

Oral History Interview
Barbara Virginia Kuzniak White
WH032

(written transcript and digital audio)

On March 13, 2009 at 1:00 P.M., Barbara White was interviewed at the Main Library in Woodbridge by Brenda Velasco.

Brenda Velasco: Barbara is from Hopelawn, New Jersey but she's lived in many places in Woodbridge. Barbara was also married to Bob White who was an avid lover of history and also a very community oriented person who was involved in the Hopelawn youth and many other things in the Township such as the Mayor's Advisory going back many years. Unfortunately, he's deceased but I got the next best thing, his wife, Barbara White.

1. *Identify individual –name, section, date of birth and also all the other sections of Woodbridge that you lived in.*

Okay, I'm happy to be here. My name is Barbara Virginia White. My maiden name was Kuzniak. I reside in Hopelawn since 1957. I only lived in four different places all my life. I'm 72 years old.

2. *How long have you lived in Woodbridge?*

When I was born my parents lived on Benjamin Street in the Strawberry Hill section of Woodbridge in the house that my grandfather built when he came from Hungary. He came over from Hungary and sent for my grandmother who was coming over with my aunt and my uncle. On the way to the ship to be transported across the ocean my aunt, who was a four year old child, got very sick and my grandmother walked her back to the village knowing that they wouldn't be allowed on the ship with this sick child. I don't know whether she had scarlet fever or something. Consequently, she remained in Hungary and my grandmother came with my Uncle Alex and joined my grandfather on Benjamin Street. They subsequently had four other children. My mother was the first one born in the United States. I lived in that home on Benjamin Street in the Strawberry Hill section until I was 6½ years old. I started school at the Strawberry Hill School which is now a cul de sac of homes; and then we moved to Meinzer Street in Avenel which we were one of, I think, there were four houses on the block. Next to us was farmland and we had a small cape cod on Meinzer Street, the first block in from Rahway Avenue. I recall a lot of happy times growing up in Avenel.

Brenda Velasco: It was almost farmland then, back then.

Barbara White: It was farmland next to us, yes. As a matter of fact, the same family, the Knox family, started selling off the land and homes were built. Many, many years later the house that was built next to my parent's home, my husband's mother remarried and moved into that house. When my husband was discharged from the Navy he came and moved in with his mother and stepfather. There were four of us that lived on that block and we were so anxious to meet this new sailor who moved into the neighborhood.

Brenda Velasco: He was a sailor, right.

Barbara White: Little did we know, he was sort of engaged at the time to a girl he had met in Chicago.

Brenda Velasco: Didn't stop him though, did it?

Barbara White: No, and we went out in a group. He was new to the area. He was born and raised in Kenilworth and as I said, when he got out of the service his mother was in Avenel. He had never heard of the town of Avenel and didn't know where it was. In those days the servicemen hitchhiked every place they went. He had somebody give him a ride to Avenel Street and then, I believe he said, he got on a bus and he said I have to go to Meinzer Street. That's the first he saw of the area. I guess for a year we weren't really dating but going out in crowds and I sort of took a liking to him and I guess the same was mutual. Consequently, his pre-fiancée came to New Jersey with her girlfriend. I haven't thought about this in years and years and years, but the bottom line is we got together.

Brenda Velasco: Good.

Barbara White: And we got married and we were married just shy of 45 years.

Brenda Velasco: Wow!

Barbara White: We got married in November of 1954 and we moved to an apartment in Avenel on Yale Avenue. When we got married we were both out of work. I had graduated high school in June and got a job with Raritan Arsenal and the department was moving to Illinois. It was funny that his girlfriend was from Illinois too, but anyway.

Brenda Velasco: But he didn't go back there.

Barbara White: He was working for Ralph L. Smith Oil Company delivering oil and I guess times got a little hard and Ralph Smith had to lay him off also. So here we got married in November, both out of work living in an apartment on Yale Avenue; but he had applied for a job with IBM and was more or less assured that he was going to be called. When my department in Raritan Arsenal closed, if I wasn't engaged to Bob, my cousin also worked there and we were talking about going out together because my cousin said if my mother let me go then we could probably go together; our mothers were sisters.

Brenda Velasco: Dating back then was a little bit different than dating in 2009.

Barbara White: Oh, yes.

Brenda Velasco: And this is why I want to make note that quite often you didn't just go out by yourself with your boyfriend.

Barbara White: Oh, no you went in groups.

Brenda Velasco: Yes.

Barbara White: You went in groups all the time. With Bob and I, it was funny, it was our last get together because his girlfriend, Joan was her name, she was coming out that weekend. I remember Monday morning I was waiting on the corner of Barnett Street and Rahway Avenue for the bus to go to my job in Perth Amboy and Bob stopped and pulled up and said "get in the car". I said "no, I don't speak to engaged men". And he said "get in the car". He said "that's it I can't get you out of my mind". I told Joan it wasn't going to work out and that was it. Then we got married the following year. We then lived on Yale Avenue and then we bought a house in Hopelawn in 1957 and lived there; I'm still there. He passed away it will be ten years this September. As you said he was a very active man, a very good family man, a good husband and a good father. He was one of the first men to join the Home and School Association in Hopelawn School #10 where Miss Fee was the original principal. Remember Miss Fee?

Brenda Velasco: Yes, she's been talked about a lot.

Barbara White: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, so let's just back track. You were born in approximately 1937?

Barbara White: '36.

Brenda Velasco: '36, okay.

Barbara White: November of '36.

Brenda Velasco: I was giving you an extra year here. Alright, and originally you lived on Benjamin Street, the Strawberry Hill section.

Barbara White: Correct.

Brenda Velasco: Then after that you guys moved to.....

Barbara White: Meinzer Street in Avenel.

Brenda Velasco: Right, do you have an idea about what year? You were 6½ you said.

Barbara White: '43.

Brenda Velasco: 1943.

Barbara White: March of '43.

Brenda Velasco: Alright, during the war.

Barbara White: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: And then eventually you got married?

Barbara White: In '54.

Brenda Velasco: In '54 and then you moved out to Hopelawn in 1957.

Barbara White: '57.

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

Brenda Velasco: So you have really traveled some of the sections of the Township. You can give a little flavor of each one. Alright, and you also mentioned about why your father, or your grandfather, came over from Hungary

Barbara White: Correct.

Brenda Velasco: And he built the house that you lived in the Strawberry Hill section?

Barbara White: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, and what year did your grandfather come over?

Barbara White: It was the early 1900s because my mother was born in 1913, I believe, and as I said, she was the first one, so it was maybe around 1910.

Brenda Velasco: Alright.

Barbara White: That was my aunt that I spoke about that was left behind in Hungary.

Brenda Velasco: Yes.

Barbara White: When the war broke out they were unable to bring her over here. She was raised by relatives in Hungary until she was 16 or 17 years old. In 2003 my sister, my aunt, I and my cousin went back to Hungary to the village that my Aunt Veronica was raised and met the family members that she grew up with and it was really a wonderful trip.

Brenda Velasco: Oh, I'm sure. Did you see any similarities in appearances that would designate.....

Barbara White: Well, I'll tell you, my aunt was 82 at the time. This was the youngest child of my grandmother and grandfather. She was 82 and we visited cousins that were younger than her. My aunt was a spry 82 and the people we visited had the babushkas on and I remember they picked us up in Budapest and drove us out to their village and fed us and fed us and fed us. They killed the chicken that morning. We saw their animals on the farm and it was the best food.

Brenda Velasco: Everything was fresh.

Barbara White: Fresh as could be. Homemade noodle soup with the homemade noodles, chicken paprika, chicken goulash and all the deserts: unbelievable.

Brenda Velasco: I just want to back track, when you say babushkas these are the scarves that many of the Eastern European women wore over their head.

Barbara White: Correct.

Brenda Velasco: My grandmother did that too. Okay, so why did your grandfather settle in Woodbridge?

Barbara White: In Woodbridge?

Brenda Velasco: Yes.

Barbara White: I think his cousin was also here; their name was Balasz. Everyone is gone now.

Brenda Velasco: Alright, so that is what attracted him....

Barbara White: I think that's why he settled here, yes.

Brenda Velasco: Okay and we also had a large Hungarian population at the time.

Barbara White: Exactly.

Brenda Velasco: Did he work in the clay pits?

Barbara White: No, he was a mason.

Brenda Velasco: Okay another good occupation.

4. What physical changes have occurred over the years in the area you lived?

-houses, streets, services, stores, houses of worship, schools, etc.

I don't remember much about Strawberry Hill.

Brenda Velasco: Right, because you were young.

Barbara White: Because like I say I was 6½ when we left there.

Brenda Velasco: Alright, do you want to hit Avenel or Hopelawn?

Barbara White: I remember Meinzer Street throughout the growing up years in the '40s.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Barbara White: As you say, it was the war time and I have a couple of vivid memories of that. There used to be air raids. The sirens would go off at the Steel Equipment, which the property is still there, on Avenel Street.

Brenda Velasco: Right, that was Security Steel.

Barbara White: Security Steel and when those sirens went off you'd set the lights off and you drew the dark shades. I remember one evening my mother was washing my hair in the kitchen sink and as soon as that siren went off my father had to stand with a flashlight above us so my mother could rinse the soap out of my hair. That was one of my early memories. Then I remember when Franklin Delano Roosevelt died all the women on the street came out and were crying and crying and crying. It was like they lost a family member. I remember thinking this must be some special person for everybody to be so affected by his death.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, and you were young at the time, anyhow, but you knew the significance.

Barbara White: Yes, that amazed me. I said this has to be somebody special because the women to be showing such emotion.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, this was in 1945 so you were only about 9 years old, not into politics yet. So that was quite significant.

Barbara White: I went from playing with dolls and bike riding.

Brenda Velasco: Alright, so you had a bike back then?

Barbara White: Oh, yes, and I was an only child until I was 9 years old.

Brenda Velasco: Lucky you in some way.

Barbara White: In some ways but then it had its consequences also. When I was 9 my first sister was born and when I was 10 my second sister was born.

Brenda Velasco: Oh, wow!

Barbara White: So I did a lot of babysitting.

Brenda Velasco: Yes you did.

Barbara White: And then I had a reputation as a babysitter so consequently everybody on the block who needed a babysitter, I remember babysitting from the time I was 11 years old.

Brenda Velasco: Alright, now how many people were on the block where you lived?

Barbara White: When we moved in I would say there were six houses on the block. Then they started selling the farmland off and homes were being built; but all through the '40s it was quite barren. We all had vegetable gardens and fruit trees and walked a lot. We walked to school.

Brenda Velasco: What school did you attend back then?

Barbara White: #5 on Avenel Street. I remember we would walk to school in the morning, walk home for lunch, walk back after lunch and thought nothing of it except in the winter when there was snow on the ground. Avenel Street, where the railroad tracks went over, there was an elevation, it was a short cut; but we couldn't use that in the winter because the boys would be waiting at the other end with the snowballs and wouldn't let us come up the steps. So we would have to take the long way round on Avenel Street. So we were not too pleased when it snowed. I remember we went to school in the snow. There weren't as many snow days. I remember the snow storm of 1947. The school was closed then. Next to the school was St. Andrew's church. We were very involved with the church also. I remember walking to church and like every fourth step you would sink down in the snow. Your whole leg would sink in the snow; but we went to church. It must have been during Lent because I remember every Friday we would go to the Stations of the Cross.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, that's Lent then.

Barbara White: I don't remember the date of the snow storm but it had to be February or March.

Brenda Velasco: It could have been in February or March.

Barbara White: Of '47.

Brenda Velasco: We'll have to check on that. Alright, so St. Andrew's Church was there by that time.

Barbara White: Yes, a smaller church.

Brenda Velasco: Alright, and was there a train stop in Avenel?

Barbara White: Oh, yes. I believe so, yes.

Brenda Velasco: What about the services? Did Avenel have bus service or were there public buses then?

Barbara White: No. 54 on Rahway Avenue and ran into Perth Amboy, from Woodbridge to Perth Amboy. I have another story connected with the bus. When I was telling you about my husband and when we were dating in 1953, high school back then we had split session.....

Brenda Velasco: And that was?

Barbara White: That was in 1950, well I guess I started high school in '50 or '51. Freshmen and sophomores had afternoon sessions and juniors and seniors had the morning session which meant you had two choices. You either had a job or you stayed for extracurricular activities. Unfortunately, I went to work and rode the No. 54 bus into Perth Amboy. My uncle, who was a businessman in Perth Amboy, I guess he was very instrumental on getting me a part-time job after school at Schlesinger's Insurance Company in Perth Amboy on Market Street, no Maple Street I believe. I was about the only Woodbridge High School girl that went in. Usually, Perth Amboy girls, after school, walked to their part-time jobs there.

Brenda Velasco: Right.

Barbara White: We worked for 50 cents an hour.

Brenda Velasco: Wow!

Barbara White: We worked Saturday mornings also. We went in on Saturday mornings and for a big treat we would buy a blouse in one of the stores on Smith Street there. You can get a blouse for 50 cents at that time also and then go to Coney Island Restaurant for our lunch for the famous Coney Island hotdogs which I still have a taste for.

Brenda Velasco: So you have some good memories back then?

Barbara White: Oh, yes.

Brenda Velasco: So which high school did you walk to, the one on Barron Avenue?

Barbara White: Barron Avenue.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, that was the high school at that time.

Barbara White: Yes and in 2004, when we had our 50th high school reunion, well Friday night we went to a football game, then Saturday morning we met at Barron Avenue School which is the Middle School at this point, for a tour of the school. Every person was so shocked how small everything seemed, how small the lockers were, and in our minds we envisioned everything much larger than it really is.

Brenda Velasco: How our perspective changes, doesn't it. (Golden Bears)

Barbara White: Exactly.

Brenda Velasco: Now when you were in high school where did they play football? Because you were at the Barron Avenue High School which was the only Woodbridge high school at the time.

Barbara White: Right.

Brenda Velasco: Where did they play football? Do you remember?

Barbara White: I believe the field was where it is now, by the current high school.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, because you also had a semi-pro football team coming in by the end of the '40s, I think.

Barbara White: I don't recall.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, alright, so let's get back to Avenel.

Barbara White: Okay.

Brenda Velasco: We've got the houses of worship, we've got School No. 5 which you attended; what about the stores?

Barbara White: There was a corner store, a family owned store, on Rahway Avenue, the end of Meinzer Street, the corner of Coddington Avenue and Rahway Avenue owned by the Gorsky family, a very, very nice woman. Of course at this time money was very, very tight and my mother had the two little children then and it was my job to go to the store almost every day for the meat that my mother needed for that evenings meal and the stores, at that time, allowed you to run up a tab, as they called it. If you didn't have the money you just kept track and you paid them so much a week or whatever you could afford at the time. We were one of the families that also did this. I don't know how many years this went on but it was through the war and so forth and finally the Gorsky family had to give up the store because people owed them so much money. I think they built a home in South Plainfield and moved to South Plainfield. I remember my mother and father driving over there to pay Mrs. Gorsky the rest of her bill, everything that she owed her, and Mrs. Gorsky was amazed. She said "you're one of the few people that were that responsible".

Brenda Velasco: And honest.

Barbara White: Yes, honest.

Brenda Velasco: So you were brought up with some very good values.

Barbara White: Well everybody was at that time.

Brenda Velasco: And some good role models.

Barbara White: Everybody was.

Brenda Velasco: Let's see, services, what did the Township.....

Barbara White: May I interrupt you?

Brenda Velasco: Oh, yes.

Barbara White: I still am friends with Chester Gorsky, the son. He married Maryann Gizaleski who was also raised in Avenel who I was a Sodality member with, we were very active in St. Andrew's Sodality years and years ago. They're still together. They just moved to Wyoming two years ago. They had moved from South Plainfield to Pennsylvania. They had a tree farm in Pennsylvania for a number of years and they moved to Wyoming. A matter of fact, I told her I was going out to Reno this May and she said "well then you're going to come up to our place from Reno – you're not going home to New Jersey".

Brenda Velasco: Why did they move to Wyoming?

Barbara White: I don't know why they picked Wyoming.

Brenda Velasco: Well you're going to have to visit and find out.

Barbara White: She said she loves it out there.

Brenda Velasco: Wide open spaces.

Barbara White: Exactly.

Brenda Velasco: But let's go back because you mentioned the sodality and not everybody knows what the purpose of that organization and what you did in the Sodality.

Barbara White: That's a group of young girls in the Catholic Church. There's a Rosary Altar Society for the older people which is what I belong to now in Holy Spirit Church in Hopelawn.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Barbara White: But we're very active with young girls, raising money for the church, and I remember once a month we would travel to different churches in the area. I enjoyed that.

Brenda Velasco: Okay and you carried on; as you got older you became a member of the Altar Rosary Society.

Barbara White: And there was always conflict between the young and the old. The Sodality thought "Gee, the Rosary Society people are these elderly people who didn't understand us".

Brenda Velasco: Okay, once again our perspectives change as our circumstances and age change. Alright, what about the Township, did the Township provide any services for you while you lived in Avenel? Did you have garbage collection? Did you have a water supplier or did you have well water?

Barbara White: You know, when you're young, you really don't pay much attention. We had running water and I'm sure there was garbage collection. I also remember there was milk delivery; the old milkman. In the summer, you really had to get that milk out of that milk box on the porch before it turned sour. In the winter, you had to make sure you got it out before it froze. Also Dugan Pastry and Bakery truck would come through. But as far as other things in the house, I mean, you know, that was left to the parents. I didn't pay much attention to that.

Brenda Velasco: Did you have a supermarket or store where you went, such as an A & P, because you did mention that corner store owned by the Gorsky's?

Barbara White: Gee, you know I don't remember. The Cameo was around the corner and also there was another small store. I don't remember the first, as you say, supermarket.

Brenda Velasco: But you know what, you were only 9 or 10 years old. You weren't interested in those things.

Barbara White: I just remember going to a small store because I could walk there.

Brenda Velasco: Where Mom could send you. Yes, because you did a lot of walking

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

There was a post office in Avenel. It was on Avenel Street just before the underpass I was talking about close to the train station.

Brenda Velasco: Was there a library there or did you use the school library?

Barbara White: I remember using the school library.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, how about parks?

Barbara White: There was Avenel Park. That was quite a distance from us.

Brenda Velasco: That was off of Park Avenue by the VFW so that would be quite a distance for somebody your age.

Barbara White: We would ride our bikes there.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Barbara White: You know years ago there was so much freedom for the young people. You could sleigh ride, you could ride your bike, you could let you children go out and tell them, “alright be back by six o’clock” and not worry about them.

Brenda Velasco: We’re going to get to some of the recreation that you did in Avenel but I just want to go back to question #5. Was the firehouse on Route #1 and Avenel Street?

Barbara White: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, so the firehouse was there.

6. What did you do for recreation?

As I said, a lot of walking. As I say, I remember school and work.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, but you also mentioned a bike.

Barbara White: And a bike, yes.

Brenda Velasco: When did you get your first bike then?

Barbara White: Now you’re bringing back other memories. I remember we lived in Avenel. I don’t know how old I was when I disbelieved in Santa Claus.

Brenda Velasco: Alright, so you were after age 6 or 7 maybe.

Barbara White: Yes, I guess right after we moved into the house. My mother, father and I came home, and I guess it was Christmas Eve, from my grandmother’s and when we walked in the house under the Christmas Tree was this bike. If I had any doubts about Santa Claus it wasn’t going to be that year. Santa Claus left that bike there for me. Never realizing my father must have come home and put it together while we were there but I would attest it was Santa Claus till my dying breath that year.

Brenda Velasco: That was a great Christmas for you.

Barbara White: I’ll never forget that.

Brenda Velasco: And your grandmother lived by Strawberry Hill?

Barbara White: Strawberry Hill, right. Every Sunday we all went back to grand mom’s house. By this time my aunts, my mother’s younger sisters, were married and had children but every Sunday we would go to my grandmother’s. And my grandmother, I don’t know how she did it with the homemade noodles hanging in her kitchen and the homemade chicken noodle soup.

Brenda Velasco: Wow! Lucky you.

Barbara White: That was a ritual.

Brenda Velasco: That’s a happy ritual.

Barbara White: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: A delicious ritual. Okay, anything else for recreation?

Barbara White: #11 School in Woodbridge had Friday night dances. I went to Avenel School from 1st to 5th grades; School #5 only went up to 5th grade. Then we went to #11 School in Woodbridge for 6th, 7th, and 8th grades. I know those years, every Friday evening they had dances, with records, the old vinyl records, and the teachers acted as chaperones and the #54 bus that I spoke about?

Brenda Velasco: Right.

Barbara White: I don't know whether this is correct but I'm remembering being given a dime and the bus fare was 5 cents to go from Avenel to Woodbridge and with that dime I would use the bus fare to either take the bus into Woodbridge or save that dime for the bus ride home and the other nickel I would buy a lemon coke.

Brenda Velasco: Prices were different back then.

Barbara White: Prices were different and also the movies in Perth Amboy. By J.J. Bitting, there was a movie house that we used to go to.

Brenda Velasco: Oh, right, the State Theatre. Okay, but that was in Woodbridge right?

Barbara White: Right, right.

Brenda Velasco: So you attended that movie then.

Barbara White: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, near J.J. Bitting. Do you remember what the price was there?

Barbara White: I don't, no I don't.

Brenda Velasco: Did you take the bus there or walk it from where you lived?

Barbara White: That's a long walk.

Brenda Velasco: I know.

Barbara White: Most of the time I would take the bus but like I said, I would hold that nickel back and walk. And you know, everybody says this, the traffic was nothing like it is today. You could walk, almost walk, in the middle of the street halfway. Now a day you wouldn't dare let your child do that.

Brenda Velasco: No.

7. What was the focal point of your community at that time?

In Avenel, for me, it was the school and the church. Oh, another thing I remember, there was a flower shop on the very end of Burnet Street and I remember going to church with my father and, this must have been during the holidays, we would always stop and he would get a carnation for us. If your mother was alive I think you had a pink carnation and if she was deceased it was a white carnation or the other way around.

Brenda Velasco: Okay a pink or white carnation.

Betty White: Pink or white. Oh, and another thing with this Sodality, we always had, what we called, the May crowning, to crown the Blessed Virgin Mary and all the homes had flower gardens and these people would let us come in and take the flowers to decorate the church.

Brenda Velasco: Wow! It must have looked beautiful at the church with fresh flowers.

Barbara White: It was beautiful and I remember that we would ask permission and I mean we would strip their flower gardens and bring the flowers back to church.

Brenda Velasco: That was a large area to decorate.

Barbara White: And some of the people weren't even Catholic but they knew we came around every year to take the flowers out of their gardens. Now I hadn't thought about that in years.

Brenda Velasco: I haven't seen a May crowning in a long time either.

Barbara White: We still have it at our church now.

Brenda Velasco: That's good, Holy Family right?

Barbara White: Holy Spirit.

Brenda Velasco: Holy Spirit, okay.

Barbara White: One other thing, with the Sodality, as I say, when we would visit the churches once a month. When we visited Holy Spirit, Father Kerr was the priest. When we went to the other churches the Sodality girls ran the program and had the refreshments; when we went to Holy Spirit, Father Kerr, you knew he was in charge. I even thought, oh these poor girls, it's not nice to say, but he was really in charge and the church was in the basement. Well, little did I know, I was going to move to Hopelawn and be a parishioner of Holy Spirit. In the meantime, he built the school, he built the church, my children were married in the church and had all the sacraments; baptism, communion, confirmation etc.

Brenda Velasco: Full life cycle.

Barbara White: In that same church where Father Kerr stood out in my mind.

Brenda Velasco: So you have mixed memories.

Barbara White: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: And we'll leave it at that.

Barbara White: He was wonderful when I was a parishioner.

8. *What did you like about living in your section of Woodbridge?*

Brenda Velasco: We're talking about Avenel.

Barbara White: Avenel was a nice place to grow up. I'm sure every section of the Township was nice. My classmates and I reminisced that we lived in the best of times, we really did. Of course, my parents had a hard time because of the war and rationing and everything but we had freedom and you could walk and you could ride your bike and in the winter, I remember sleigh riding. I'm sure the streets were plowed but they left just enough snow on the streets which were perfect for sleigh riding, especially at night.

Brenda Velasco: You had a ball.

Barbara White: We had a ball and my mother used to come out with us. We used to belly flop and go down Meinzer Street and I remember this one time I had my little sister with me and it must have been really an exceptional sleigh riding time because I not only came down Meinzer Street but past Commercial Avenue and came down past my house. So I crashed across the cross section of the streets and my mother happened to be looking out the front door. Well, that was the last time she let me have my sister on the sled with me at night. I thought why is she so upset?

Brenda Velasco: Because your sister was enjoying it.

Barbara White: We had such a good sleigh ride, we went much further. So then after that the parents made sure that someone stayed at the corner there and if there were any cars coming then they would stop them because we were all out sleigh riding, especially in the evening. And if you had a flexible flyer, that was it.

Brenda Velasco: That was the best.

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

Well, everybody must talk about the train wreck.

Brenda Velasco: Yes. Were you able.....

Barbara White: I was in Rahway at the time, would you believe, trying to get into Rahway Hospital. A classmate of ours was hurt in “shop” I believe and was taken to Rahway Hospital. So his sister and I, I think my father drove us there. When we got to the hospital there was all this commotion and visitors weren’t allowed to go in. We didn’t know about the train wreck at the time.

Brenda Velasco: There wasn’t 24-7 news as we have it today.

Barbara White: Exactly. While everyone was in Woodbridge and knowing what was going on, we were annoyed because we couldn’t get into Rahway Hospital. They said under no circumstances, no visitors were allowed at all. We had to come back home. Then after we got home we realized when we heard the news. Another thing, that South Amboy explosion. (May 19, 1950)

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Barbara White: My father and I were in Perth Amboy, he was with me, and I was looking for a gown to buy because we wore gowns in the crowning. The glass started flying from the store fronts and again we didn’t know what happened.

Brenda Velasco: Do you remember the year? It had to be in April or May for the May crowning.

Barbara White: Right.

Brenda Velasco: It was in the spring.

Barbara White: I don’t remember the year.

Brenda Velasco: I’m going to have to look that up. So you experienced two major catastrophes.

Barbara White: Yes, but not knowing at the time what was happening.

Brenda Velasco: Right, and you weren’t eyewitnesses but you experienced the side effects of them.

Barbara White: Can we go back to the schools?

Brenda Velasco: Sure, go ahead.

Barbara White: When we moved to Hopelawn in ’57 No. 10 School, like I said, was right in back of us. This was going to be our starter home, it was a small cape cod, but the school was exceptional and what we wound up doing was just adding on to the house and we stayed there. The neighborhood was fine, the school was great and then we worked very hard to get a bond issue passed, to get all these improvements made to Hopelawn School No. 10. I remember a new furnace and new windows. We really went door to door because we were members of the Home and School Association and really worked with the Board of Education to get this passed. It seemed like not that many years afterwards the Board of Education in their wisdom decided to close schools in the Township. They closed No. 7 School, which was in Fords, and No. 10 School.

Brenda Velasco: Which was in Hopelawn?

Barbara White: Which was in Hopelawn.

Brenda Velasco: And had such a good reputation. Who was the principal?

Barbara White: Miss Fee.

Brenda Velasco: Miss Fee.

Barbara White: Miss Fee and then Mr. Patton. When Miss Fee retired and she was living down the shore, we went down to visit her a few times. She was an exceptional woman. She would stand out with the bell and if you dared step on a blade of grass in front of that school, you were terrified. Of course, I thought that was great.

Brenda Velasco: You weren't a student, you were a parent.

Barbara White: No, I think that was great for the children.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, many people have had these memories of her. She's exceptional.

Barbara White: And then the Board of Education who voted to close these schools, some of the members then moved out of town which really hurt me. One wound up in prison and two moved out of town. Yet they had the authority to close these schools around us.

Brenda Velasco: And they were elected.

Barbara White: But they were elected, I guess.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Barbara White: The school is now a Korean Church and daycare-very, very nice people.

Brenda Velasco: It's still serving the community then.

Barbara White: It's still serving the community. I remember a lot more about Hopelawn schools than I do about Avenel and with the capacity of working with the Home and School we served hot dogs and had band shows and Chinese Auctions and as I say, we weren't a PTA, we were a Home and School Association. One night when I was going to the meeting my husband said "why can't I go - I'm a father" so I said "I don't see why not". He was the first man who attended a Home and School Association meeting and then we got other parents involved. When we had fairs or things going, I mean, you needed the strength of these men and their intuition too for things.

Brenda Velasco: He was a good role model for his children as well.

Barbara White: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Having the male promoting education as well. So that was great.

Barbara White: Oh, another thing they did years ago, there was a fossil dig in Hopelawn. My husband had many interests and many hobbies and I don't know which came first the fossils or the bottles but my son and a few of his friends were digging up by Hopelawn playground and they brought home what looked like a fossil to my husband. So he said, "send it to Rutgers they have a sociology division there". Well we got a letter back that it was 350 million years old and it was outlined and if they had any more. The kids were bringing these fossils and putting them into our garage and my husband was a little annoyed at it but then when he got this letter....

Brenda Velasco: Not any more.

Barbara White: He was up there digging with them.

Brenda Velasco: Right, this was the Rutgers Archeology Department, I believe, because they have a show every year. You bring in what you think and they will categorize it.

Barbara White: So my husband made up a display of all of the fossils. They were identified. He went down to Rutgers and met up with the professors. We made a display case and presented it to, I believe, Mr. Patton was principal at that time and Mary Stankowicz was the librarian. The Hopelawn library was in the school originally. That was another thing that had to be removed when the school was sold.

Brenda Velasco: Right, then the library was.....

Barbara White: In the basement of the school.

Brenda Velasco: Alright, then after that he was by the Hopelawn Firehouse.

Barbara White: Yes, the home next to the firehouse.

Brenda Velasco: Now it's not.

Barbara White: Yes. Hopelawn is sort of the forgotten section. We have been fighting for a post office for years and years and years. We have Perth Amboy's zip code, 08861.

Brenda Velasco: Right.

Barbara White: And consequently we pay higher insurance prices because we're locked into Perth Amboy.

Brenda Velasco: That's interesting because I know I have, living in Colonia, have a zip code that relates to Rahway.

Barbara White: Really.

Brenda Velasco: Yes. We have over five different zip codes in Woodbridge Township. That's the way the federal government worked. But I'm out of Rahway and if you mail your letter from Hopelawn to Colonia, because we're out of Rahway, we will get ours a day later than everybody else.

Barbara White: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: But this is the federal government. That must have been quite interesting for your husband and your son with the fossils.

Barbara White: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: That was great.

Barbara White: There was an article in the paper and they had their pictures in the paper. Then my husband told the reporter to make sure you put in that there are no fossils left; everything has been dug up. He didn't want everybody from here, there and yonder coming and digging up the property.

Brenda Velasco: Very smart.

9. What do you like about Woodbridge today?

I like the services. I like the garbage pickup and the snowplowing. Now they do plow right down to the street surface.

Brenda Velasco: So you're not going to do any more sleigh riding Barbara?

Barbara White: No, my sleigh riding days are over. You got to worry about broken hips and broken arms at this point. Back then you had no worries about that. I often wonder, my mother too, I can still picture her belly flopping but she wouldn't go out until it was dark.

Brenda Velasco: But she enjoyed it too.

Barbara White: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, do you belong to the Community Center at all?

Barbara White: No, I don't. I'm retired but I'm very busy; let me say, I am very active in other things.

Brenda Velasco: You volunteer.

Barbara White: I volunteer and I bowl; I don't know it just snowballs, you just get into one thing and then all of sudden.....

Brenda Velasco: The day is gone.

Barbara White: Right. I look forward to getting up each day because it brings so many surprises. You never know what's going to happen that day, it's never boring.

Brenda Velasco: Well, that's a good attitude to have.

10. Do you have any family members still living in Woodbridge?

Yes, I do. I'm very fortunate where I have both my sisters that I spoke of, they live in Edison; one three miles from me and one six miles from me.

Brenda Velasco: Wow! You are lucky.

Barbara White: Yes. I have three children; my son and two daughters. Bobby lives in that same house on Meinzer Street that I grew up in; he's not married. I have two daughters, Betty and Bonnie, when Betty got married her and her husband first had an apartment and then they bought a condo. They then bought a house and while they were waiting for it they moved back into our home.

Brenda Velasco: Which home?

Barbara White: On Laurel Street in Hopelawn.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Barbara White: This was in the '80s, 1985 or 86. So my son decided it was time for him to move out and I said "look don't feel that you're being forced out" and he said "no, no it's time". But where did he move? Back into the apartment in the house on Strawberry Hill: 40 Benjamin Street, the same place that my mother and father brought me home from the hospital. My son lived in that home and my aunt, who was still in the house downstairs, was physically handicapped. So if she needed anything, with the broom stick, she would knock on the ceiling and then my son would know that she needed something.

Brenda Velasco: You kept that house in the family.

Barbara White: We kept that in the family until two years ago when my aunt sold it and went into St. Joseph's Nursing Home. When my mother passed away in 1975, in 1978 my father went to Florida and we kept the house in the family. As a matter of fact, Lee Beckerman was one of our renters.

Brenda Velasco: Right, he lived in Hopelawn at one time.

Barbara White: No, before that. He lived in the house on Meinzer Street in Avenel.

Brenda Velasco: Wow!

Barbara White: Then he moved to Hopelawn. Yes, small world, isn't it?

Brenda Velasco: Very small world. Okay, in fact, Wendy might be here today.

Barbara White: Oh really, I haven't seen her in years.

Brenda Velasco: And what happened to your daughter Bonnie? Where does she live?

Barbara White: Bonnie lives on Laurel Street. She lives 350 steps away from me because when I walk up there I count the steps. So I'm very fortunate.

Brenda Velasco: You are.

Barbara White: My son is in Avenel, my daughter Betty is in Edison and my daughter Bonnie is in Hopelawn. And I have six grandchildren; two sets of twins. Both daughters had twins and we had five boys in 4 ½ years. When Bonnie's twins were 10 years old, we had our little granddaughter Bethann, who was forced to go to Port Reading School on the bus because Hopelawn School has been closed, you see.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, too bad.

Barbara White: All my grandchildren were bused to school because the school was closed.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, well I thank you very much for the interview.

Barbara White: Thank you for having me recall these memories.

Brenda Velasco: They sound pretty happy. You had some good memories.

Barbara White: Yes, I always say the '40s were the growing up years, the '50s were the teenage and married years, the '60s were my children, the '70s were dealing with teenage children, the '80s were adult children and marriages, the '90s were my grandchildren and now in 2000 I'm living as a widow; so I've gone the whole spectrum.

Brenda Velasco: You've gone the whole spectrum but you have a great attitude on life.

Barbara White: It's been a good life, very good life.

Brenda Velasco: Well, I thank you very much and as I said we will have to have the written transcript but the recording and written transcript will be available in the Main Library as well as our future historical museum for all the generations of Whites that are to come.

Barbara White: Very good. Thank you very much.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, thank you.