

**Middletown Historical Society**

**Middletown, Delaware**

**Oral History Series**

**Speaking of the Past: Conversations**

**With Long-Term Residents of**

**Middletown, Delaware, 1900 – Present**

**Interview with Brenda Shivery**

**February 9, 2026**

MIDDLETOWN HISTORICAL SOCIETY ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

BRENDA SHIVERY – YOUTUBE- 02092026

Interviewer: Pat Maichle

**Pat:** Good morning. How are you?

**Brenda:** Good morning.

**Pat:** I'm Pat Maichle. I'm a volunteer with the Middletown Historical Society and I'm here with Keith Schneider who is our videographer. And uh what we're uh attempting to do here is to produce a series of videos of long-term residents in Middletown to talk about the history of Middletown and how it has changed over time. So, I'm here with Brenda Shivery who is a uh resident of Middletown. Can you uh tell me when you moved here or if you're a lifelong resident and what is your birthday at least the year?

**Brenda:** My family moved here in 1957 and I was born in 1945.

**Pat:** Okay. How did your family come to live here? Why did they move here?

**Brenda:** My father um my father's work.

**Pat:** What did he do?

**Brenda:** He was an accountant and he actually moved to Middletown and went to work for Hall Buick on uh West Main Street.

**Pat:** And was he always an accountant? Is that what he did his whole life?

**Brenda:** Yes.

**Pat:** Okay. Yes. And where uh are do you have other family members in the area or was it just your immediate family?

**Brenda:** My five siblings have all moved away.

**Pat:** Why?

**Brenda:** California, Idaho, and Pennsylvania.

**Pat:** Why is that?

**Brenda:** Uh job transfers, better opportunities.

**Pat:** But you stayed here.

**Brenda:** Yes, I did.

**Pat:** Uh your original house that you lived in, can you describe it for me? So, for example, does it have was it a two-story? Was it a ranch house? Did it have electricity, running water?

**Brenda:** Well, it was built in 1955 and yes, it had running water, a sewer hookup, and uh over the years I have remodeled a lot of it. It's kind of a Cape Cod style. Um many small rooms. It's a lot to take care of.

**Pat:** So, you're still living in the original house?

**Brenda:** Yes, I am.

**Pat:** Oh, wow. Um what is your earliest childhood memory? good or bad.

**Brenda:** In Middletown. I think moving here because we had lived in California um seven years prior to that and of course in Delaware the weather is a lot different. the humidity. We're in California. It's a dry heat. And um I eventually did get used to it, but was very sad and homesick when we moved here. But we had snow. We didn't have snow where we lived in California.

**Pat:** So, you were happy with that?

**Brenda:** Yes.

**Pat:** Did you Did you get used to going out and playing in the snow?

**Brenda:** And Oh, yes. We had a we got a sled for our first Christmas on the East Coast.

**Pat:** That was a big deal. What kind of games did you play when you were growing up?

**Brenda:** Oh, hopscotch, jacks, pickup sticks, Chinese marbles, checkers. We didn't have a TV until 1954. So, we played a lot of games and listened to radio.

**Pat:** Did you play outside?

**Brenda:** Oh, yes. Yes.

**Pat:** What kind of things did you do?

**Brenda:** We played hide and go seek and just explored. Mostly hide and go seek. I can't remember any other outside games. Sometimes I have delayed thinking.

**Pat:** You can throw it in later if you want to. What was your favorite thing to do for fun? For example, movies, go to the beach, go swimming in town or

**Brenda:** Oh, go to the beach. Go to the beach. It was gorgeous here. Where we lived in California, we couldn't even go on the water. It was so cold because we were in central California. I love the beach.

**Pat:** Did you go like every summer or did you go all year round?

**Brenda:** Uh, just whenever we could. Just whenever we could. We eventually uh my dad uh bought a place down uh near Lewes and we would go down every weekend and uh my dad and would and the my brothers would go fishing and it was great. I would take the my sisters to the beach. We had a great time.

**Pat:** What's What was school like for you as a child? What were your best and worst subjects?

**Brenda:** Well, I began school in Middletown in seventh grade and I took an academic course for two years in Latin. I had that for two years, English lit. Then I changed my major to business and uh shorthand and typing. Short hand and typing and of course algebra, trigonometry. Yes. I I I like those. It enabled me to have a career as an accountant.

**Pat:** You were good with numbers.

**Brenda:** 54 years.

**Pat:** You were an accountant for 54 years.

**Brenda:** Yes.

**Pat:** What um schools did you attend? Where did you go to high school? Did you go to college?

**Brenda:** Uh Middletown High School, class of 62. and related to my uh career choice with accounting. I probably had enough for a college degree because we were required to have 80 credits per year to maintain a permit to practice. So there were very a lot of classes, a lot at the University of Delaware through the Maryland Society of Accountants, the Delaware Society of Accountants and so forth.

**Pat:** Do you remember any fads from your youth? Popular hairstyles, clothes.

**Brenda:** uh, petty coats, black and white Oxford shoes. Yeah.

**Pat:** How'd you wear your hair?

**Brenda:** H,it was it was it wasn't really long and it wasn't really short. It was just like a medium length, that's all. But the petticoats, you know, that were made this and the full skirts. Yeah.

**Pat:** Did you go to dances on occasion? Wearing your skirt on occasion.

**Brenda:** Of course, at Middletown High School, they would uh be able to dance maybe at lunchtime or lunch break. And I'd I'd watch all the juniors and seniors do the jitterbug. And it was it was really Yes. I wish the children today could have experienced it.

**Pat:** That's neat. What were your favorite songs and music?

**Brenda:** Elvis Presley. Who else? I saw the very first Ed Sullivan show when he his first show. Yeah, Elvis Presley.

**Pat:** Did you dance like he did?

**Brenda:** Tried to. My sister and I, we tried American Band Stand. Oh, that was we were faithful watchers of American Band Stand every day when we came home from school.

**Pat:** Did you ever know anybody who went on the show?

**Brenda:** No. No. But we picked up favorite people that we followed.

**Pat:** Did you have any pets?

**Brenda:** No. No pets. I I h since the last few years I have, but not then.

**Pat:** What do you have now?

**Brenda:** I uh oh three years ago I had two Yorkies. I lost them both and now I currently have a Yorkie which I rescued a year ago and her name is Sugar.

**Pat:** What was your religion growing up when what church did you attend?

**Brenda:** In California It was a Protestant church. In fact, um, every Wednesday at a certain time, we we walked from the elementary school to the church and the entire student body was there. And then in Middletown, I went to Bethesda Methodist Church and I'm still a member.

**Pat:** That's where is that located?

**Brenda:** On East Main Street.

**Pat:** Were you ever mentioned in the newspaper or any other publication?

**Brenda:** Yes.

**Pat:** For what? What reason?

**Brenda:** Now I'm thinking I was an officer in the Newcastle County uh Ladies Auxiliary Fire Service. I believe when I was elected treasurer, they had my name in the paper. I've had my picture in the paper but not my name because as a volunteer EMT for five years with volunteer hose.

**Pat:** How long were you uh did you say you were a paramedic in the

**Brenda:** No, an EMT.

**Pat:** EMT. How long did you do that?

**Brenda:** Five years.

**Pat:** Five years. Mhm. What world events had the most impact on you while you were growing up? Did any of them personally affect your family?

**Brenda:** No. But 9/11, I think, was the worst. 9/11.

**Pat:** Did you know anybody up there?

**Brenda:** No, but my um son and daughter-in-law's friend was working in a building next to it. That's where her office was. She worked for a big CPA firm and but she didn't happen to go to work that day.

**Pat:** This was in New York, not the one in

**Brenda:** New York City.

**Pat:** Wow.

**Brenda:** Yes.

**Pat:** But she probably knew others who were there in those buildings.

**Brenda:** Yes. Yes.

**Pat:** Did you watch, excuse me, did you watch on TV that day?

**Brenda:** I had it on live. I saw it on live. My mother was alive at the time living in New York State College, Pennsylvania. And I called her and she was watching it too and it really really affected my mother. Yes. To see something like that happen. Yes.

**Pat:** How are holidays and birthdays, Christmas celebrated in your family? Do you have special traditions?

**Brenda:** Uh well uh surprise parties. Oh yes. We go out to dinner. We have parties. We definitely celebrate all of that. Birthdays and holidays. Yes.

**Pat:** What do you do as a family? What do you do for Christmas, for example?

**Brenda:** Well, uh um my daughter-in-law usually will cook a Christmas dinner and we exchange gifts at that time and um we just enjoy one another's company as a family.

**Pat:** That did you do that as children as well?

**Brenda:** Yes. Yes. Yes.

**Pat:** How is Middletown today different from when it was when you were a child? How has the community changed?

**Brenda:** Probably 25,000 more people. I do like the change because it's made everything convenient for me at at the age I am now. And I think mayor and council have really done a good job in controlling what has been happened in Middletown because if they hadn't uh annexed all of the properties uh New Castle County would have and the type of buildings would have been a lot different. It wouldn't have been very attractive. So, I I I approve. I'm I'm I'm glad to see it. It's difficult to get out there to run errands with the traffic, but you just use the right timing and just have patience and it works.

**Pat:** So, you're able to go to all the stores around that you need.

**Brenda:** Oh, yes. Oh, yes. I do patronize a lot of a lot of the restaurants. Yes.

**Pat:** What do you know about your family surname, your last name? Do you know the history of all of that?

**Brenda:** my married name or my maiden name?

**Pat:** Your maiden name.

**Brenda:** My maiden name of Bowlinger. Uh, yes, I do. Um, we're from Ireland and Switzerland. From Switzerland to Ireland and then to the United States many, many years ago. My grandmother's my great-grandfather five generations back by the name of Thomas White that's on my grandmother's side of the family was from Kilkenny Ireland and he landed in Boston and he actually uh organized the Boston Tea Party.

**Pat:** Wow.

**Brenda:** They have a plaque near the harbor honoring him for what he had done. And he married um I believe his wife at the time was 15. And they proceeded to have 22 children. So I have many many cousins distant that I I don't even know

who they are. But he's uh buried in a special cemetery in Huntington County, Pennsylvania. And they honor him a lot. Our family honors him a lot.

**Pat:** Have you been up to Massachusetts to Boston to see the plaque?

**Brenda:** Yes, I have.

**Pat:** That's exciting.

**Brenda:** Yes, I have. I was so excited. I didn't know it was there. I didn't know it was there.

**Pat:** So, have you um thought about joining the DAR or does that

**Brenda:** No, I believe I was asked to do that at one time and it just wasn't a convenient time. But since then, I've done a lot of volunteering, you know, throughout town and doing some uh free accounting work for certain organizations and No, No. And now I'm just too busy.

**Pat:** Well, that's good. That's exciting. Is there a naming tradition in your family such as always giving the firstborn son the name of the paternal uh father or grandfather?

**Brenda:** Um well my son's uh father is uh John Clarence Shivery. So, we named our son John Michael Shivery. And um it my ex-husband's uh father was named Clarence Earl. So they he went by the C Earl. So, Michael is J. Michael. So, we we did follow that tradition.

**Pat:** Okay. Considering that we are celebrating the 250th anniversary of our country this year, you kind of answered this already. What stories have come down to you about your parents, grandparents, more distant relatives, ancestors? concerning the beginning of our country

**Brenda:** Pretty much my uh four times back great-grandfather Thomas White. and he came directly from Ireland Kilkenny Ireland

**Pat:** And he came directly from Ireland, Kilkenny, Ireland. Yes, that's exciting. Are there any stories about famous or infamous relatives in your family besides that one?

**Brenda:** No, not really. No.

**Pat:** You've been famous around Middletown at least.

**Brenda:** Oh, I had many, many clients, great clients in the Middletown area.

**Pat:** And you volunteered?

**Brenda:** Yes, I did volunteer a lot. I did.

**Pat:** And what about um uh what your family did, what your parents did here in town in Middletown?

**Brenda:** Well, my father uh worked as a bookkeeper for Hall Buick and they moved to Smyrna and he went down there and eventually got a job with the state of Delaware and he was manager of the Department of Revenue in Wilmington u when he retired.

**Pat:** And did your mom work outside the home or she?

**Brenda:** She actually did waitress work at the Hearth in Odessa.

**Pat:** That's famous.

**Brenda:** Yes. It's now called the Odessa Diner.

**Pat:** Yes. Are there any special heirlooms, photos, bibles, or other memorabilia that have been passed down in your family?

**Brenda:** Yes. From the Shivery family, there are some few pieces of furniture, but I've given those to my stepdaughter, Sandy Shivery Archer. And uh pictures. Yes, I have a lot of pictures on my side of the family. Yes, because we have such a huge family.

**Pat:** How about those dishes you have?

**Brenda:** Oh, I do have um the Middletown bicentennial plates which was uh I think they that was celebrated in 1961. And I do have six of those bicentennial plates, which I don't think I could ever part with.

**Pat:** Sooner or later, you will need to.

**Brenda:** I know. I know.

**Pat:** As time goes on. Yes. Do you have plans for who you're going to leave those to?

**Brenda:** No, not really. I'm just hoping my children um don't auction things like that off that they will take it. They will take it. I believe Sandy would be the one to take the bicentennial plates. My other two granddaughter, my other three granddaughters actually, one lives in South Carolina, one in Philadelphia, and one in uh Hockessin, aren't interested in any collectible antique or anything like that. So, probably Sandy.

**Pat:** What was the full name of your spouse, siblings, parents?

**Brenda:** That would be Clarence Earl and Gladys Shivery. What's Miss Gladys' middle name? Is that something I've forgotten her middle name. Oh, I'll repeat that. Clarence Earl Shivery and Gladys Carrie Shivery.

**Pat:** And do you have any siblings that you What are their names?

**Brenda:** I have siblings. Yes.

**Pat:** What are their names?

**Brenda:** Um my sister Fay, my brother Denny, my brother Tom, my sister Len who is deceased, and my sister Beth.

**Pat:** When and how did you meet your spouse and what did you do on dates?

**Brenda:** I actually lived two doors away from him and uh he he uh contacted me and asked me to go out three times and I declined. The fourth time I accepted and we actually uh went to his class reunion. Uh he graduated in uh 1957 and we went to his class reunion. We'd go around for rides because he had a had his daughter and uh got steak sandwiches from Jackie and Sarah's pool hall.

**Pat:** And then you got married.

**Brenda:** Went to football games. Middletown football games of course. And then we got married.

**Pat:** Was that a big deal for you? I mean, did you have a big celebration? Did your family come?

**Brenda:** It was very small. It was very small. My family was there. Yes, it was very small.

**Pat:** How long were you married?

**Brenda:** 20 years.

**Pat:** And he's passed away?

**Brenda:** No, he lives in Fort Myers, Florida.

**Pat:** Okay. Fort Myers. Okay. How would you how would you describe your spouse? What did uh you admire most about him?

**Brenda:** He was dedicated to his job.

**Pat:** What did he do?

**Brenda:** He was a bank manager. Okay. For Wilmington Trust. Very friendly. A lot of people knew him. In fact, everyone knew him. And he liked to laugh a lot.

**Pat:** That's a good attribute. What did your family enjoy doing together?

**Brenda:** Going to the beach every weekend

**Pat:** Even when you were grown.

**Brenda:** Yes. Well, my father was adventuresome. Even in California on weekends, we would either go up to Napa, we would go to Yosemite, uh we would go to Monterey. We were always doing something. We camped one time up in Yosemite and uh they had a flatbed trailer. My sister and I slept in the car and my mom and dad slept on the back of the flatbed trailer right next to this rolling creek. Very rough and we could see that famous mountain in the background. That's but there was only dirt roads then. There were no super highways or anything and I remember all of that.

**Pat:** That's a good childhood.

**Brenda:** Yes. Yeah. My dad was an accountant.

**Pat:** Let me make sure I got everything. What was your profession and how did you choose it? Oh, yeah. You mentioned a little bit about this.

**Brenda:** Well, my father uh work worked at an as an accountant then then he got involved in doing income tax work and when I was 14 I began to help him. I could only they had the cards way back then and I could only put the names on the cards. So it took me two years before he let me do a actual return. And once I started, I didn't stop for 54 years.

**Pat:** And did you have

**Brenda:** And I loved it.

**Pat:** Did you have your own business?

**Brenda:** Yes. When he retired and left Delaware, he just left everything to me. And most and all of those clients actually contacted me and my and my practice built and built and built over the years with by word of mouth.

**Pat:** And besides your business, you also um did taxes accounting for other organiza for organizations in the town.

**Brenda:** Yes.

**Pat:** Like what? Which organizations?

**Brenda:** Well, the Historical Society and required tax returns I did for the uh Little League baseball, the MOT soccer club um and many organizations. I did apply and get 501c3 status for them which was a very helpful tax move so they would not have to pay income tax. And there were certain fire companies that I did work for Townsend in Delaware City, Odessa.

**Pat:** What accomplishments were you most proud?

**Brenda:** Raising my two sons.

**Pat:** Where do they uh live at now? Your two sons?

**Brenda:** My son Greg lives in Hockessin with his daughter and he's uh graduated from St. Andrews School and Syracuse University and he um is an athletic director at Newark Charter High School. And my son Michael lives in Union, South Carolina. And he worked for Walmart for many, many years as a trucking coordinator and he's now disabled. And he is 55 and he lives in Union, South Carolina and he has a beautiful daughter and two beautiful grandchildren.

**Pat:** How has the recent development in Middletown affected the area?

**Brenda:** Well, we have less farmland and uh some of those farmers were my clients, so I'm very aware of what they did and they certainly made a lot more money selling the property than tilling it. And I really can't blame them. I know we've lost a lot of our beautiful, beautiful uh geographic areas, but I can understand why they did it.

**Pat:** Is there anything else besides the farming, which is a big deal, but, the businesses that you

**Brenda:** The number of schools that have increased in our district is just totally unbelievable. Unbelievable.

**Pat:** Talk about that a little more.

**Brenda:** Well, I actually took in a nephew from California at the age of 15. He's now 32 and he was able to be in the first uh class at Appoquinimink High School, which was state-of-the-art. I was in there many times on his behalf. He graduated from there, went on and joined the Marines, and then he went to the University of Delaware and got a degree in criminal justice. He is one of my other favorite things that I've accomplished and he's a great guy. He really is. But the schools, it's just unbelievable the number of schools that we have here now.

**Pat:** How many were there, excuse me, when you went to school here?

**Brenda:** There were 69 in my graduating class and we were the first class to graduate from the Ellis K. Lacrone gymnasium and of course he was our principal then and then we had Miss Mary Money was the school secretary and that's all there was. That was all the admin staff. There was just the two of them.

**Pat:** And that was at Middletown High School.

**Brenda:** Middletown, the original Middletown High School where the Reading Middle School now stands or, excuse me, the middle the middle school on on South Broad Street.

**Pat:** And I can't even count how many schools there are now. I don't even know how many schools.

**Brenda:** The last I read, there were 21. and they're hoping to uh build another high school across from Summit Aviation, but that's on hold now because the state of Delaware has put a freeze on building any further new schools.

**Pat:** What do you want people to know the most about yourself, your family, your business?

**Brenda:** M. Well I'm very happy and I'm very happy that my children were raised in Middletown and the many friends that they have made and keep in touch with and just the family unity. I know my boys used to play ball in the middle of the street. Now it's completely impossible. And I'm I'm really really thankful that they were able to uh realize some normalcy back when the population in Middletown was smaller.

**Pat:** What do you want people to know the most about Middletown's past?

**Brenda:** It was a great place to raise a family. And don't take me wrong, but it still is. But it's at a different level, a completely different level because back then we had less schools. My sons, you know, we we knew everyone. Now you go in a grocery store, you're lucky to see someone that you know. So, uh, I might be talking out of both sides of my mouth, but it was good then and I still believe it's good.

**Pat:** Is there anything else you want to tell us at this point about your experience in Middletown growing up or being married or working or

**Brenda:** No, I I I I loved doing what I did for 54 years. I sold my practice and I I love my work. I love my clients. They were all wonderful and very challenging. Very,

very challenging because I could draw a mess like a magnet and it was such a challenge to get it all sorted out.

**Pat:** And you worked right from your home, correct?

**Brenda:** Yes, I did. I had two offices in my home. I had employees to handle the phone and so forth. Yes. I don't think my neighbors appreciated all the traffic coming and going, but I did eventually retire at 69.

**Pat:** Well, that's all the questions I have, unless you have something else you want us to tell us.

**Brenda:** No, I and I grateful that you're doing this and I hope that uh my answers to your questions will will help.

**Pat:** Oh, they do. Thank you very much. All right.