothing more restful both physically and mentally just in that cabin and listening to the birds, animals, and everything else all around you. And I love to hunt; I love to fish when the seasons come around.

R. Terwilliger: Were you a man then that lives by the seasons? I mean you can't be that kind of person and not forward to spring.

E. Leiss: Well, you can have your Florida as far as I'm concerned. It might be a nice place to visit, but people say, "Why don't you go to Florida? You won't have to worry about cold weather." I don't know. Cold weather doesn't bother me. I've been through, I guess, a little of everything as far as weather-wise is concerned.

R. Terwilliger: But you've hunted a lot. Does your family eat [unclear] and rabbit and pheasant?

E. Leiss: Oh, I sure do. And I cook up myself sometimes.

R. Terwilliger: I know you've told me about how this is kind of something new you started to try in the past.

E. Leiss: **Well, I've learned a lot about cooking while I was being up there when we had a regular cook that would cook for us in deer season. We'd have anywhere from fifteen to twenty, twenty-five fellows up there sometimes, hunters.**

R. Terwilliger: Now, you have some pictures in here that I can look for later of hunting.

E. Leiss: **Oh, I guess you'll find a little of everything there. When I go up there alone, instead of just sitting around looking out the windows, I prepare something to eat for myself and I prepare [unclear] that I even bring it home that saves my wife cooking for one day at least, which doesn't make her mad at all. She doesn't have to cook. And I'm still healthy with my own cooking so she [unclear]. [laughter]**

R. Terwilliger: What more can you say for it than if you look as good as you do, and feel as good as you do, you must be a pretty good cook. But I think it was just extremely wonderful of you to take time. From what seems to me, you have a busy life. [laughs]

E. Leiss: **You were going to ask me–I don't mean to intrude here.**

R. Terwilliger: Yeah, sure. If I've forgotten something, tell me.

E. Leiss: **A couple of the biggest crimes during my time there. And I should mention perhaps the two murders that we had, and one of them, which really made history, and still does for that matter, who was murdered–he was a judge. And he was murdered by one of the local residents. And the case wound up in Ripley's ["Believe It or Not!"] column and all the newspapers and magazines because when he was tried in court, he was found guilty of the murder. And the judge that was at the trial was to sentence him in a couple of weeks. It so happened in those days that the judge died in the meantime, and the law then says the only judge that can sentence the guilty person is the one that tried him. So the man was put in Trenton State Prison and he spent all of his life there. They didn't know what to do with him.**

R. Terwilliger: Oh my gracious!

E. Leiss: **And even, the story goes that when they wanted to release him, he didn't want to go to out to the outside world because he'd been away from it so long.**

R. Terwilliger: Now who was murdered?

E. Leiss: **I think it was Mr. [Samuel] Prickitt. Judge Prickitt. I don't remember the first name.**

R. Terwilliger: And we tried to remember who the guy was locally the last time. Did you ever remember what his name was?

E. Leiss: **I keep thinking of a Hunter[3], but I don't think it was a Hunter.**

[3] Samuel Prickitt was a well-known minister at the Centenary Methodist Church and a municipal judge, who was famously murdered by Archibald Herron after Samuel Prickitt sentenced him to ten days in jail for disorderly conduct. According to Prickitt's granddaughter, Dolly Buchanan, "The case was of interest to legal minds because of the fact that Archie Herron, a convicted murderer, died of old age in the Death House of Trenton because at that

R. Terwilliger: It doesn't matter, but it was one of those–this man ended up with life imprisonment because the sentencing judge died in the interim, and there was nothing in the books about what you do about this. It has to be by the trial judge.

E. Leiss: Right. They've changed that.

R. Terwilliger: I'm sure so.

E. Leiss: And the other, of course there was another murder, who was one of the McGuinnesses, which was a well-known family in this town, who was a tavern owner. And at that time, it was known as the Ratskeller and it was where the present bakery is at [419] Main and New Streets. After he [William McGuinness] closed his place of business at one o'clock in the evening and he went across the street where there was a little Greek restaurant, had some coffee, and then from there, he went next door where he lived, and he was shot at by some unknown person and his body wound up on Main Street. And that murder was never solved. And I had thought and hoped that someday it would be solved, but apparently it hasn't been.

R. Terwilliger: And I think they talked a little bit too about–I asked you about what influence Camp Kilmer had on the borough when they were–they were all that–that was that camp of embarkation, is that what they call it, when they were shipped out and came back through there? And you know I can remember even as a young girl that–

E. Leiss: Well, we did mention then that the train loads that used to go right up that Reading Railroad. It seemed so strange, especially when I lived most of my life, a good part of my life, alongside that railroad and seeing nothing but coal cars go by. And seeing all these troops going, and we used to stand on the side and they'd wave at us. We'd clap our hands and everything. And we didn't have too much trouble with them as I mentioned in the interview because I don't think we had anything for the boys in our town. Our taverns closed at one o'clock. Most of the drinking fellows that liked to drink in that outfit would be in Edison. New Brunswick, I think, had a few headaches with them. Edison had some. But thank God we didn't have too much of it in our little town.

R. Terwilliger: No. You know other than seeing them wait for a bus occasionally, I don't think even they were allowed in the YMCA. They would come up to the Y where you know you had socials on Saturday night. But as far as ever seeing inside the building, unless I guess they were with someone or a friend of someone, they weren't allowed in. But I wondered as a policeman at the time if you know that posed any kind of a threat to the borough?

E. Leiss: You know we looked for it because we had a feeling just judging from what some of the incidents that happened in surrounding towns. But we were very fortunate I think that the–as far as Camp Kilmer is concerned.

R. Terwilliger: I think we're going to wind it up. I wanted to ask you one last thing that now that you have retired and you seem to have yourself in order, is there anything else you want to

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time, the law required that a judge who sentenced a man had to set the date of his execution and the debtors died in the interim."

accomplish? I don't mean to make this sound so final, but what are your plans for the next twenty years?

E. Leiss: **Well, I really didn't make plans. I only ask the Good Lord to keep my health. I think that is very important in retirement as I think if I was stricken now with some kind of sickness and I had to lay in bed, that would be very close to my end. But the fact that I can get around and keep active and I still play golf–I don't belong to the country club anymore as I had a few years back, but I still play golf along with my fishing and hunting.**

R. Terwilliger: Your place up in the country? Do you have grandchildren by the way?

E. Leiss: **Yes, I have two grandchildren, two boys. I have the one daughter [Judith Ann (Leiss) Kochy].**

R. Terwilliger: Do you spend much time with the grandchildren?

E. Leiss: **Well, I suppose. I could say that I should maybe spend a little more time, but I have taken them up into the woods to do a little fishing sometimes.**

R. Terwilliger: What are their ages now?

E. Leiss: **I believe one is about thirteen and the other must be about twelve.**

R. Terwilliger: So they're really just coming of age where this could be–you know they could be real companions to you.

E. Leiss: **Maybe someday they'll listen to this tape.**

R. Terwilliger: Yeah.

E. Leiss: **So I better not lie about anything. [laughter]**

R. Terwilliger: No, I don't think you have. And thanks again, good luck, good health to you. You're a good man.

E. Leiss: **Oh, you are certainly welcome. Thank you, thank you.**

[END OF INTERVIEW]