

# WWII Veteran Fights to Save Rent-Controlled Apartment

## WEST ORANGE

Walter Bloss has lived in his one-bedroom apartment in West Orange for 43 years. He pays \$255 a month for a rent-controlled unit that could otherwise claim upwards of \$1,000 a month—much to the chagrin of his landlord. The two have been at odds for several years now, with the landlord becoming increasingly bitter about this perceived loss of income. For the moment, Walter is winning that battle, but it's not likely to be the last one.



Walter is 89 years old. He is a veteran of World War II with nine medals to show for his service. He suffers from macular degeneration, which has rendered him legally blind and sensitive to bright light. He has a pacemaker and suffers from diabetes. But his mind is sharp, his manner spirited, and his nature charming. Every afternoon he climbs the two steep sets of stairs to his third floor walk-up after spending

most of the day with a long-time friend and owner of a business just a few doors down. Walter helps out in ways that he can, such as answering the phones when his friend is busy—but mostly, he enjoys the company, and appreciates his friend's willingness to keep an eye on him throughout the day and provide help when he needs it.

Increasingly, Walter's doctors feel he needs ad-

ditional support, and that he should not be alone night after night without someone checking in on him. Lately, that someone has been his grandson—a young man whom the landlord has tried to ban from the premises. This was the crux of the most recent legal battle over Walter's tenancy.

The first time Walter was in court with his landlord, it was because he was accused of not paying his rent on time. But as he had all the receipts to prove otherwise, he won that case easily. This time was a little more complicated. The landlord wanted Walter to sign a lease that included a new clause—one that stated that any and all caretakers needed to be approved in advance by the landlord. Without that approval, it said, no one was permitted to stay in his apartment with him. Walter decided to go to court to let a judge decide whether that lease was reasonable, believing that if it was, he would have the opportunity to sign it and then abide by it. Instead, the judge issued a written decision notifying Walter that he would be evicted, with no opportunity to sign the lease and stay. Soon, the constable was at the door stating that Walter had to leave the premises with all of his belongings inside. "He [the landlord] says—*You have to leave. You have to get out. And you can't take anything with you. Just get out because I'm locking up the apartment.* And that's when I called Legal Services about what was going on."

Essex-Newark Legal Services asked the trial judge to allow Walter to sign his lease and stay, but when the trial court refused this option, they immediately filed an appeal. The appeals court notified the landlord that while the case was pending, Walter would be

Leaky pipes wrapped with duct tape, rotted flooring under the toilet, and frayed wires in the bathroom light fixture are just a few of the hazards that Walter's landlord will not repair.



immediately allowed back into his apartment, and further—that his grandson could stay in the apartment to care for him. No one knows how long it will take the appellate court to render a decision in the case, but in the meantime, his housing is secure. “Thank goodness I got a place to stay. Otherwise I’d be out on the street and be homeless.”



isting tenants are non-existent. Walter says previous landlords weren’t like this, and that he was never at odds with them. “No problem with all the other landlords, only him. And he’s the fourth one since I’ve lived here.”

A brief walk around the apartment re-

veals precarious situations like a heavy water heater sitting on unstable flooring, frayed wires, and leaky pipes that have been patched together with duct tape. He even removed the intercom system, so that Walter does not know when someone is at the door for him. Worse—if someone is responding to an emergent need of his, he is unable to buzz them in. “I don’t understand some people.” ❖

*Interview completed October 24, 2012*

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help more  
people like Walter.  
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FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: Visit [LSNJ's website, www.LSNJ.org](http://www.LSNJ.org), for general information about Legal Services or the [Poverty Research Institute](#) page for detailed reports about poverty in New Jersey. For more information about your legal rights, visit [LSNJLAW](http://LSNJLAW).

FOR HELP: Through its [statewide, toll-free hotline, 1-888-LSNJ-LAW \(1-888-576-5529\)](#), Legal Services offers telephone advice to people who have been unfairly denied cash benefits, food stamps, or rental assistance, as well as certain health programs, including Medicaid/NJ Family Care, Charity Care, and PAAD. You may also apply for services online at <https://lsnjlawhotline.org> or contact a [Regional Legal Services program](#) for help.

TO MAKE A DONATION: For information on how to donate to Legal Services, visit [LSNJ.org](http://LSNJ.org).