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Oral History Interview

Betty Bandics Szilagyi

WH014

(written transcript and digital audio)

On Friday, August 22, 2008 at 11:15 A.M. Betty Bandics Szilagyi was interviewed at her home on 27 Woodview Avenue in Fords by Brenda Velasco.

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

My full name is Betty Bandics Szilagyi. I was born on April 3, 1932.

Brenda Velasco: So the year you were born was 1932?

Betty Szilagyi: Yes 1932, April 3rd. I came here as a ten day old infant and we lived in that house.

Brenda Velasco: So you lived in Woodbridge then?

Betty Szilagyi: 76 years.

Brenda Velasco: 76 years young.

2. How long have you lived in Woodbridge – Fords?

I live at 27 Woodview Avenue in Fords. I have been in this house for 54 years.

Originally I lived at 22 Oakland Avenue which is the house directly behind me and I moved into that house when I was ten days old. That was in 1932 – April, 1932. I really have not moved out of the area.

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

Actually I'm not sure. It seems like my mother's parents came over from Europe and they settled originally into the clay bank area, I guess it's bordering on Edison off King George Post Road off that area. Then they brought the property directly behind me and they built a house. That was 1912.

Brenda Velasco: So your family goes back. You're the third generation.

Betty Szilagyi: Right, 1912 was when they built that house behind me and that was where I was raised as a child.

Brenda Velasco: That was on Oakland Avenue?

Betty Szilagyi: Yes, 22 Oakland Avenue.

Brenda Velasco: You mentioned that your maternal grandparents came from Europe. What part of Europe?

Betty Szilagyi: Hungary.

Brenda Velasco: Hungary? We know that Fords has had a large contingent of Hungarian immigrants who have come to Fords.

Betty Szilagyi: Yes, so much Hungarians. Really, really so many.

Brenda Velasco: What type of work did they do?

Betty Szilagyi: Well my grandfather worked in the clay banks. I guess they dug the clay out of the pits and everything and my grandmother worked in Johnson & Johnson and she

was rolling bandages and so forth and then she also worked in the cigar factory. That was my grandmother – my mother’s mom.

Brenda Velasco: That was your grandmother who worked at Johnson & Johnson and then the cigar factory? Where was this cigar factory?

Betty Szilagyi: There was one in Perth Amboy and there was another one in New Brunswick.

Brenda Velasco: I was not aware of that. And Johnson & Johnson where was that?

Betty Szilagyi: New Brunswick.

Brenda Velasco: New Brunswick? So how did they commute there?

Betty Szilagyi: Trolleys.

Brenda Velasco: So they commuted by trolleys.

Betty Szilagyi: She was also a walker.

Brenda Velasco: And they did a lot more walking back then.

Betty Szilagyi: Oh dear, yes. She used to walk from here across this property which was vacant at the time to the church in Perth Amboy – Holy Trinity. That was the old Holy Trinity Church. It’s still called Holy Trinity now.

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

Oh many, many, many. It seemed to have just simply built up. There were houses put on like every available piece of property and then they gave us roads. We had dirt roads before and they paved our roads. That was somewhere I believe in the ‘40s when we got the roads. The asphalt roads not you know concrete. Like I say everything just seemed to be a building boom; every available piece of property was built on.

Brenda Velasco: Was this after World War II or before World War II?

Betty Szilagyi: It seems like after.

Brenda Velasco: So this is when Fords really developed?

Betty Szilagyi: Oh, yea, definitely.

Brenda Velasco: After World War II.

Betty Szilagyi: And not only here but like off Ford Avenue. There I mean like they built developments and it was incredible. Oh so many many houses.

Brenda Velasco: What about schools?

Betty Szilagyi: We had No 7 School which was on King George Road. That’s no longer a school. Here we had No. 14 School; that’s where I started. In 1937, I started there in 1st grade. We had no kindergarten. I can still remember my first teacher. Her name was Lillian Kistrup and she was so kind to me. I could still remember that. I was my mother’s only child after 14 years of marriage and I was very attached to my mother, so of course when I went to school I cried for months after that. My mother had to stand in the hallway so I could see her and Mrs. Kistrup was very kind to me. She really helped me through all that.

Brenda Velasco: You’ve got some good memories.

Betty Szilagyi: Dear God, I certainly do. I can tell you every one of my teachers. There was Panty McCorej for 2nd grade. The 3rd grade was Mrs. Svoboda, Helen Svoboda. 4th grade was, and she was teaching even I think when my kids went to school, Georganna Krontz, and 5th grade I had Gertrude Sharp which was the wife of the principal Howard Sharp and they lived on King George Road in this great big house. I don’t think it’s there

anymore though, that particular house. 6th grade I had Hazel Delhouly. Then for 7th and 8th grade, we went to No. 7 School. We had changing classes and so forth.

Brenda Velasco: So that was at School No. 7 which no longer exists. It's now an office building. Then where did you go to high school?

Betty Szilagyi: Woodbridge High School for four years, double session. When you were a freshman and sophomore, you went in the afternoon. We went from 12 Noon to 5:00 P.M. approximately. Then when you were a junior and senior you went in the morning, I think, like 8:00 A.M. to 12 Noon. It was a split session and I graduated on the Legion Field.

Brenda Velasco: On Legion Field?

Betty Szilagyi: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: That's where the graduation exercises were held? So people from Fords still would go to Woodbridge High School today but now we have three different high schools.

Betty Szilagyi: Exactly, yes. I went to the regular one, the one that was on Barron Avenue. I can still remember the inside of that school.

Brenda Velasco: Right. Right. We have to remember that that was the high school back then.

Betty Szilagyi: Yes that was the high school then and now it's a junior high school I think.

Brenda Velasco: Yes it is. We call them middle schools right now. How about stores?

Betty Szilagyi: Oh my. At that time I don't believe we had any mall like, per say, Woodbridge or Menlo but we had so many nice Mom and Pop stores. We had one right up on Hansen Avenue that used to deliver your groceries if you wanted them to. We had butcher shops right on New Brunswick Avenue. We had an A&P right on New Brunswick Avenue.

Brenda Velasco: So New Brunswick Avenue was the place?

Betty Szilagyi: Oh, it was so busy. You can't believe how we had so many stores. We had a movie house, a nice movie house. We had two hardware stores and the Post Office. We had a candy store, Furbals Candy Store. We had a 5 and 10, Metzgers 5 and 10. They still live in Colonia, at least some of them do, the Metzgers.

Brenda Velasco: Metzgers?

Betty Szilagyi: Yes, that was Metzgers 5 and 10.

Brenda Velasco: So you didn't have to go out of your community really?

Betty Szilagyi: No, we just walked right down.

Brenda Velasco: And that's what everybody did, they walked?

Betty Szilagyi: Everybody did, they walked. If you wanted to go into Perth Amboy we used to go on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturdays to the market to get all the fresh stuff from the farmers and live chickens.

Brenda Velasco: You bought live chickens?

Betty Szilagyi: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Then you had to pluck them?

Betty Szilagyi: Yes. My mother, I think, she'd turn over in her grave if she saw me buying packages now.

Brenda Velasco: But so much easier.

Betty Szilagyi: She'd say to me, honey you don't know what that was like when it was alive. It could have been diseased.

Brenda Velasco: So then there were three days for the market in Perth Amboy?

Betty Szilagyi: The market, yes. We used to go Tuesday mornings, Thursday mornings and Saturday mornings. There were two markets actually. One was on New Brunswick Avenue and the other one was on Smith Street: Smith and Oak, I believe it was. But that's where you went to get your order. Oh, bunches of women used to come with their great big bags and their live chickens on the bus.

Betty Velasco: So you took the bus to Perth Amboy then?

Betty Szilagyi: Yes. There was the No. 4 and No. 6.

Betty Velasco: Your memory is very good.

Betty Szilagyi: It is. I remember the No. 82 being later on. There was a No. 82 bus I used to go up to Hall Avenue. That was when I was a little bit older.

Brenda Velasco: How about houses of worship?

Betty Szilagyi: Actually I don't remember any new ones being opened. Also I don't know if you talked about schools. We had some parochial schools. We had Our Lady of Peace and I think there was a Lutheran School on Fourth Street in Fords.

Brenda Velasco: On Fourth Street?

Betty Szilagyi: Yea, well Our Lady of Peace, I think, that school is really technically in Edison. House of worship we had Our Lady of Peace Church which eventually in the '50s blossomed into a brand new bigger church, and we had the St. Nicholas Church on Second Street which eventually used to make the old Hungarian and Slovak goodies downstairs on a Friday.

Brenda Velasco: Wow!

Betty Szilagyi: Yea, that was on Second Street. Then we had the Lutheran Church on Fourth Street. Over on Hoy Avenue we had a Presbyterian Church, Slovak Presbyterian. I'm trying to think, I don't think we had any Jewish church.

Brenda Velasco: So you didn't have any synagogues?

Betty Szilagyi: Not to my knowledge, no. We had a great bowling alley in Fords.

Brenda Velasco: Where was that located?

Betty Szilagyi: Right on New Brunswick Avenue, a couple of steps down from the movie. It was Bacskay's. They had a lumber mill and everything, Bacskay. They owned that building, they owned the bowling alley, they had a restaurant and they had a bar.

Brenda Velasco: They had quite a bit.

Betty Szilagyi: Yea, and that was all in one building.

Brenda Velasco: They had the bowling alley, the restaurant and a bar plus there was a lumber mill that they owned?

Betty Szilagyi: The lumber mill was behind it. Their lumber mill faced, it burned down eventually, on King George Road after Dunkin Donuts. I used to remember going there for supplies for the house. That was still there in 1954, I remember that. We had candy kitchens here and we had places where kids could kind of like feel comfortable. We had pharmacies, Poohans and Katz.

Brenda Velasco: You had two pharmacies then?

Betty Szilagyi: Yep, right on one block. Katz was on the corner of Corielle and New Brunswick. They had a nice fountain and everything and then down the street, just a few

stores down maybe six or seven stores down, there was Poohans. In fact, both of those men lived in Fords.

Brenda Szilagyi: The owners lived in Fords? You had a self-contained community.

Betty Szilagyi: We did. We had our meats here, we had bus service, and we had a place to play, just like everything. Everything was like right here. It's kind of changed you know, but we had a lot of nice things. We had butcher stores with fresh meat right on New Brunswick Avenue there. Really nice. We had a bakery.

Brenda Velasco: You had far more back then than what you have now.

Betty Szilagyi: Oh absolutely. We don't even have a bakery really.

Brenda Velasco: No, I know. Fords doesn't have a bakery.

Betty Szilagyi: We had Eisner's Bakery. They lived here in Fords, too, the Eisners. We had that bakery here. It was like right on the borderline kind of like Edison and on a Sunday morning you couldn't get into that bakery. Everybody from church would be coming over there standing in line and then 8:00 at night they used to make their rye bread and you could smell it and the people would be rushing down 8:00 at night and get this real hot rye bread. You couldn't slice it.

Brenda Velasco: No, but you could smell it and you could think in another hour maybe, but it smelled good. I just want to go back to something you mentioned, candy kitchens?

Betty Szilagyi: Yea, we had Furbals. They had a fountain there. We had one in Poohan's Drug Store. It was actually maybe not the same. We had Kayberts when I was working already. That was like in the late late '40s we had a place called Kayberts Candy Kitchen right on New Brunswick Avenue.

Brenda Velasco: And you called them candy kitchens?

Betty Szilagyi: Well, that one was a candy store but the other ones were drug stores with nice fountains where you could go in for ice cream and everything. We had Furbals which I worked for. Dave Pavlowsky was Ceil Furbals husband. We had Furbals, we had eventually Kayberts, across the way there we had Katz's Drug Store where there was a nice fountain and we had Poohans where there was a nice fountain. It was nice.

Brenda Velasco: And with the candy kitchen was it like a candy store?

Betty Szilagyi: Actually no, it wasn't a candy store it was kind of like for sweets. I could go in for a snack and stuff.

Brenda Velasco: Sweets and snacks then?

Betty Szilagyi: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Because usually I haven't heard that term.

Betty Szilagyi: Candy kitchen?

Brenda Velasco: Yea.

Betty Szilagyi: Oh actually maybe I mean you wouldn't even describe it as a candy kitchen but that was the only thing that was nearest to a candy kitchen I could think of.

Brenda Velasco: And you go in there for your snacks, your candy and anything like pastries maybe?

Betty Szilagyi: They had pastries and coffee.

Brenda Velasco: So coffee and pastries.

Betty Szilagyi: In fact, they lived in Colonia. Their name was Knutsen. Her name was Kaybert. They got that from one of the names but their name was Knutsen and they owned that, Kayberts. We had a lot of bars also but nobody went into bars here.

Brenda Velasco: Not when you were a teenager.

Betty Szilagyi: No.

Brenda Velasco: Bars were pretty constant throughout going back then?

Betty Szilagyi: Oh yea, we had a lot of them. We had two on one block near the pharmacies. We had another one on the next block over and the next block over we had another one. We had a lot of them. Sam's Bar and Grill, that was still in existence up to a couple of years ago.

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

We had a firehouse. In fact, that's a new development. We have a beautiful firehouse on King George Road. Originally it was on Corielle Street in Fords that was across from what used to be the library.

Brenda Velasco: So you've seen a lot of changes?

Betty Szilagyi: Oh I have. I have. You know I would like to go back. We'll miss them again really and on New Brunswick Avenue we had the Post Office.

Brenda Velasco: Is it still in the same area?

Betty Szilagyi: Yes, it is still in the same area; they moved up there.

Brenda Velasco: So the Post Office is still on New Brunswick Avenue? That's the original location?

Betty Szilagyi: No, it moved up the road a couple of blocks and it's like a nice new building.

Brenda Velasco: But it was still located on New Brunswick Avenue and is today.

Betty Szilagyi: Yes, in fact I don't even know if we had mail delivery at that time. I remember going to the Post Office with a box number. I don't even know if we had mail delivery at that time. I'm not sure.

Brenda Velasco: When we look at which public buildings were there, you mentioned the Post Office and the firehouse. What about the library, where was the library originally located?

Betty Szilagyi: It seemed like the library was originally located in that little tiny building on Corielle Street across from the firehouse.

Brenda Velasco: And that's where the Fords Women's Club was?

Betty Szilagyi: Yes. Yes. And then of course they built a great big beautiful library on Ford Avenue.

Brenda Velasco: Do you recall when that was built?

Betty Szilagyi: Off hand, no.

Brenda Velasco: And then Parks because you live right down the street from a Park.

Betty Szilagyi: Yes this was here, oh, many, many, many years. In fact, there was a point when there was grass there, like nice grass and everything and a man up on Beech Street used to have cows. He used to bring the cows down into the field here and they grazed all day and then he brought them home at night. We had buttercups and daisies and everything in that field. Then right adjacent to it where the basketball court is right now, we had a big beautiful pond and we used to go ice skating there in the winter. There were two big trees there. Years ago when I was growing up this was like woods. We had a lot of wildlife and everything. Whatever was here would come out and see you. Then we had Fords Park, as far as I can remember.

Brenda Velasco: So this is Woodview Park then?

Betty Szilagyi: I think they called it Woodview with Land Park. That was here since I was a teenager. We used to play volleyball on it.

Brenda Velasco: Then you have Fords Park.

Betty Szilagyi: Fords Park. That's about all we had.

Brenda Velasco: That's a County park. Did you have Warren Park at that time in Fords?

Betty Szilagyi: At that point I don't remember. Well that's like out of Fords.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, very close to Perth Amboy.

Betty Szilagyi: I don't know if we had that one or not.

6. What did you do for recreation?

You wouldn't believe. We had a lot of recreation. Well I wasn't allowed into the bowling alley. My mother didn't like that idea although my father used to go. I used to point out to her you know that it was okay that Daddy would be there, too. We had the movie, we had the bowling alley, and we had candy kitchens and little restaurants. We had Lopes and different little places that you could go into that they didn't discourage children going into. Then we had a lot of picnic groves and in the summertime we, right up the street here on I think Woodlands, the other Woodlands on Mary, we had a picnic grove. We had another one off Ford Avenue called Varady's Grove and that's all houses now; that's no longer. We had those two and the churches had carnivals and dances. It was like even our church, before the new church was built, they always had a beautiful carnival there in June, always.

Brenda Velasco: What church was that?

Betty Szilagyi: Our Lady of Peace.

Brenda Velasco: Our Lady of Peace. Do they have a carnival still?

Betty Szilagyi: I think they still have it in their parking lot. Oh and St. Nicholas on Second Street used to have also their carnival. It was, you know, active and on top of that you know like within the neighborhood everybody was like more close knit. We used to roller skate up and down the street and bike ride up and down the street and it was fun. We had a lot to do. Then we had baseball games that we used to, you know, go to over here. It was a lot to do. It was a nice upbringing really. We didn't have the conveniences like we do now, you know, like turning your heat up and watching the heat go up from gas heat. We had to shovel the coal and stuff but it was a nice life, it was.

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

People would gather actually only at the picnics I would think. I don't remember much gathering actually.

Brenda Velasco: But you'd see people on New Brunswick Avenue at the local stores?

Betty Szilagyi: Oh yea.

Brenda Velasco: And church?

Betty Szilagyi: Yes, church and church had dances and picnics, picnics up at Varady's and over here. We actually had no focal point really.

Brenda Velasco: Because Town Hall was down in Woodbridge Proper then.

Betty Szilagyi: Yea.

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

I think everything. Even now really I like it here. Of course I've been here 76 years. I really like it.

Brenda Velasco: It's beautifully quiet.

Betty Szilagyi: It is quiet and my backyard is like a haven. We can't plant grass there because of too many trees but it's small. It's very small. The only thing is it's just like peaceful, very peaceful. Very nice.

Brenda Velasco: You know coming on this block you wouldn't realize we're the most densely populated state of the 50 states and Woodbridge has a population of over 100,000 people and you look out your front window.

Betty Szilagyi: And there's nothing there.

Brenda Velasco: There's nothing there Betty. It's just all green grass and some trees.

Betty Szilagyi: We wanted to move, when I first got married to my second husband, off of Ford Avenue into a development but it just didn't work out so we didn't.

Brenda Velasco: Are you happy you didn't?

Betty Szilagyi: Yes. Yes. This was my home and behind me was my home too. My grandparents and my parents you know.

Brenda Velasco: Who lives in those homes now?

Betty Szilagyi: Actually behind here my father lived in there until he passed. My mother passed first and then he passed and then of course the house became mine and I gave it to my son. My son renovated it and added more something to it. Then he moved into Edison into this great big, very pretty house. He rented it for a while but renters in a house don't always work. Then my daughter-in-law's parents, my soon to be former daughter-in-law, but anyhow they lived in Kearney and they wanted to leave Kearney so they moved behind us right here. They bought the house from them.

Brenda Velasco: So it's all in the family?

Betty Szilagyi: It's in the family, yea. What did my son call it? Senile alley.

Brenda Velasco: Oh, boy!

Betty Szilagyi: No it wasn't senile it was another word but it was nice because she had children.

Brenda Velasco: That was the house on Oakland?

Betty Szilagyi: Oakland Avenue, yea.

Brenda Velasco: That was 12 Oakland?

Betty Szilagyi: No 22.

Brenda Velasco: 22, okay.

Betty Szilagyi: Now they sold it. Actually both parents died. They sold it to a couple with two children. I know he's a plumber but I really don't know them.

Brenda Velasco: So it's still family occupied?

Betty Szilagyi: No.

Brenda Velasco: Not your family.

Betty Szilagyi: Not my family.

Brenda Velasco: But another family because it's ideal. This whole neighborhood is ideal to live in.

Betty Szilagyi: Actually here it's me, the people next door which didn't always live there. They were here over 40 years but I mean originally somebody else was there. Out of this whole neighborhood, I think there are only about four families from the original from when I was a child that are still here. Everybody else has moved out.

Brenda Velasco: So you've had a change in the neighborhood?

Betty Szilagyi: Oh definitely, yes. Across the street from here there used to be, I think, the Lions Club built it. It was a great big beautiful wading pond. When my kids were very small, I have a son now who's going to be 48, I could just walk over there with him and his sister and have them wade in the wading pool. It was very nice.

Brenda Velasco: That was right across the street?

Betty Szilagyi: Right across the street. Now I see the pipe coming out where the water used to be draining out of it. It was very, very nice.

Brenda Velasco: And that was built by the Lions Club?

Betty Szilagyi: I think it was the Lions Club but I know it was here in the early '60s and eventually there was a rash, I guess, of children that were not exactly best behaved, vandalism and so forth, and they kept vandalizing it and they finally filled it in. It's a shame because you know. Of course we don't have any children of that age any more here.

Brenda Velasco: That was in the '60s when it was closed?

Betty Szilagyi: I think late '60s it was because in the mid-'60s it was in full swing. There was a little shelter there with like sand boxes over it. It was nice.

Brenda Velasco: That was ideal.

Betty Szilagyi: Oh it was perfect. I wouldn't like to leave my little one. I had to bring the little one with me but I used to go over with my son. He loved it. He had little things to play in and oh it was nice.

Brenda Velasco: Very nice.

Betty Szilagyi: I like it here. I really do.

Brenda Velasco: We should also say you were the secretary of the mayor at one time too.

Betty Szilagyi: Two mayors.

Brenda Velasco: Two mayors?

Betty Szilagyi: I came into Town Hall in 1974 as secretary to, who was a judge, Alan Rockoff. He was the Director of Law. I came in as a secretary and Alan left and Arthur Burgess came in. He's still an attorney in Colonia I believe and his office is in Woodbridge. I stayed there and then that was through two terms and then in 1980, Joe DeMarino got to be mayor. He had no secretary, per say. He was interviewing girl after girl after girl. In the meantime, they were disbanding the Law Department so I was kind of like in between there and he asked me if I would like to be his secretary. I said of course. I was a little nervous because I never did something like that and then I stayed with him for I believe it was two terms. He went out and then he came back in and I was his secretary again. Then when Jim McGreevey came in he asked me if I would stay as his secretary and I did. Actually it was three mayors.

Brenda Velasco: Yea, three mayors.

Betty Szilagyi: I really wasn't secretary to Jack Cassidy. Jack Cassidy had, her name was Ethel Hanson. I'll never forget that. She lived on Church Street and she was secretary there but I was still secretary in the Law Department. I loved my time in Town Hall. I spent a lot of time there and I hesitated to leave. My husband said you can't really stay anymore because, you know, I was over 60 and he said you're costing me money by working.

Brenda Velasco: So that's why you eventually left because I remember you were there for awhile.

Betty Szilagyi: A long time.

Brenda Velasco: Yea.

Betty Szilagyi: I know it was 30 years really.

Brenda Velasco: 30 years, wow!

Betty Szilagyi: Before that I worked as a teacher's aide in School No. 14. We had Mr. Kaniff. I don't know if you remember Jim Kaniff?

Brenda Velasco: No.

Betty Szilagyi: Oh God he was such a great principal really. You know it was so perfect for us.

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

As far as significant things that happened the one bad thing I remember was the train wreck in Woodbridge. That was bad. That was so bad.

Brenda Velasco: Did you witness it?

Betty Szilagyi: Actually, no. Only after, you know, like we didn't go over to see it either. We didn't have anything else significant in Fords.

Brenda Velasco: Except for paving of the roads. That's a big thing and all the development that you had here.

Betty Szilagyi: We had to get the ducks off the pond and the cows off the grass. I was thinking about that yesterday. The really bad time was when World War II started. I remember I was 9 years old and I remember that Sunday we were visiting somebody. My father picked me and my mother up and he was very somber and he said we were in trouble. He said the Japanese had invaded Pearl Harbor. It was like I didn't quite register what they were, the Japanese were, that invaded Pearl Harbor but as time went on I learned that the terrible changes that were going to be in your life as a result of this. In the first place my father was 41. I guess he was worried about going into the service.

Brenda Velasco: Did he go into the service?

Betty Szilagyi: No. No he didn't. You know what they did, him and his younger brother, they worked in Ritchie Radiator. My father was a finisher of sanitary ware and he worked there during the daytime. At night they had military jobs in Carteret Ordinance. They had an Ordinance Depot in Carteret where they were shipping supplies overseas and he and his younger brother, George, they did the night shift for that. They were loading the boxes for shipment overseas. He worked there from, I think, 6:00 P.M. to 1:00 A.M. or 6:00 P.M. to 12 Midnight. Something like that.

Brenda Velasco: Wow, so he was gone a long time. How old were you then Betty?

Betty Szilagyi: Let me see that was 1941. I was about 12 years old.

Brenda Velasco: So he had two jobs. Did your mother work?

Betty Szilagyi: My mother worked in the cigar factory when she was young and then she took a job very briefly in the Molded Fashions coat factory. It was on Grace Street right where Councilman Dalina owns a house and she worked there very briefly because my father did not want her to work.

Brenda Velasco: So basically she was a housewife.

Betty Szilagyi: She was a housewife, a great homemaker. She sewed without a pattern. She cooked without a recipe. She chopped wood. She painted. She cut the grass. I mean my mother was wow. I will never compare to what she was.

Brenda Velasco: What was the name of the factory?

Betty Szilagyi: Molded Fashions. It was on Grace Street in Fords and I remember her job. They had the Chesterfield coats at that time and they had a velvet collar on the Chesterfield coat. She sewed those by hand. I remember that. Then my father said no no no I don't want you to work. But aside from that it was a time in your life when you don't realize how bad it's going to get. All of a sudden, like all the boys who like were older than you that you were friendly with in the neighborhood, got drafted and so many of my cousins, gone over to points unknown, for you know, to serve in the service – Army, Navy whatever. Then we had rationing. We had gas rationing. We had sugar rationing. We had meat rationing. We had to watch what we would buy because we had all coupons to hand in and the bad part was, which used to scare me, the man across the street, his name was Peterson, Adolf Peterson and he lived there like forever and ever. He was the air raid warden designated for our area and he used to go up and down the street at night with his hard hat on and a flashlight and make sure that everybody had their shades drawn so that if an aircraft came over they shouldn't see lights. I mean that scared me. You're waiting for, you know, the biggest disaster of your life to start.

Brenda Velasco: Yea, and you were young.

Betty Szilagyi: I was very young.

Brenda Velasco: And very impressionable.

Betty Szilagyi: That was in 1942 or 1943, right around there. I was like maybe 10, 11 or 12 but it still was very impressionable. My father never did go into the service.

Brenda Velasco: He was very fortunate.

Betty Szilagyi: Yes, he was.

10. What do you like about Woodbridge today or your section of Fords?

Just about everything really. Our services are good. Even like the sanitation services. The street sweeper comes in once a week and cleans the street. The services are good definitely, and then they have the different pickups, special pickups, and all so that's good. Actually it's not much change from the atmosphere of before except for our houses. It's still what I always liked about Woodbridge. It's just like part of my life, my own life. Of course, I've never known anything else, but to me I like it.

Brenda Velasco: And you feel safe here?

Betty Szilagyi: Yea, I do. I don't know why but I do. I mean I don't go out on my street you know like at night because there is so much happening everywhere you know so you really don't tempt anything. But I feel safe here, really.

Brenda Velasco: Do you belong to any of the senior clubs or anything?

Betty Szilagyi: I belong to the Market Square in Perth Amboy and then I belong to the Widow and Widowers in Woodbridge. Of course I have my family. My daughters come over you know to visit and my son comes to visit and it's nice. I don't have anybody to babysit anymore because they're all grown up. I used to like that. Two days a week I used to make a nice meal and everybody chose what they wanted. I used to make the meal and the kids used to come over after school and they used to eat you know. We like

played games and all of a sudden they're grown up. My grandson is 17, my granddaughter is going to be 13 and those are the only two around here.

Brenda Velasco: And their tastes and everything changes.

Betty Szilagyi: Yea, oh yea. My grandson asked me a couple of weeks ago to make stuffed cabbage and I said I promise you I will as soon as I get to buy the cabbage that's not curly.

Brenda Velasco: So he's waiting?

Betty Szilagyi: You can't roll curly cabbage. I did make it. I made it two weeks ago. I like to please him. He's a very polite boy. He's looking forward to going to Columbia.

Brenda Velasco: Terrific.

Betty Szilagyi: Yea, he wants to be a brain surgeon.

Brenda Velasco: Oh, that is great.

Betty Szilagyi: Brilliant, brilliant boy. He makes me feel retarded.

Brenda Velasco: He's part of your family.

Betty Szilagyi: Meanwhile his sister is a sports fan. She likes her softball so she's hoping to make it big in sports, in softball.

11. Do you have family members still living in Woodbridge:

No.

Brenda Velasco: Because you son moved to Edison.

Betty Szilagyi: Edison. My one daughter moved to Cape May.

Brenda Velasco: Oh, lovely.

Betty Szilagyi: Yea and trying to talk me into going there too. I said how will I ever carry my piano, and my other daughter lives in New Hampshire.

Brenda Velasco: Oh, they are all scattered now.

Betty Szilagyi: Yea, they're scattered. She found a job in Winchester Hospital there and she answered the ad and she liked it. She's been there ever since, 14 years I think it is. She found a husband there and got married.

Brenda Velasco: Beautiful place to live or a beautiful place to visit.

Betty Szilagyi: Visit, not live. I don't think I could do the streets with the ice and everything.

Brenda Velasco: No, no different weather up there. Winters are brutal up there.

Betty Szilagyi: Brutal, brutal. Sometimes it takes her hours to get home really.

Brenda Velasco: No, our winters are bad enough. Okay, is there anything else that we failed to cover do you think?

Betty Szilagyi: I don't think so.

Brenda Velasco: We also didn't mention that there's a park named for your husband, isn't there?

Betty Szilagyi: Yes, yes and also he was on the Board of Directors. His name is on the plaque by the Woodbridge Library. He was on the Board of Directors at that time.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, at the library.

Betty Szilagyi: I didn't mention that, I'm sorry.

Brenda Velasco: That was the Woodbridge Main Library you're talking about?

Betty Szilagyi: Yes, when they were building it.

Brenda Velasco: Do you recall what year?

Betty Szilagyi: No, not really.

Brenda Velasco: And I know the park on Bunns Lane is named after him.

Betty Szilagyi: Yes it is, yea.

Brenda Velasco: So you have quite a bit of Woodbridge history there.

Betty Szilagyi: Yea, I'm proud of it really. You know I loved my job in Town Hall. No day was the same as the day before it or the day after it. It was just like everyday it was something different. It was very interesting and I loved it.

Brenda Velasco: And I remember seeing you there.

Betty Szilagyi: I loved it.

Brenda Velasco: I thank you so much.

Betty Szilagyi: Oh you're welcome and it was nice doing this. I was happy to do this.

Brenda Velasco: I was happy to share your memories with you and for you giving us your personal history. It is 12:00 noon and we are concluding this interview.

