**Kate:** Good afternoon. This is Kate Moore for the National Park Service. Today is the 5th of December 1993 and I’m in Coldwater, Michigan, at the home of Charles Fischer speaking with Elizabeth Fischer White who came from the Netherlands in 1912 at the age of eight years old. Why don’t you begin by giving us your full name and date of birth please?

**Elizabeth:** My full name is Elizabeth Fischer White and I was born March 20th 1904.

**Kate:** How was your name spelt in Netherlands before you came here?

**Elizabeth:** You mean Elizabeth?

**Kate:** No, Fischer.

**Elizabeth:** V-I-S-S-E-R and when we arrived here somebody changed our names to… Elizabeth is a Dutch name as well American name. I didn’t have to change while the rest of the family have more or less changed names.

**Kate:** Your name is now spelt F-I-S-C-H-E-R?

**Elizabeth:** Yes.

**Kate:** Talk a little bit about the town that you were born in; what you remember. What’s the name of it again?

**Elizabeth:** A-R-U-M, Arum.

**Kate:** What size town was that?

**Elizabeth:** Very small; I don’t remember anything.

**Kate:** Do you remember anything about the town at all before you came here?

**Elizabeth:** No.

**Kate:** What was your father’s name?

**Elizabeth:** Robert Fischer.

**Kate:** What did he do for a living?

**Elizabeth:** Farming in Arum as well as after we came to this country.

**Kate:** What did he look like? Can you describe what he looked like?

**Elizabeth:** Charlie looks like dad more or less.

**Kate:** How would you say he looked?

**Elizabeth:** Just an average person.

**Kate:** Was he a tall man?

**Elizabeth:** No, medium. My dad was not too tall.

**Kate:** What was his personality like? His temperament?

**Elizabeth:** I don’t know. I really don’t remember my dad. There were so many of us kids and we girls figured our dad kind of always favored the boys. They think they come first.

**Kate:** Were you particularly close to your father?

**Elizabeth:** No, not exactly.

**Kate:** Do you remember any stories associated with your father that you used to tell about your dad?

**Elizabeth:** No.

**Kate:** What about your mom’s name?

**Elizabeth:** Bertha and her dad’s name, Batja.

**Kate:** How do you spell that?

**Elizabeth:** B-A-T-J-A. Andela is her maiden name.

**Kate:** How do you spell that?

**Elizabeth:** A-N-D-E-L-A.

**Kate:** What did she do for a living?

**Elizabeth:** Sorting children.

**Kate:** What did she look like? How would you describe her?

**Elizabeth:** About my size and I think I look like her.

**Kate:** Blue eyes?

**Elizabeth:** I don’t know. I never paid much attention to eyes; no say.

**Kate:** What about her personality and temperament? Do you remember her?

**Elizabeth:** Yes. Mom was intrepid of what she could be. She could also lose her temper.

**Kate:** What type of person was she in terms of her values? If you were to characterize your mother, how would you do it?

**Elizabeth:** I’d just say she was just mom. We were home and she took care of us.

**Kate:** What did she do for her chores around the house? What was her role? Did she do the housework as well?

**Elizabeth:** Yes. I had several older sisters and they always were ready to help mom do what we could.

**Kate:** Did you have hired help at all?

**Elizabeth:** In the house [unclear 00:05:05]. One thing about us as soon as the girls are 16 years old they get a job.

**Kate:** At 16 you go out to work?

**Elizabeth:** Yes. I had to go to school at 16.

**Kate:** And go to work?

**Elizabeth:** And go to work.

**Kate:** When you worked did you also go home and work and help with the chores?

**Elizabeth:** Yes. We were going home in between times and we were keeping house having those kind of jobs for other people in town.

**Kate:** That was after you came to this country?

**Elizabeth:** Yes.

**Kate:** Do you remember much about before you came to this country at all when you were still small?

**Elizabeth:** No, except that we arrived in New York and my oldest brother came by himself two or three years before. He had a house ready for the family when we came. My older sister stayed in Holland. She was going to be married and she wouldn’t leave but 12 of us came with mom and dad.

**Kate:** Name all your brothers and sisters. I know this is a big chore because you had a lot of them but do you names of all your brothers and sisters?

**Elizabeth:** Yes. Garret he was the oldest one and he was 16 or 17 when he left Holland all by himself and made a trip over here but I had an Uncle John here. Garret, Glendon... I don’t know where he was in his first couple of years but he was in Indianapolis when we came. There was another Dutch farmer there, Van Dikes, and he’s working on the farms. He had been out west as a cowboy. He stayed for a year or two.

**Kate:** He was your oldest brother?

**Elizabeth:** He was the oldest one.

**Kate:** Who was next?

**Elizabeth:** Except my sister Joel, she stayed there. Then Irene; she’s the one in a nursing home here. She married a Van Dike. Then Jenny; I can’t remember [unclear 00:07:53] come before or after Jenny. Jenny and then Adel, John, Alice, Francis, me, Sadie, Robert, Leo and Charles.

One baby was born in Nappanee, Indiana; that’s all, in August I believe. We had moved to Nappanee, Indiana and the baby was born and died in December.

**Kate:** Do you remember your house that you used to live in in Holland before you came? Do you remember anything about where you lived before you came here?

**Elizabeth:** Nice house; it was a new house.

**Kate:** In Holland?

**Elizabeth:** Yes.

**Kate:** What kind of house was it like? How big?

**Elizabeth:** Like I said I don’t remember but it was small.

**Kate:** You had a lot of people in it?

**Elizabeth:** Yes. The beds are made in a wall. There was a couple of them. Two kids sleep in each one of them.

**Kate:** It was a brick house?

**Elizabeth:** I believe new houses as they were called. That was at my time. [unclear 00:09:27] was a first part of their life I guess, but they were called new houses and that’s where we were living, so they tell me; I really don’t remember.

**Kate:** Do you remember any of the furniture in the house at all? Do you remember the houses in or out of town?

**Elizabeth:** No; Just a small town and a canal right there, white horse to stand behind.

**Kate:** Did you have animals?

**Elizabeth:** I don’t think so.

**Kate:** Who else lived in the building?

**Elizabeth:** I wouldn’t know.

**Kate:** Just your family? One family house?

**Elizabeth:** I think it was two. We had a front section and somebody else on the back. Irene could tell you a lot more if she remembers; she’s 99. She’s got a very sharp memory. In fact she’s the only one in the family that does know anything about Holland.

**Kate:** Who did the cooking in the family then?

**Elizabeth:** Mom did except when Jenny got old enough instead of getting a job she stayed home to help mom.

**Kate:** What was mealtime like? Do you remember what it was like in Holland? Do you remember any meals eating with the kids in Holland?

**Elizabeth:** Yes. We all ate together and I was in a hurry ready to eat.

**Kate:** When you were in Holland were other family members nearby? Your grandparents or any cousins?

**Elizabeth:** Yes. They say that I had two grandmothers but I don’t know. I don’t remember them but the older kids used to say they’d walk by grandma’s house going to school.

**Kate:** This is the house near the canal where you lived, right?

**Elizabeth:** Yes.

**Kate:** What were your grandparents’ names? Do you remember?

**Elizabeth:** No. I don’t remember the grandmothers even. I don’t think the grandfathers were alive even when I was a child.

**Kate:** Who were you closest to in the family? Was there someone special you were close to?

**Elizabeth:** My sister just older than me, Francis, and Sadie; just younger. The three of us were close and we stay that way even growing up.

**Kate:** Do you remember any stories before you left Holland? Anything that stays in your mind that you remember when you were children with your sisters?

**Elizabeth:** No.

**Kate:** You must remember stuff after that?

**Elizabeth:** Yes. After we were still school and we all had jobs in a town near Coldwater keeping house for people. I lived in east of town and Sadie had work for the same family in another direction. After we had our job done in the house we usually walked over to the farm where the folks live just to get out and do something. We walk on and back again, separate and go fix dinners for our working families.

**Kate:** Did you have a religious life when you were a child in Holland? Was there any church building?

**Elizabeth:** No. We did go to church Sunday School after we moved to Nappanee.

**Kate:** What about holiday celebrations in Holland? Do you remember Christmas ever or any special holidays?

**Elizabeth:** No, I don’t.

**Kate:** Do you remember ever going to school in Holland?

**Elizabeth:** No. Here I must have gone because I was in the third grade. I know they say we start when you’re four years old there.

**Kate:** Do you remember getting ready to come to the United States?

**Elizabeth:** I don’t.

**Kate:** Anything at that time you don’t remember?

**Elizabeth:** No.

**Kate:** You said you came to the States because your older brother had been here?

**Elizabeth:** Yes.

**Kate:** Did he send money for you all to come?

**Elizabeth:** He sent folks some money after they had borrowed the money from some doctor.

**Kate:** After where, in Holland?

**Elizabeth:** In Holland. All the children had to pay back what it cost us to come; us younger ones I think $25 for the boat trip. Soon as we got a job we had to pay him that $25 before he let us spent it any other way.

**Kate:** So you stayed in debt to this doctor until you all grew up?

**Elizabeth:** No. Dad had some money back that he figured that he had paid for us and he wanted us to pay him for our part of it.

**Kate:** Do you remember wanting to come to America when you were little? Do you remember packing things or any preparations?

**Elizabeth:** No.

**Kate:** Do you remember what your mom and dad said about coming to the United States? Do you remember the voyage?

**Elizabeth:** No. I was at it but I don’t.

**Kate:** Do you remember the Statue of Liberty seeing that?

**Elizabeth:** No.

**Kate:** What did you know, what did your family tell you about the boat trip? Did anybody tell you any stories about it?

**Elizabeth:** Most of the family were sea sick off and on. My sister Alice was quite ill just before we got to this country. The doctor told her if she stayed sick like that she’d have to go back to Holland. They wouldn’t allow her to land. Alice just like that the next day she wasn’t sick anymore.

**Kate:** Did they tell you anything else about you on the boat?

**Elizabeth:** No.

**Kate:** You came all together though, right?

**Elizabeth:** Yes.

**Kate:** Do you remember anything about Ellis Island at all? Coming into the port?

**Elizabeth:** No.

**Kate:** What’s your first memory in the States then?

**Elizabeth:** Being in Indiana. Running up the hill and then rolling down. That’s the only thing I remember; Martinsville, Indiana.

**Kate:** That was the first year you were here?

**Elizabeth:** Yes. That was our first summer here, not here in Michigan.

**Kate:** The first time you were in United States was there and you remember running up the hill and rolling down?

**Elizabeth:** Yes.

**Kate:** Do you remember anything else after that?

**Elizabeth:** No.

**Kate:** What did they tell you about that time? What did your family talk about that time very much?

**Elizabeth:** There might have but being kids we didn’t pay any attention. Like I said we met the Van Dikes there and they had children my age.

**Kate:** How long did you stay in Indiana?

**Elizabeth:** Just until August; we arrived there in April and in August my dad and Mr. Van Dike had been promised farms in Nappanee, Indiana. When we got there the man backed out and sold. They told me in later years. Dad got a job in a creamery for a while.

**Kate:** In Indiana?

**Elizabeth:** In Nappanee.

**Kate:** When you were there you lived there for how long in Indiana?

**Elizabeth:** I don’t know if it was a year or two. We moved from Nappanee to Milford and we moved on to a farm there. Garret was at home helping dad. I don’t know if Adel wasn’t out there too.

**Kate:** Your older brother then took care of the family, is that true?

**Elizabeth:** They helped, yes.

**Kate:** He worked with your father?

**Elizabeth:** Yes.

**Kate:** Your father worked in a creamery did you say?

**Elizabeth:** That was in Nappanee but then when we went to Milford that was a little out of town. I don’t know how far away. We lived out on the farm and we kids went to school in Milford.

**Kate:** Do you remember learning English at all?

**Elizabeth:** It took quite a while to be able to learn and talk.

**Kate:** Do you remember having any problems in school about learning English?

**Elizabeth:** No. I don’t know just how long it took us to talk enough to get by.

**Kate:** But do you remember that there was difference in language when you came?

**Elizabeth:** Yes. We couldn’t talk English at all and I doubt if we learnt very much the first three, four months in Martinsville since the Van Dikes were Dutch to begin with. We could talk to them,

**Kate:** Do you remember any Dutch now?

**Elizabeth:** Yes, if I heard it I could but I never was too good in talking it.

**Kate:** In that place in Indiana when you went to school, do you remember about the house there? Do you remember the farm when you moved the farm and lived there and went to school?

**Elizabeth:** We weren’t on a farm in Nappanee. We lived in town.

**Kate:** Then you moved to Milford. Were you in a farm there?

**Elizabeth:** Yes we had a big farm; lower lane all to the main road.

**Kate:** What was the farmhouse like? How big was that?

**Elizabeth:** I don’t remember but it was a big house for our family.

**Kate:** Did they family rent that or did they buy it?

**Elizabeth:** No we just rented it.

**Kate:** And then you farmed, is that it?

**Elizabeth:** Yes.

**Kate:** Did you work on the farm?

**Elizabeth:** They said we did onion fields but I don’t remember it.

**Kate:** So your mom took care of the kids and your dad was a farmer and your brothers helped and evidently you did too?

**Elizabeth:** Yes. We all helped out as far as that goes.

**Kate:** How do you remember being treated by the children when you first went to school? Do you remember anything about when you first went to school in Milford?

**Elizabeth:** Not too much. Nappanee was the first schooling. I don’t recall the teacher’s name I know she… Madison she put her arm around her and got that idea in my head.

**Kate:** You remember it was difficult the first time?

**Elizabeth:** No I don’t remember. I suppose it was. Being kids we didn’t bother so much.

**Kate:** Were you in the same class with any of your brothers and sisters?

**Elizabeth:** Yes. Francis was a year ahead of me and Sadie was a year behind us. But when we were in Milford we lived in a country where we went to a city’s town school.

**Kate:** How did you get there?

**Elizabeth:** Sadie said dad used to take us on [unclear 00:23:17] the horse and wagon. They have programs Fridays in schools and they got Francis and me to sing a Dutch song. Every Friday we have to get up in front and sing that song for them. The last time we sang we start to laugh. We never did stop laughing and we didn’t sing again.

**Kate:** How old were you then?

**Elizabeth:** Ten.

**Kate:** Were there other Dutch families in the area?

**Elizabeth:** Yes, couple of them. We had two Dutch girls.

**Kate:** Did they speak Dutch with you?

**Elizabeth:** We were talking English fairly well by then as kids. Mom and dad never learned to talk. They could understand but they never learned to talk.

**Kate:** So you spoke Dutch at home basically?

**Elizabeth:** Yes but mixed.

**Kate:** You mixed it?

**Elizabeth:** Yes just as far we had for mom to understand us.

**Kate:** Did the children all learn English? Even your elder brother?

**Elizabeth:** Yes.

**Kate:** But your parents didn’t learn it?

**Elizabeth:** No.

**Kate:** They didn’t need to?

**Elizabeth:** No.

**Kate:** What about your mom’s friends? Did she have any friends?

**Elizabeth:** Never. She didn’t have any except her and in Milford there was a Dutch family. She could talk and visit with her a few times but we didn’t live there too long and Mr. Pius in Coldwater had [unclear 00:25:08]. He wanted a large family where the boys on his farm and my dad where he heard about it I don’t know. He heard about a big farm and he applied for it and Mr. Pius rented it to us so then we moved to Coldwater.

**Kate:** What year was that about?

**Elizabeth:** 1917.

**Kate:** You moved to Coldwater in 1917 you think?

**Elizabeth:** Yes.

**Kate:** And had a big farm?

**Elizabeth:** Yes and all the boys were moved to work on this farm.

**Kate:** You went to school here?

**Elizabeth:** We all went to school here.

**Kate:** You were how old then? About 11 years old?

**Elizabeth:** I was in the sixth grade when we came to Coldwater.

**Kate:** Do you remember the school here in Coldwater?

**Elizabeth:** Yes. [unclear 00:26:25].

**Kate:** Any teachers or you don’t remember any people there at all?

**Elizabeth:** No. We came in first of March or April and passed to seventh grade that spring and then I had to go to a different school.

**Kate:** What do you remember about that time in Coldwater? How was it moving to Coldwater, were you happy about it?

**Elizabeth:** Yes. I guess we were always happy and contended. Everybody had a job, the girls got jobs; they were in housework. Irene was the only one. Jenny stayed home to help mom. Alice she worked out also but she went to [unclear 00:27:25] for couple years at the [unclear 00:27:30] to pass her eighth grade so she could go to the [unclear 00:27:39] Nursing School.

**Kate:** When you came did people make fun of you ever for being Dutch? Did anybody ever have any bigotry?

**Elizabeth:** Not that I know of.

**Kate:** What was religious life like? Did you attend church, your family?

**Elizabeth:** Not too much.

**Kate:** Which church did you attend?

**Elizabeth:** We went to the Baptist church. In fact I was remarried by a Baptist minister.

**Kate:** In Coldwater?

**Elizabeth:** Yes.

**Kate:** The Baptist church that you went to was it very close to where you lived?

**Elizabeth:** By that time I was married, in 1926. My husband and I lived out on a farm in Batavia; lived there for four years I was out.

**Kate:** Your brothers and sisters what occupations did they become eventually?

**Elizabeth:** When they were on the big farm they were in the milk business delivering. I had three milk wagons that I had to deliver. When we left that place dad bought a small farm about 90 acres, 100 acres. Charlie was still in school and Adel had a job working for a [unclear 00:29:39] company.

**Kate:** It’s funny because before you said your father worked for a creamery.

**Elizabeth:** Yes but that was long time ago.

**Kate:** Was he always in the dairy business when he was on farms or was he also growing crops?

**Elizabeth:** Just regular farming; they do everything except that we had a big farm here in Coldwater. It was a dairy. They had hay and stuff like that. How many cows were they milking, Charlie?

**Kate:** How many cows were there on the farm here in Coldwater?

**Charlie:** 83 cows.

**Kate:** He milked them by hand?

**Charlie:** We had a machine.

**Kate:** Did you ever live in that small farm that your parents bought after Coldwater?

**Elizabeth:** Yes. We walked home perfectly every day. Sadie and I are…

**Kate:** When you had that big dairy farm you all lived together?

**Elizabeth:** Yes. We kids were all kids in school yet.

**Kate:** But when your dad went and bought the small farm, were you still all living there?

**Elizabeth:** Yes but that was four years five years later. We lived five years on a big farm.

**Kate:** Were children still home by then?

**Elizabeth:** John and Charlie yes but the boys got jobs doing different things in town.

**Kate:** What did you do for fun when you were living on the farm? What was your idea of fun that time? When you lived on the farm, what did you do for entertainment?

**Elizabeth:** Nothing. We were just kids all over the big farm. We didn’t have any friends; we didn’t need it I guess. We went to school, come home, had to do some chores, we had chickens…

**Kate:** You had animals too in this farm?

**Elizabeth:** Yes.

**Kate:** Did you have horses?

**Elizabeth:** Yes, on the farm, but the men there they didn’t need a bunch of us kids messing around.

**Kate:** Did you have your own pets? Your dogs and cats?

**Elizabeth:** I don’t think we had a dog. We had cats. Sadie and I got a lamb one time. I had a pet lamb. It was blind but I suppose I was [unclear 00:32:54].

**Kate:** Do you think your family is satisfied with coming to the States or dissatisfied?

**Elizabeth:** Very much satisfied.

**Kate:** Do they talk about that ever?

**Elizabeth:** Nobody wants to go back.

**Kate:** You had one sister in Holland still.

**Elizabeth:** Yes.

**Kate:** Did she ever want to come here?

**Elizabeth:** She came over. I didn’t know her. She left home working in Amsterdam before I was even born. She was that much older so if she ever [inaudible 00:33:38].

**Kate:** Why originally did your family come? What was the motivation for your family to come here?

**Elizabeth:** Dad always said that he want to come to America.

**Kate:** Do you know why?

**Elizabeth:** Yes; land of honey that’s what they call it.

**Kate:** Do you think he felt good about the decision?

**Elizabeth:** Yes. Everybody is well satisfied.

**Kate:** Did you ever go back to Holland very much?

**Elizabeth:** Yes. I’ve been there 23 years ago. My youngest daughter and her family, her husband and her, went over that time.

**Kate:** When you first got married where did you live? Who did you marry? Did you marry someone who’s Dutch?

**Elizabeth:** We rented a farm in Batavia, that’s six miles out.

**Kate:** How did you meet your husband?

**Elizabeth:** He was a milk man. After we left Pius on the big farm the Gavin family from Springfield, Missouri rented their farm. My husband was a brother to one of the Gavin women. He was delivering milk with a milk wagon in a horse. Where I was working at he was our milk man so I got acquainted with him that way.

**Kate:** How old were you when you got married then?

**Elizabeth:** 21; I lacked two weeks to being 22. We lived out in Batavia four years then we moved to Coldwater and rented a farm over there.

**Kate:** What kind of farming did you do?

**Elizabeth:** Everything; a little of everything.

**Kate:** What’s everything mean, like for example?

**Elizabeth:** Hay, corn, milk from cows, pigs.

**Kate:** Did you have children?

**Elizabeth:** I have four.

**Kate:** Boys? Girls?

**Elizabeth:** Two of each.

**Kate:** Did you speak Dutch to them at all?

**Elizabeth:** No.

**Kate:** Never? So they never learned it?

**Elizabeth:** No.

**Kate:** But they were interested in Holland? Have they ever been?

**Elizabeth:** They are interested, like my youngest daughter they’ve been to Holland or Europe at least 4 times in the last 10 years. They like Europe and we have relatives there. They keep in touch with them. They’ve visited us the last several years.

**Kate:** Do you remember the first time you met your husband?

**Elizabeth:** Yes. He’s a cute little guy I thought.

**Kate:** You met when he was delivering milk you said?

**Elizabeth:** Yes.

**Kate:** How did you know he was going to be your husband?

**Elizabeth:** We got to talk and he come to see me. That was two years later. We didn’t get married right away.

**Kate:** Now you live in Coldwater, right?

**Elizabeth:** Yes.

**Kate:** You live in a farm?

**Elizabeth:** No. I live next door to my younger electrician here in town and they have a little house next to their house. Her mother lived there but when she died 10, 12 years ago they asked me if I had my own home and [unclear 00:37:32]. I owned my own home for a while and my husband died.

**Kate:** When did your husband die?

**Elizabeth:** 1970. My son’s mother-in-law died and I haven’t talked about selling my home so they said, “You want to live in this little house next door here?” That’s where I’m at now.

**Kate:** Your children what do they all do? What professions are your children?

**Elizabeth:** Marj, the oldest one, she worked at a Federal-Mogul here in town. She worked in a hospital before she retired to Hughesville. My oldest son is next. He’s the second one. He’s retired from his job in Anderson, Indiana working for… I can’t pick it up.

**Kate:** Then you had a daughter after your son?

**Elizabeth:** I have two boys in the middle there. My oldest son lives in Anderson, Indiana and Jim lives here in Coldwater. Joyce was the youngest and she was a school teacher in Detroit but she’s also in real estate now.

**Kate:** You’re a close-knit family? Do you see each other quite a lot?

**Elizabeth:** Yes.

**Kate:** How about your brothers and sisters are you in contact with them here in town?

**Elizabeth:** Yes. When they come to town we dearly get together.

**Kate:** Who’s surviving in the family now than the five of you? How many of the 14 children are surviving now?

**Elizabeth:** There’s six of us; three girls and three boys.

**Kate:** In conclusion do you think that your family is happy you came to America?

**Elizabeth:** They better be. Yes.

**Kate:** That’s a good place to end. Is there anything else you’d like to say?

**Elizabeth:** No. I didn’t know I was supposed to do all of this talking. I thought I would just be stopping here and talk to Charlie. I wouldn’t like to say Charlie didn’t know anything about it.

**Kate:** Thank you for taking the time for us for the archives about your experience. This is Kate Moore signing off on the 5th December 1993 for the Ellis Island Oral History project with Elizabeth Fischer.