

Oral History Interview

Al Russo

WH097

(Written transcript and digital audio)

On December 14, 2011, Al Russo was interviewed by Brenda Velasco at 9:30 A.M. at 570 Rahway Avenue, Woodbridge.

Brenda Velasco: Al Russo is a long time resident of Port Reading, however we are at his law office right now on 570 Rahway Avenue in Woodbridge.

1. Identify individual-name, section date of birth.

Al Russo: My name is Alfred Russo. I was born in 1943.

2. How long have you lived in Port Reading?

Al Russo: I was born in Port Reading, obviously I'm 68 years old, and I've lived there ever since.

Brenda Velasco: Alright, let me just follow up with something because when you talk about Port Reading everybody is sort of related. What was your mom's maiden name?

Al Russo: My mother's maiden name was Zuccaro.

Brenda Velasco: Okay and I know just in discussing, we were looking at a picture before you had some cousins who had another last name.

Al Russo: Yes, well the Zuccaro family had eleven who were born and there were marriages with the Simeone's, there were marriages with Zullo's, there are relatives in the Minucci family; quite frankly almost every family was related to someone somehow either through blood or through marriage and if you weren't you always were honored by being a godfather for one of the children.

Brenda Velasco: You were all connected; it was one big family.

Al Russo: Right, everyone was connected. When a new priest would come to the church my mother would always tell him, don't talk about anyone because everyone is related.

Brenda Velasco: He had to play it safe.

Al Russo: Right.

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

Al Russo: I don't know. I mean my father came from Italy. I imagine he came to Port Reading because people from his town came to Port Reading before him and when they said come to America I think they substituted the word come to Port Reading instead of come to America.

Brenda Velasco: Do you recall what part of Italy?

Al Russo: Yes, he was from a place called Pietrastornina which is in the province of Avellino. I think an overwhelming number of original immigrants came from that town and they obviously went to work for the railroad. They were looking for work, they were hard workers and it was difficult and dangerous work for a lot of them. I guess that was America. Quite frankly, I don't know how my mother ended up here. I know she was born in Staten Island and they came across the Arthur Kill somehow.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, now we got the picture. Why don't you explain what the picture was about?

Al Russo: Right. There were two pictures I just gave you. One is the cover of *Reading Railroad Magazine* from the September, 1953 issue and on the back cover its' a picture that is part of the crowd from Port Reading at the Philadelphia division picnic. The picnics were held in Willow Grove, Pennsylvania and the Reading Railroad would actually have a passenger train which only came to Port Reading once a year except during the Korean War. I'd like to talk about that later. But the railroad was a freight railroad; however once a year they'd bring in a passenger train and the employees of the railroad and their families were able to take the train, go to Pennsylvania, go to Willow Grove Park which was an amusement park, I don't know if it still is, and the company would have a picnic. There would be, you know, three legged races and people racing. I could remember hopping in burlap bags, things of that nature.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, so you participated and we're looking at this picture which was on the back cover that you showed to me and we see your mom there.

Al Russo: My mother is the lady in the middle, my father is in the picture, I see Louie Nardiello who was a councilman, there's his mother and sister, Frankie Covino and his son Jimmy Covino, Patricia Barbato who is now Patricia Martino, she's married to Marty Martino, Vinnie Martino's brother, you have Patsy Barbato who is her brother, he was coach at Colonia High School and played football in Woodbridge. So it illustrates how all of these families are, in fact, related in some degree. I mean if you look at Patricia Barbato's mother her maiden name was Zullo and you could see that everyone had a connection of being related somehow.

Brenda Velasco: Alright and you didn't speak ill of anybody if you were an outsider because you were going to offend somebody there.

Al Russo: That's correct.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, so you're saying that the Reading Railroad played a really big.....

Al Russo: Major, major role in our lives. I mean even when I was in the Boy Scouts or Cub Scouts we would take trips down to what was called the coal docks to just see the operation and to see the dumper. I actually have a picture from when I was in the Cub Scouts that we went there. It had to be in the early '50s because once I became twelve I joined the Boy Scouts.

Brenda Velasco: Okay and this was of the McMyler Coal Dumper that is now still there where Pro Logis is located now?

Al Russo: Right; deteriorating though.

Brenda Velasco: Very badly. I know we did stop there for an historic tour one time.

Al Russo: Right and we then were on the dock also and a tugboat pulled up and it was pretty exciting for us kids to see, you know, a tugboat close up like that. The only time you saw a tugboat was looking in the Golden Books I guess.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, so this is in the early '50s when you were a Cub Scout you had those pictures.

Al Russo: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Those are good pictures. Okay, now you said your dad worked for the railroad.

Al Russo: Yes, he was what they called a car rider. In order to really appreciate what he did and how dangerous the job was you have to understand the operation of the dumper because the dumper was actually a piece of machinery that lifted up an entire hopper car full of coal and turned it over and emptied the coal into a barge which was hooked up underneath it in the Arthur Kill. As the train, we called them Long Roaders, would come in with all of the hopper filled, a car would be disconnected so that was on its own and it would go down through gravity on the track, picking up speed and then it would be locked on to the place where it was turned over. Then it was let go, and the car would then continue up toward the big hook which it looked to me like it was four or five stories high. I don't know, it could have been ten stories high if you look at it and the car. I'll illustrate it and then you could have an idea on how to report it. The car would, through gravity, go up the hook like this and the car rider was on the back of it.....

Brenda Velasco: That's your dad?

Al Russo: Right and he would have to apply the brakes by turning this wheel and stop the car at the top of the hook so that the track was able to be switched at the bottom of the hook. So then you unwind the brake, the car now starts coming down the hook and on the track alongside the cars that are full. Now the empty car goes back alongside the cars that are full but it had to go up this hook to stop up there so they could switch the track and then start it again because there was no engine to push it back and then it had to go back. I don't know if I made it clear, but that's the way it operated.

Brenda Velasco: Alright and in that process it had to dump out its coal.

Al Russo: It dumped the coal first, and then it was released. The train would bring the car to the place where it was unhooked, then it was dumped, but now the car has to go back empty. And the way it went back it went down and then up the hook, brakes applied, tracks switched, brakes unapplied and then it came back down from the top of the hook.

Brenda Velasco: And it was done manually by a human being.

Al Russo: Manually and guys fell off and died. Some of the car riders fell off the back of the ladder when they were turning the wheel.

Brenda Velasco: So this was quite dangerous.

Al Russo: It was dangerous, yes. My father ended up becoming a carpenter. He ended up getting in a union and went to work as a carpenter.

Brenda Velasco: For the Port Reading Railroad?

Al Russo: No.

Brenda Velasco: No, separately.

Al Russo: He was a union carpenter out of Perth Amboy. He was Local 65 as I recall.

Brenda Velasco: Which was a much safer job?

Al Russo: Yes, although not as steady. I can remember him being home many, many days in the winter. When it was bad weather, they didn't work.

Brenda Velasco: It was a little bit safer though.

Al Russo: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, so how long did he work for the railroad then?

Al Russo: Well, I don't really now. I know he was a carpenter when I was probably twelve or thirteen years old so he was probably there for a few years.

Brenda Velasco: So during the 1940s he was probably.....

Al Russo: Late '40s early '50s.

Brenda Velasco: Do you remember what year he came over from Italy?

Al Russo: I'm guessing he was still working there because we went on this trip in 1953 so sometime then.

Brenda Velasco: What year did he come over from Italy, do you remember?

Al Russo: Let me see, he was thirteen years old so around 1896 I think. He came with three brothers and they were separated, I guess, when they came into the port and they were sent for processing to Boston and he came here. They ended up staying in Boston so I actually have relatives in Boston from those two brothers.

Brenda Velasco: Did he come with his parents?

Al Russo: No.

Brenda Velasco: By himself at age thirteen?

Al Russo: By himself, yes.

Brenda Velasco: It was a different

Al Russo: Different world.

Brenda Velasco: A very different world and one where you had to really look for opportunity which wasn't there in Italy especially in that area at that time. Do you recall anything else about your dad working at the railroad? What he was paid?

Al Russo: No.

Brenda Velasco: I mean you were too young at that time you didn't care about those things. You cared about baseball and things like that or cub scouts. Okay, so let's go back to the other interview then.

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

Al Russo: Well you know they replaced some of the buildings. There was an old post office and there's a new post office now. There was an old firehouse; there's a new firehouse.

Brenda Velasco: But are they in the same locations?

Al Russo: The firehouse is in the same location, St. Anthony's Church is in the same location, the public school has moved. The public school used to be on West Avenue and School Street and now it's on Tappan Street or Turner; I guess it's Turner Street.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, the post office though that's right on Port Reading Avenue.

Al Russo: The post office is on Port Reading Avenue now, yes.

Brenda Velasco: Was that there before?

Al Russo: No.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, so that was a different location.

Al Russo: That's a different location. We had a library which I believe the church built on West Avenue and then, of course, that was knocked down. They built one down by where the school is, where the public school is now, and then that has turned into a media center I believe.

Brenda Velasco: And Father Milos started that library?

Al Russo: Yes. He also built the basketball court there, handball court. I don't know if anybody brought that up.

Brenda Velasco: No.

Al Russo: Two giant walls along the railroad, the Jersey Central Railroad actually, and a tennis court.

Brenda Velasco: He did a lot for the town, didn't he?

Al Russo: Yes. If I may take the liberty to talk about the two sides.....

Brenda Velasco: Yeah, go.

Al Russo: Talking about the Jersey Central Railroad the Jersey Central Railroad did stop in Port Reading where it would be underneath the bridge down by Bowtie Pool, they had a regular station there. When my parents were married, they took the train from there; it was called *The Blue Comet*, and went to Atlantic City for their honeymoon.

Brenda Velasco: Wow!

Al Russo: And it's interesting if you go online and just look up *The Blue Comet* you'll see it was a powder blue engine and tender and the cars and.....

Brenda Velasco: Directly to Atlantic City.

Al Russo: Well it wound its way through different parts of New Jersey, I guess, because there wasn't any direct track.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, but eventually.....

Al Russo: But it was a regularly run train, because the train started in Jersey City. If you wanted to go to New York we used to take the train there and get off in Jersey City and take a ferry across.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, so from Port Reading you had direct links to New York City?

Al Russo: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, you could go to New York City or if you wanted to go to Atlantic City you had the railroad right?

Al Russo: Right. I don't know how convenient it was. I'm sure it was a long winding route and I did look it up in the past. You could see the route online. The other thing that was really interesting, actually if anybody is interested in football, Leon Hess, of course who was the owner of **Hess Oil** at the time and then **Amerada Hess**, bought the New York Football team that became the *Jets*. They were the *Titans* at the time. In order to get people interested in going to the football games, he would have some of his executives come over to the firehouse and leave approximately two hundred tickets for games on Sundays and as the saying goes you couldn't even give them away. I tell my son-in-laws, one is from New York and one is from Pennsylvania, they're big football fans, you know the reason the *Jets* are green and white are because Hess's gas stations are green and white. That just didn't happen by mistake.

Brenda Velasco: It wasn't because he was Irish; it was the gas station.

Al Russo: Right.

Brenda Velasco: How about services? Now we mentioned the railroads, the Jersey and the Port Reading Railroad, were there services like stores down in Port Reading at the time that you were.....?

Al Russo: There were a couple of stores, mostly you would call them like delicatessens now, but D'Alessio had a store. You could go there and get, you know,

bread and things like that. One of the things that used to really scare me though was he had barrels with eels swimming around where you went to pay. You really didn't like to look at them. They were scary; they looked like snakes in a barrel.

Brenda Velasco: I'm sure.

Al Russo: But if you talk to Albina (D'Alessio) she'll tell you about them. People actually ate those things, too.

Brenda Velasco: But that was a delicacy, right, around the holidays?

Al Russo: Yes, Christmas time. So he had barrels with eels in them and, you know, provolone and all kinds of salamis and things like that. Then Louie Martino had a candy store.

Brenda Velasco: And where was Louie Martino's store?

Al Russo: Louie Martino's candy store was the building, which is still there: it's actually next door to the bakery, Dorsi's Bakery, to the left of it where that pool place is. That was Louie Martino's store.

Brenda Velasco: Ah, okay! And D'Alessio's.....

Al Russo: D'Alessio's store was down by the triangle formed by Port Reading Avenue and Turner Street which is a little vacant area right now and then you have that, what is it, **7-Eleven** or **Quick Chek** or something there now. But it was up toward that triangle.

Brenda Velasco: How about houses of worships in Port Reading?

Al Russo: The only one was St. Anthony's Church. I was actually baptized in it. The priest was a Father Galassi (1911-1943). I don't know much about him but he was quite a character I hear; a real tough guy.

Brenda Velasco: He was after Father Milos?

Al Russo: No, before.

Brenda Velasco: Before.

Al Russo: I think but I'm not sure that he was also related somehow to the Police Director Galassi later on.

Brenda Velasco: I was thinking that.

Al Russo: Yeah, he might have been his uncle and just as tough.

Brenda Velasco: Okay and where did you go to school then?

Al Russo: Port Reading School No. 9 which was on West Avenue.

Brenda Velasco: And how far was it from your house?

Al Russo: I lived on East Street so I guess it was a half a mile. We used to walk and had a lot of fun.

Brenda Velasco: Well you had a lot of kids around at that time, too.

Al Russo: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Because you were an only child, you said, but you had a neighborhood full of kids.

Al Russo: Yes, and we walked there and, of course, you walked past the firehouse and like I said there was all this family around. My uncle was the paid fireman; he was there all the time. They called him Tutto Zuccaro and he would watch us, you know, after we crossed the street and watch us walk up the street to make sure everything was okay.

Brenda Velasco: So the extended family came in handy.

Al Russo: Yes, they were always there. After that I went to Woodbridge High School.

Brenda Velasco: So School No. 9 went up to eighth grade?

Al Russo: Yes, eighth grade. Actually, you know what, they changed it. I finished seventh grade there and then the eighth grade I went to the Woodbridge High School building. The first year it opened it had the eighth grade, ninth grade and half of tenth grade went in the afternoon session which began at twelve thirty and ended at ten after five, and the remaining half of the sophomores and juniors and seniors went in the morning. They went from seven thirty to, I think, twelve ten. What would happen is when the buses took the afternoon session kids we would get off and sit in the auditorium where they would have all the announcements and Pledge of Allegiance and things of that nature while the morning session was emptying the building and then we would leave the auditorium and go to our homerooms.

Brenda Velasco: So the logistics were quite complicated moving all these people.

Al Russo: It actually worked very well because, like I said, half of the school emptied out and we went in but we were all in the auditorium at that time.

Brenda Velasco: So this was about 1956 sort of because you graduated in '61?

Al Russo: Right.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Al Russo: It would have been my eighth grade. Probably the most unique thing about it is that if you think about sitting.....I remember my English class sitting in class at five o'clock and it was pitch dark.

Brenda Velasco: At this time of the year it would be, yes.

Al Russo: Right, in December. You'd sit there and you'd look out the window and say oh my God what are we doing here, it's absolutely dark.

Brenda Velasco: This was split session because Woodbridge was with a (population) boom right now. It was right after World War II.

Al Russo: Right, a tremendous number of students and JFK and Colonia weren't even in existence yet.

Brenda Velasco: So we only had one high school. That was the new high school that you're talking about?

Al Russo: It was brand new, yes.

Brenda Velasco: So you went there in eighth grade.....

Al Russo: So I actually went there five years.

Brenda Velasco: Five years at the new high school, wow! (It was) never ending for you.

Al Russo: Right. Actually, you know what I probably didn't want it to: I loved going there.

Brenda Velasco: What are some of the good memories you have of the high school?

Al Russo: Well the best one was I was on the football team for all four years.

Brenda Velasco: That was Woodbridge.

Al Russo: Not only that, in my senior year we were undefeated: Central Jersey Group Four champs.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, that's 1961.

Al Russo: 1960.

Brenda Velasco: 1960.

Al Russo: Right and you know we had all kind of honors and dinners and proclamations and everything else that you could imagine.

Brenda Velasco: Now, who was your coach back then?

Al Russo: Nick Fresco was the head coach; Frank Capraro was the assistant.

Brenda Velasco: Because I interviewed Frank, too, as well as Albina.

Al Russo: Okay, he should have brought that up.

Brenda Velasco: Oh, he brought up a couple of things.

Al Russo: I have my yearbook here some place in broken pieces but.....

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Al Russo: Well here's something.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, this is 1960, the champions. That was the central group, right?

Al Russo: Right.

Brenda Velasco: Wow! All so young at that time, huh?

Al Russo: I know. You would know people in this picture also probably. Let's see. Our quarterback was a guy named Jimmy Dunda who went to Brown University. Eventually he was killed in a car accident in his twenties probably. Then we had the Schundlers, the two Schundler brothers here. Their brother is the guy who ran for governor.

Brenda Velasco: Brett.

Al Russo: Right. This is Peter and Russell, they live in Colonia.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, so some of the Schundlers were graduates of Woodbridge High School.

Al Russo: Correct. This is Buzzy Estok. He was a principal here in Woodbridge.

Brenda Velasco: Yup, okay.

Al Russo: This is me right here. Bill Sparks, he played for Rutgers. His brother was killed in a car accident.

Brenda Velasco: Wow!

Al Russo: I'm trying to think if there was anybody else here. George Fair, he played for Syracuse.

Brenda Velasco: So this was a.....

Al Russo: Piccaroni I think was something in Colonia High School also, a coach or something.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Al Russo: So we had a good group. A lot of guys went on and did fairly well.

Brenda Velasco: It was good preparation.

Al Russo: Yeah, Woodbridge High School was a tough school. I would tell anybody I talk to. The English Department was absolutely outstanding. Everybody that went to college excelled in English. They were tough people they had.

Brenda Velasco: Who was the principal?

Al Russo: Adam Slike was one the teachers, Mrs. Boynton and Mrs. Goldstein; real tough English teachers. The principal was Dr. Lozo.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, how about going down to Question 5.

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

Brenda Velasco: We covered schools; we've covered the firehouse basically. How about park?

Al Russo: Well we were lucky because I told you the park that most of us went to was on West Avenue adjacent to what was the library building. I don't know, it looked like a house so it must have been someone's house at one time, but it had basketball courts, tennis courts, handball courts and they tried flooding it for ice skating, which we did, because it had a curb around it. Sometimes the fire company would just fill it up with water for us to ice skate there. There was a place called Eakie's Pond where we used to go ice skating. As a matter of fact when I went to the school, high school, in the afternoon session in the morning when the pond was frozen I'd go ice skating every morning because it was a short walk from my house. Father Milos had the Fife and Drum Corp. In addition to the Fife and Drum Corp people played trumpets, trombones, a glockenspiel and we would march in the, you know, Memorial Day parade which was a big parade in Woodbridge at the time. Then afterward you would go to the firehouse and they'd have hot dogs, sandwiches, beer and soda for everybody in the town.

Brenda Velasco: When you're talking town you're talking Port Reading.

Al Russo: Correct. I think Colonia might have done that also. I don't know of any other areas that did it.

Brenda Velasco: So this was really self-contained. You had the activities right in Port Reading. You didn't have to leave Port Reading except for high school eventually.

Al Russo: Yes.

6. What did you do for recreation?

Al Russo: We played baseball, basketball, tennis, handball, ice skating and then we played baseball with like two man teams. We called it Over the Backstop. We played on the baseball field and if you hit it on the backstop, depending on the location, it would be a single or double or triple. If you hit it over you were out.

Brenda Velasco: You were inventive.

Al Russo: Yes, played there all the time till it got dark.

Brenda Velasco: And never a concern; your parents had no concern about you staying out?

Al Russo: No.

Brenda Velasco: Because the extended family was around.

Al Russo: Right. Everybody made fun of me though. We used to have to go home when the streetlights went on. Every time the lights went on that's when we had to go home.

7. What was the focal point of your community?

Al Russo: Oh it would be the church and fire company.

Brenda Velasco: And we went over the church with the library and the handball courts and everything.

Al Russo: Right, in addition to doing church stuff.

Brenda Velasco: Right, the spiritual aspect, sorry. But that's the big hook to get you there with the other as well. It was the social gathering and it's still there and it still plays a very important role in Port Reading.

Al Russo: Absolutely.

Brenda Velasco: Do you still live in Port Reading?

Al Russo: Yes, three different locations but I'm still there.

8. What did you like about living in your section of Port Reading?

Al Russo: There are still people that I know from childhood. You know I still have childhood friends, Marty Martino, Richie Simeone and guys that I grew up with. Their kids are friends with our kids. They went to grammar school together and some went to college together. Of course, it's eroding now but nothing stays the same.

Brenda Velasco: It's part of life change.

Al Russo: I like our physical location for traveling. Obviously we can go to New York City in less than an hour, you can go to the shore in less than an hour and you could go to Pennsylvania in about an hour or a little bit longer if you want to get to the ski areas. So you know it's centrally located. You have just about anything you want to do.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, it's a prime area. Its location and you still have friends and family.

Al Russo: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Most people don't have.....

Al Russo: Well I was also a member of the volunteer fire company which was when you grew up everybody wanted to be in the fire company. There were sixty members in there. There was a waiting list for people to join and nobody would ever get out. You'd have to wait until somebody died. But I understand now it's a lot more difficult. They don't have the volunteers. They have paid firemen.

Brenda Velasco: But you mentioned that your uncle had been a paid fireman.

Al Russo: Right, he was the only one at the time because during the day, the guys were working, there were no firemen.

Brenda Velasco: That's why he was paid, right?

Al Russo: So he drove the fire truck. Hopefully people came and showed up and helped.

Brenda Velasco: You know that's volunteerism.

Al Russo: Right.

9. Did you experience any significant happenings in Woodbridge-construction, accidents, sports events, riots, discrimination, etc.

Al Russo: I mean the building, the **Hess Refinery**, was a major thing. You know, it had good points and it has its bad points obviously: alleged pollution problems, the site of it, a lot were teased by the guys that came around because they said it looked like Cape Canaveral, things of that nature. But on the flip side **Hess**, I guess it was their company policy, they tried to hire people from all the families in the town so a lot of guys worked for **Hess** from the Simeone family, the Margioto family, the Barbato family and Kaskiw. Eugene Kaskiw was actually married to a Barbato so I

mean you can't really say it was the Kaskiw family. But all of the families had people working in the **Hess Refinery**.

Brenda Velasco: It was a good local employer then.

Al Russo: It was a good local employer and it was a very good move by Hess because I think it kept down some of the criticism. You didn't want to jeopardize anybody's job that was in your family or whom you were related to.

Brenda Velasco: Right and they were voters in Woodbridge Township.

Al Russo: Right, so that was a major thing. One thing I remember when I was very small, I don't know what year it was when the train derailed in Woodbridge, but we were coming home from Perth Amboy, my mother had a friend in Perth Amboy. I remember I was small enough that I was standing up in the back of a 1949 Pontiac and we were driving from Perth Amboy back home and we got to Woodbridge and I saw emergency vehicles and lights more than I'd ever seen in my life. The only thing that reminded me of that later on, I guess, is when I saw *War of the Worlds*. That looked like the end of the world but it had to be before 1954.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, it was about 1951.

Al Russo: Okay, because my father died in 1954. I remember it was his car and he was driving and, like I said, I was standing up in the back of the car. So in '51 I was eight years old.

Brenda Velasco: Which would make an impression on you and you're fully aware of everything.

Al Russo: Right. I mean everywhere that you looked you saw an ambulance or a fire truck or police car. I mean it was just amazing.

Brenda Velasco: Then you had to skirt around. How did you get back to Port Reading?

Al Russo: I have no idea.

Brenda Velasco: Because the main street was blocked.

Al Russo: We were coming down that way, I guess, and we must have gone that way and come around. I don't know but when we came down from Perth Amboy for some reason I felt like we were going down by Fulton Street but I don't know. I don't think we got there.

Brenda Velasco: They were using some of the homes there for a morgue and the Methodist Church was being used for the bodies.

Al Russo: That was probably the thing that impressed me the most from my childhood seeing something really, really amazing.

Brenda Velasco: How about the Turnpike, did that.....

Al Russo: The Turnpike, yeah. My mother's house was actually the last house standing after the expansion of the Turnpike. It was the next to the last house standing after the original Turnpike because they condemned the houses and knocked them down.

Brenda Velasco: Where did you mom live then?

Al Russo: East Street, the end of East Street.

Brenda Velasco: East Street, okay.

Al Russo: She went all the way to the end where the Turnpike Bridge goes over the railroad right at that intersection. But we did make money. We sold lemonade to the workers and we would go pickup their soda bottles, which were all over the place,

and bring them to Louie's store because you used to get two cents for turning in the bottles, the deposit, which I forgot all about until you asked about it.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, they don't have that now. That's how we made money, too. You didn't need much money back then. Okay, so you mentioned about when you were in high school about the football team about 1960 you were the champs and we mentioned the railroad accident, anything else that you could think of?

Al Russo: Not really.

10. What do you like about Woodbridge/Port Reading today?

Brenda Velasco: Okay, you're still in Woodbridge, your business is located in Woodbridge your law office with Tim Casey, but you're living in Port Reading. You're about ten minutes from your office?

Al Russo: Less than that.

Brenda Velasco: Not many people have that advantage. You're very fortunate.

Al Russo: Let's put it in perspective, if I'm coming up Port Reading Avenue and the light is red by the White Church I get aggravated.

Brenda Velasco: No Parkway, no tension there, and you get aggravated!

Al Russo: Right.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, so you still like Woodbridge today; you're here.

Al Russo: Sure, absolutely.

Brenda Velasco: And you're also the counsel for the Zoning Board?

Al Russo: Yes.

11. Do you have any family members still living in Woodbridge/Port Reading today?

Al Russo: Just cousins.

Brenda Velasco: Cousins, okay.

Al Russo: All my aunts and uncles are deceased. I had an uncle on the police department, I told you one was a paid fireman, and another cousin was a policeman.

Brenda Velasco: You had to tow the line wherever you went in Woodbridge.

Al Russo: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: At least in Port Reading and here.

Al Russo: And believe it or not we know a lot of janitors and even my kids, if they did something in school, a janitor would let me know.

Brenda Velasco: You couldn't get away with anything.

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

Al Russo: I can't think of any right now.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, if you do give me a call.

Al Russo: Sure.

Brenda Velasco: This was an interesting interview. The pictures are great. So I thank you very much.

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After the formal interview concluded, Al Russo discussed the location of his office 570 Rahway Avenue. As a kid when he used to walk back to Port Reading after seeing a movie at the **State Theatre** on Main Street, he would always admire this home. His office was the former home of Abe Niess, owner of Middlesex Concrete Company.