

Oral History Interview
Chester Komoroski
WH031

(written transcript and digital audio)

On March 6, 2009, Chester Komoroski was interviewed at the Henry Inman Library by Brenda Velasco at 10:00 A.M.

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

My proper name is Chester John Komoroski. I was born on November 3, 1929. I live on Cleveland Avenue in Colonia off Inman Avenue.

2. How long have you lived in Woodbridge?

Since November of 1955.

Brenda Velasco: Your birth month.

Chet Komoroski: Yes, we moved in on the 29th which is my brother's birthday.

Brenda Velasco: Alright.

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

At the time, my wife and I lived on South Tenth Street in Newark. We had two small children at the time and we lived in a five room apartment which they called a "cold water flat". It had the kerosene unit inside the stove in the kitchen. My wife was working at the time at the General Electric Company - Lantern Division, in Newark in the evening, the 3:30 P.M. to 12 Midnight shift. When I got home from my day job, my brother and I had a gas station in Newark, I was reading a great newspaper at that time, **The Newark Evening News**, one Friday evening and saw the ad for Canterbury Village is what the proper name was for the houses along Cleveland Avenue, McKinley Avenue and Broadway. Donald Arino was the builder on there.

Brenda Velasco: I just interviewed Donald the other week; Donald Aaroe.

Chet Komoroski: No, this is Araino.

Brenda Velasco: Oh, Arino, okay.

Chet Komoroski: He's dead. But the fellow who ran for Congress one time, Lenny Sendelsky, I understand this was his first job, say like a foreman, on the job.

Brenda Velasco: Wow! It shows the connections of Woodbridge, doesn't it?

Chet Komoroski: He said it was his first job and then Donald was from Brooklyn originally and, through the G.I. Bill and all that, he got loans and he went into home building. He used to drive some of the speedboats and he was a champion going out to Bermuda or something and he wound up buying the cigarette boat line company.

Brenda Velasco: So he did quite well.

Chet Komoroski: Yes, but then I think that some of the people that bought them during that time were drug runners and he got murdered down in Florida.

Brenda Velasco: Wow!

Chet Komoroski: They killed him down there. Well, anyhow, it's just that the houses were \$12,990.00.

Brenda Velasco: How much were they?

Chet Komoroski: \$12,990.00 and it was \$10.00 down for a G.I. mortgage with 4 or 4½ percent interest, so I qualified as a veteran of World War II and entitled to the G.I. Bill.

Brenda Velasco: How did your wife react to.....

Chet Komoroski: This was Friday evening and then Saturday we went down to look at it and we loved it. We went back again on Sunday and we picked out a lot where I'm at because it was a little up and away from Inman Avenue. It was up on a little incline so we didn't have to worry about flooding. At the time, there wouldn't be any house along side of us and this is where Vinnie Mondano put up his house.

Brenda Velasco: Right and he was another former volunteer fireman.

Chet Komoroski: But at the time the lot was vacant and they were going to put five houses behind where we were and they never did and we wound up with a couple of lots in the back over there so the kids have been playing all these years back there. So it's like a little park for us.

Brenda Velasco: You were very fortunate.

Chet Komoroski: Then behind us is the woods and then St. Gertrude's cemetery.

Brenda Velasco: So that's nice and quiet.

Chet Komoroski: Nice and quiet.

Brenda Velasco: That was ideal. So you've been here since 1955, Canterbury Village.

Chet Komoroski: Canterbury Village was the name of that project just like they had Dukes Estates and Woodbridge Knolls.

Brenda Velasco: Was Canterbury Village one of the first developments to be built?

Chet Komoroski: No, I think Dukes Estates was first. I don't know about the Longfellow area but I think we were second and then like Longfellow came in and then Woodbridge Knolls and then, later on, Video Park and then the same with Oak Ridge Heights.

Brenda Velasco: Alright, so this is part of that post-World War II.....

Chet Komoroski: We came down and, I believe at the time, there were 35,000 people living in Woodbridge Township.

Brenda Velasco: Wow! Look at our population now.

Chet Komoroski: Then in just a few short years it got up to 90,000, with 21,000 students. They had one of the largest student populations in the State.

Brenda Velasco: At one time. Now we're down to about 13,000 (students) but our population is over 100,000.

Chet Komoroski: Yes, I know, it's always nip and tuck with Edison.

Brenda Velasco: Edison is our rival.

Chet Komoroski: They can keep it over there.

Brenda Velasco: I agree. I'm happy with the way it is.

Chet Komoroski: See that's why it irritates me to hear when they say "we're diverse".

What are you diverse about? You got a third of your population is one group so how are you diversified. We're diversified here in Woodbridge.

Brenda Velasco: Yes we are, very much so. Ok so, you were one of the first, not the first development, but one of the first in Colonia. By the way, how did you get down from Newark when you came to visit the house?

Chet Komoroski: We had the Parkway.

Brenda Velasco: You did have the Parkway.

Chet Komoroski: Yes, the Parkway was here. As a matter of a fact I was one of the first ones who used to ride the Parkway when I was working in Jasco Tile when I first got out of the service. We got on the Parkway, Route 27, when it went up to Centennial Avenue. That was it. We used to come down the Parkway and get off in Clark and at the time we used to moan and groan that we didn't have an exit over here.

Brenda Velasco: Do you want an exit?

Chet Komoroski: No, not today, not even at that time. At times we used to sneak on the Parkway because they didn't have a gate where it was. So now for the emergency vehicles you get on the Parkway at night and then they put a gate there, right here off Inman Avenue.

Brenda Velasco: On Inman Avenue, they didn't have a gate there?

Chet Komoroski: You see one up on New York Avenue where we have the emergency gate now?

Brenda Velasco: Okay we're not going to talk about that now.

Chet Komoroski: No, we're not going to talk about that stuff.

Brenda Velasco: What about the streets, when you moved here, were the streets.....

Chet Komoroski: The only streets that were paved were like Inman Avenue and a number of others but there were many streets that were unpaved; they were just dirt roads. The Township used to come around with a grader and they would level off the streets and put oil on them; which today oh you can't do this, you know, blah, blah, blah. They put down thousands of gallons of oil but that was alright.

Brenda Velasco: And that was to keep the dust.

Chet Komoroski: To keep the dust down.

Brenda Velasco: Did you have sewers back then, sewers for your house?

Chet Komoroski: Yes, see like our entire development, and all developments that came in, had all the sewers, all the streets and all had the water. Many homes throughout the area, whether it was Amherst Avenue or the rest of the them, Jordan, just about all the people had their own wells for the water and septic tanks and stuff like that. Then eventually they put sewer lines in throughout and you had to be careful where you drove otherwise you'd wind up in one of the little ditches where the dirt settled.

Brenda Velasco: No, because you were a development; you had everything.

Chet Komoroski: Yes, we had everything; sidewalks and curbing.

Brenda Velasco: Whereas other areas of Colonia.....

Chet Komoroski: They didn't have it.

Brenda Velasco: How about the services? When you moved from Newark, Newark was a paid fire department.

Chet Komoroski: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, you moved to Colonia and it was a little bit different then a setup in a big city and you've been affiliated with the fire department for 52 years you said. Right?

Chet Komoroski: Well even in Newark, growing up in Newark, I don't recall any time I saw a fire truck on our street. People took care of everything. They had the old six family houses.

Brenda Velasco: A lot of multiple family houses.

Chet Komoroski: Right and they had, whether they were burning coal in it at the time or anything else, they were very careful and there were no fires. I didn't even see a fire truck. Besides 85 percent of the fire departments in New Jersey and throughout the United States are volunteers. We had fire hydrants on our street and everything else so we weren't concerned.

Brenda Velasco: You were Chief of the Colonia fire department for a while but I noticed that as soon as you moved in you became a member of our fire department.

Chet Komoroski: Well I moved in 1955 and at the time the Colonia Civic Club, which was right there on the corner, the building is still there, of Conduit Avenue and Inman Avenue which is now a child care center.

Brenda Velasco: Oh, right, I know where it is.

Chet Komoroski: That was the civic club.

Brenda Velasco: ABC Academy or something.

Chet Komoroski: Right and that's where they would have meetings and one of my neighbors was involved heavily in politics, Helen Reedy. She'd be by her window drinking her coffee, smoking her cigarettes and on the telephone. So we all belonged to the civic club.

Brenda Velasco: Which wasn't far from your house?

Chet Komoroski: No, it was right down the street and many people would meet there and they would talk and that's where one of the fellows that was with the fire department. We always looked for people that worked the second shift, so I was working in General Electric, my wife and I both at the time, we worked from 3:30 P.M. to 12 midnight. Her mother and sister lived with us at the time. So we would bring the kids into Newark and a good friend would watch the children and then her mother, when she finished work, would pick them up and come back home to Colonia.

Brenda Velasco: So your kids grew up in Colonia as well as Newark?

Chet Komoroski: Yes, the two of them. Then there were three more that came.

Brenda Velasco: Your family expanded. So that's through the Colonia Civic Club?

Chet Komoroski: Right, but the fire department, like in all small municipalities, especially the volunteers, most of them are like I said is 85 percent and still that way throughout the United States, that's your center of all civic activities. You have most of the men that are members and one of my sons was a member as he grew older. Look at Ray Hughes and all of them and Jimmy Souza, they're all children of firemen that came in.

Brenda Velasco: And the Higgins.

Chet Komoroski: And the Higgins, right, see so this was all.....

Brenda Velasco: It goes from one generation.....

Chet Komoroski: Yes, to the next. So my oldest boy, he was a member of the First Aid Squad along with some of the others like Billy Stellmach and all. They were members of the First Aid. But anyhow, like with the fire department, that's where we had all of our dances whether it was for Halloween or St. Patrick's Day and square dances. This was all fun time. At that time we had the old firehouse. We would move all the fire trucks outside and that was our dance floor.

Brenda Velasco: Right where the trucks usually park.

Chet Komoroski: Yes, where the trucks would be.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, so let's go back then, where was the original firehouse located?

Chet Komoroski: Well when I came down, I was at the one that was on Inman Avenue that was there. But where the VFW is, that building, that was the fire department there and they had split up or something. Who stole whose fire truck or something. Ray knows that story. But when we came in that was the fire house there. Our No. 1 truck was that '42 Mac. That was our number one fire truck and that originally was purchased from a fire department down in West Virginia.

Brenda Velasco: Wow!

Chet Komoroski: They have pictures of it. We still have that and that's the one they just keep for a show piece.

Brenda Velasco: Now it's an antique.

Chet Komoroski: Sure, 60 some odd years now. It still runs well: good.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, but it was originally purchased from West Virginia?

Chet Komoroski: Yes, West Virginia.

Brenda Velasco: I didn't realize that. Did the current firehouse have a second floor?

Chet Komoroski: No.

Brenda Velasco: That came later.

Chet Komoroski: It has just the first floor and actually I think the bathrooms were upstairs a little bit. There was no second story to the building. Even at that time it was private ownership. I forgot the exact title again. The group that started it they had owned the building and the property. As a matter of fact, they had added on a room to the side of the building and that was the meeting room.

Brenda Velasco: Then there was the parking lot.

Chet Komoroski: Yes, the parking lot and that originally was up on a little hillside there along side the firehouse and that dirt was used when they had the Parkway where they had that big mound of dirt inside between the lane north and southbound. That dirt was moved from there and now that's sitting up on the Parkway.

Brenda Velasco: Alright, how about the stores? Do you remember what stores were there?

Chet Komoroski: The stores they had here were Vaccaro's had just opened up, Jerry Rosa just opened up with Colonia Drugs and John Trimarco, the family that owned the property there, he had, right on the corner of Amherst and Inman, a hardware store.

Brenda Velasco: That was a good hardware store.

Chet Komoroski: Yes, very good, and his brother-in-law Mo would take care of it, working in there. Many of the people would just stand in there and gab and gab.

Brenda Velasco: Well you came in to get something that's why.

Chet Komoroski: And right across the street on Amherst they had like a little deli over there; it was Benny's. Then they had, right there, on Conduit where they had

like that ice cream place, Dickerts.

Brenda Velasco: That was a good place.

Chet Komoroski: That was a nice place for people to go in there for newspapers and coffee and things like that.

Brenda Velasco: That had a lively business at that time.

Chet Komoroski: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: And they had a deli department and catering.

Chet Komoroski: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: I remember that.

Chet Komoroski: And the only school was School #17.

Brenda Velasco: And that's where you children attended?

Chet Komoroski: No the one year the oldest boy went to kindergarten and the next year School #20 opened.

Brenda Velasco: So that was in 1956?

Chet Komoroski: No they were only like three years old or something. So they opened up and then as it went by then School #21 and School #22. School #27 was all empty. We used to play softball up there where School #27 is.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, that's the Pennsylvania Avenue School.

Chet Komoroski: Yes, the Pennsylvania Avenue School. But even in School #17 they just started with St. John Vianney. We used to have mass at School #17. Oh no, you can't separate church and state and blah, blah, blah. We had mass in there. At the time, where the high school is at, that was available but Father Radziwon didn't want that, he wanted property on Inman Avenue where they're at now.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, because Father Radziwon was the pastor of St. John's; he was the first pastor.

Chet Komoroski: Him and Monsignor Perrini up there in St. Helena's they worked together. See those all split off from St. Cecelia's Church. Even at that parish up there and here. Father Radziwon came from a very rich Polish family; that was the Radziwell family.

Brenda Velasco: Wow!

Chet Komoroski: So little by little up there was Ritchie's.

Brenda Velasco: I know where it is.

Chet Komoroski: That's where like the.....

Brenda Velasco: Inman Auto, that complex.

Chet Komoroski: No, Ritchie's was where the church is now.

Brenda Velasco: Oh!

Chet Komoroski: That was all his property there.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, he had landscaping recently.

Chet Komoroski: Right and where the Knights of Columbus building is that was the last building. They had like a little shed over there. As a matter of fact, we had a fire in there one time.

Brenda Velasco: I know that was also where Greiner's Tower is.

Chet Komoroski: Next to it and then at the time, to me, they made a little boo boo by only making it three stories; "oh, we don't want anything higher than that", you know. They could have doubled the capacity.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, as they had at Olsen or Cooper.

Chet Komoroski: Although she lived down there, the one in Woodbridge there on....

Brenda Velasco: Stern?

Chet Komoroski: No.

Brenda Velasco: Adam and Finn. There are some on Rahway Avenue that's Adam and Finn and Stern is right off of Main Street.

Chet Komoroski: It's one there; it's another name for it.

Brenda Velasco: Maple Tree Manor?

Chet Komoroski: No.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, how about the houses of worship that we had here.

Chet Komoroski: They had where the St. John Vianney's preschool, that was a church. A matter of fact, Ronnie Morrissey used to belong there; I think it was Ronnie at the time. But that was a house of worship there.

Brenda Velasco: Was that the only one that you can recall?

Chet Komoroski: No, the one on Delaware with the Baptist Church, they were there. See what happened there was that area got split up because of the Parkway. See that broke that up over there.

Brenda Velasco: And that was before you moved in that the Parkway was built.

Chet Komoroski: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: And down there was a synagogue.

Chet Komoroski: Yes on Temple Way there. Originally they called that Cleveland Avenue. The synagogue opened and then that changed hands now a couple of times

Brenda Velasco: Yes, it's an Indian Temple now.

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

Well, there was no post office and no library.

Brenda Velasco: Well that's very easy.

Chet Komoroski: There were no parks. School #17 was the only school that they had and the firehouse.

6. *What did you do for recreation?*

What did we do for recreation, we had three more children.

Brenda Velasco: For a total of five.

Chet Komoroski: When we moved down, just picture this, our street alone, just our neighbors and all that, a matter of fact one just moved away back to Pennsylvania, but just on our street alone we had dozens and dozens of kids. We all moved down here and we were just young families.

Brenda Velasco: How many rooms were in your house?

Chet Komoroski: We had five rooms; two bedrooms, kitchen, living room and dining room. But see with the cathedral ceiling everything was open. It was very spacious.

Brenda Velasco: And then you had woods in back.

Chet Komoroski: Right the yard in the back.

Brenda Velasco: And St. Gertrude's cemetery.

Chet Komoroski: See at the time we put up one of the above ground swimming pools. My neighbor next door, original neighbor, they had four children then, altogether, and he was the manager of the Paramount Theatre in Newark. Wonderful families and as a

matter of fact, off the cuff, Pat Cameto over there at School #21, that was his aunt that lived next door to me and was my original neighbor. She was Cameto, I know that.

Brenda Velasco: Then what you've seen is a stable neighborhood. Because you still live there.

Chet Komoroski: Yes, and there's a number of the old timers still there. Well they're dying off naturally but the children have moved away. When they opened up School #20 the kids used to go through my backyard through the woods and to the school. Since they were going all the way down to Cleveland Avenue over Montrose and down that way they just cut through the backyard and through the woods. There was a path through there.

Brenda Velasco: They took short cuts.

Chet Komoroski: And they used to come home for lunch too in those days.

Brenda Velasco: Wow! They did a lot of walking.

Chet Komoroski: Like in the backyard we had an area there say 100 feet deep by 250 feet wide. That's where they played their baseball and football and all that stuff. They learned how to ride their bikes.

Brenda Velasco: It was a great area to raise kids.

Chet Komoroski: At that time there was no traffic light on Inman Avenue and Cleveland but we didn't have that much traffic.

Brenda Velasco: Right, at that time. A lot has changed.

Chet Komoroski: One place that expanded was St. Gertrudes. Well there was supposed to have been a street that was going to go through there from Water Street to Conduit. But when word got out, they started burying people there and that was the end of the street. That was to take the traffic off from Cleveland.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, because yours is a busy street.

Chet Komoroski: I saw a map when I was down at the Town Hall where I think it was from Broadway right out to New Dover Road. That's why Broadway is so wide. And that was the end of that street too.

Brenda Velasco: And they never connected it.

Chet Komoroski: I did see a map one time.

Brenda Velasco: Your street is the one that people use.

Chet Komoroski: Yes it's the only one. You either go that way or Amherst Avenue.

Brenda Velasco: Right.

Chet Komoroski: Now you can go through E Street through the high school to get out there to New Dover but mostly now it's Amherst Avenue, Wood Avenue or Cleveland.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, so your kids had a lot of area to play in.

Chet Komoroski: Basically yes they would be there but as the schools opened up then they had, well when they were going to School #20 they'd go down there or something. I used to teach my daughter softball.

Brenda Velasco: When did they start baseball, Little League and Little Fellows?

Chet Komoroski: I don't know when they started but see another thing is that in all of the developments we used to have the men's softball league. We used to play on Sundays, and each one of them had a team, the VFW, the Oak Ridge Heights; and the larger developments always had the excellent team because they had more men to pick from. We used to play in different areas mostly behind the junior high school at the time where the fields are still there. We used to play there on Sundays.

Brenda Velasco: Okay so where did your kids go to.....

Chet Komoroski: School.

Brenda Velasco: We have the elementary school, School #20, but was the middle school.....

Chet Komoroski: Yes, they had the Colonia Junior High School and at the time they had football teams and they had baseball teams and they had baseball teams in the junior high school; now they have nothing. I wonder why.

Brenda Velasco: That you have to take up with the Board of Ed. So there were a lot of activities for the kids then.

Chet Komoroski: Yes.

7. What was the focal point of your community?

Brenda Velasco: Where was the main place where you congregated? Was it the Colonia Civic or firehouse?

Chet Komoroski: Well right in the beginning it was but the activities then were, let's say, at the firehouse because even today different groups meet there. The seniors meet there, the different political organizations use it and I'd say what I miss a lot was that we would have a Memorial Day. First we would go to Woodbridge; their parade started 10:00 in the morning. The Colonia parade started at 100 P.M. from Wood Avenue to the firehouse and then we'd hop over to Iselin. Iselin had a parade on Oak Tree Road which started at 3:00 P.M.

Brenda Velasco: So you hit all the parades.

Chet Komoroski: We had three parades for Memorial Day to honor Memorial Day. No there's nothing.

Brenda Velasco: No, not any more.

Chet Komoroski: Well, we have St. Paddy's Day which was started by Mayor Cassidy at the time when he became Mayor in '72. Now they have it every year. Now we don't even have a Christmas parade any more.

Brenda Velasco: Well it's a holiday.

Chet Komoroski: They call it a holiday parade.

Brenda Velasco: We started the veteran's parade for Veteran's Day and that marches from St. James to Town Hall. Not that long, but we're having more and more people. So come down for that day.

Chet Komoroski: People nowadays, they don't.....

Brenda Velasco: No it's not so much with spectators but we want to honor the people who have been in the service.

Chet Komoroski: Exactly.

Brenda Velasco: People are getting older too and they can't walk that long but we had Anthony Orsini and he was from Colonia.

Chet Komoroski: Which one?

Brenda Velasco: Anthony Orsini. He just wrote a book. Okay and the firehouse really.....

Chet Komoroski: That's the center basically of your civic activities.

Brenda Velasco: And it's right on Inman Avenue.

Chet Komoroski: Right.

Brenda Velasco: Accessible to anybody.

Chet Komoroski: But all of the other groups whether they be the American Legion or VFW, naturally for specifics, you know, that they're there. But the fire department, normally in communities like ours, and I'd say throughout the Country, this is the focal point where people can meet at, they have different affairs, and different things that go on.

Brenda Velasco: And we just had the Mayor's Breakfast there.

Chet Komoroski: You say the firehouse and everybody knows.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, it's easy to identify.

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

The neighborhood was fine. Number one, we didn't have all that congestion with the traffic. I won't say the noise because living in the city was great and going up in the city was wonderful over there. Anywhere you wanted to go you walked no more than one or two blocks and you got onto a bus. You had so many activities in the city whether it was going up to Olympic Park or whether going all over; going to the theatres down on Broad and Market Street and everything else. That used to be the biggest intersection in the country, Broad and Market Street, at one time.

Brenda Velasco: Wow!

Chet Komoroski: It was fabulous. I tell all the young kids today I say you will never experience the joy of living in a city, growing up in a city, at that time.

Brenda Velasco: Yes and you could live there as a middle income family as well; it wasn't just the super rich.

Chet Komoroski: But we were poor in those days, you know, growing up during the Depression. People today, they don't know what the hell it is the hard times. They're driving along in their big cars over there and but they're living the hard time. Grow up during that Depression that was in the '30s.

Brenda Velasco: But you liked Colonia, it was different

Chet Komoroski: Yes, right and the people are very friendly because we were all in the same boat. We all moved down here. You got to know people. It carried over from the city where people would be sitting on their front porches of the house and gabbing and everything else up until late in the evening.

Brenda Velasco: Especially during the summer.

Chet Komoroski: During the summertime, yes.

Brenda Velasco: No air conditioning.

Chet Komoroski: They'd sit outside and they'd gab all in the front. We'd be at the school across the street, Camden Street School, and they used to be opened until 9:00 P.M. They had a playground teacher there until 9:00 P.M. every night.

Brenda Velasco: Wow!

Chet Komoroski: That's why we mentioned now, "how come there's nothing here after school activities". All the schools that were here, we used to go there because now people provide their own entertainment for the kids with the swimming pools, with the swings sets and everything else.

Brenda Velasco: And you did the same thing.

Chet Komoroski: That's what you did.

Brenda Velasco: You had the above ground pool for your kids. But they also had the area: the open woods.

Chet Komoroski: Yes, and even like now I know, what you call, for many years, our beloved ex-mayor down in Merrill Park with all the rides there for the kids.

Brenda Velasco: Yes.

Chet Komoroski: How did the kids get there? All these schools should have had all these little areas like we had with the jungle gyms, we had the sliding boards, the teeter totter and every school had that.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, at one time.

Chet Komoroski: So how do you get down to Merrill Park? Somebody has to take you there.

Brenda Velasco: Right, you need the auto.

Chet Komoroski: Yes, to get there. So instead of having this distributed throughout the township where a person can take their child

Brenda Velasco: That's a good point.

9. Did you experience any significant happenings in the area of Woodbridge-construction, accidents, sport events, riots, discrimination, etc.

Brenda Velasco: You moved here after the Parkway was built but, like with fires, did you experience any significant fires in Colonia? Because you've been on the fire department for so many years.

Chet Komoroski: Yes, we had a number of them that the houses were totally involved. We're very famous with Don Newcombe with the Dodgers (1949-1958). He lived right where Colonia Drugs is now; they bought that house later on then. That house was involved in a fire at that time. I used to work, for a long time, with Jerry Rosa; I used to work part-time over there when my wife had to leave G.E. so in order to raise your family I worked there from 9:00 A.M. to 2:00 P.M. during the week and went to work at 3:30 P.M.

Brenda Velasco: You had two jobs?

Chet Komoroski: Yes, I was working with Jerry. Then just on Sundays then. So when you're raising a large family, if you don't make an adequate amount plus, then you work. You find additional work; it provides the other necessary things that you want.

Brenda Velasco: Jerry Rosa provided additional jobs for several people. My husband also worked there at one time.

Chet Komoroski: When he first moved in, he was down there about a year, I used to work from 9:00 A.M. to 2:00 P.M. and go home and change and have something to eat and start work at 3:30 P.M. in Newark till midnight.

Brenda Velasco: Anything else that you can think of? Any accidents that you saw in Colonia?

Chet Komoroski: Well with the fire department we'd be on the Parkway many, many times with accidents and all that. I think the worse was we had somebody coming down from a bowling banquet at one time, I remember the guy's name was Bajul, and he ran off the Parkway right around where it would be like Amherst Avenue now. He ran off into the woods over there and he got burnt up.

Brenda Velasco: Wow!

Chet Komoroski: There's nothing like a burnt body; the odor in there. We've had a number of them even right here on Lake Avenue. (Lake and Arthur during the 1960s) Evidently, the fire was smoldering all night long in the couch and it burnt right through the floor. Ronnie Morrissey found a woman there in the bathroom. A lot of people will run to the bathroom because they have water in there and all that.

Brenda Velasco: Right.

Chet Komoroski: That's where we found the body. They had a couple of other fires where people got killed in there.

Brenda Velasco: Was that Morningside Avenue?

Chet Komoroski: This one, no, this one was right on Lake Avenue.

Brenda Velasco: Oh right on Lake Avenue, okay.

Chet Komoroski: Then with the little girl down here where they found her, I think, like on Christmas morning or something; that was bad. To me, one of the best was right there across from the bank where the house was totally involved: the kitchen and all that. We put that out in a couple of minutes with the high pressure fog over there. If you'd see the pictures of the inside you would say "this house was saved". It's still standing. That was a good fire.

Brenda Velasco: That's good; it gives you a good feeling.

Chet Komoroski: But, while it's on there, the best fought fire is the one that you prevent. Fire prevention is the most important thing.

Brenda Velasco: You are a fireman to the core.

Chet Komoroski: That's the best fought fire, the one that you prevent. Because you'll hear, oh yea, what did you save; we got a million dollars damage. What did you save? You'll see in the paper that a huge building burned and you'll hear, "wait a minute what did you do"? But, you prevent a fire from happening and that's the best thing. But you've got to be prepared for everything and you can't have one of one, you've got to have two of everything in case one breaks then you something else. But see what's great here is that wherever you go you'll see volunteers; we don't pay salaries. So now that money that comes from the taxes, that pays for equipment; it pays for everything. So instead of salaries we used to have people come in from whether it was New York or Newark and say, wait a minute, take one or two guys and I say you got a brand new firehouse every year if you needed it see because we're not paying salaries over here. Look at Woodbridge over there what is that seven and a half million dollars or what.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, but Colonia Fire District 12.....

Chet Komoroski: Yes, exactly and what is good now is that see in the beginning when they started in '43 and the fire districts were set up according to who was here at the time. Then what they did, after a number of years, they were expanded. So where Avenel used to come all the way to Montrose Avenue well then District 12 took that over and they took that whole area around Longfellow so this way it's closer protection for the people instead of them coming all the way from Avenel on Route #1. But at the time, they were the only ones that could cover it because nobody was here on Inman Avenue.

Brenda Velasco: No, not until '43.

Chet Komoroski: Sure.

Brenda Velasco: And we were all supporters back then too, we weren't that

heavily populated.

Chet Komoroski: We had a lot of fellows that were here and there was one fellow that I can't remember his name at the moment but he used to provide for the fire trucks. He'd pay for gasoline for them and all of that.

Brenda Velasco: Did he own a gas station?

Chet Komoroski: No, he used to do some of the plowing around and all that and he lived on the end of West Street.

Brenda Velasco: Wow!

Chet Komoroski: And he used to plow West Street for the township. We had the graters and we had heavy snow storms. Boy that grader would come by and right down to the road!

The fire department used to run every year a carnival and right in the beginning it would be by the old firehouse. They'd have a few tents up there and all that.

Then we had one where the post office is now when that was just vacant land, we had a carnival there and then the last one was across from where the Getty Station is. That was all vacant land. We had a carnival there in conjunction with the First Aid Squad. That was great. The fellows that worked the evening shift, like I did, we'd go down there in the morning everyday and we'd help clean up and stuff like that. So here the place used to be packed and it was something to look forward to.

Brenda Velasco: That was a big thing.

Chet Komoroski: Very enjoyable.

Brenda Velasco: The only carnival we have now is at St. John's and that's for a week and everybody comes to that.

Chet Komoroski: Yea, so anyhow that was an enjoyable thing. Like I said between that and also all of the different dances at the firehouse I'd say with Halloween and the rest of it and even the square dancing and all that. It was good clean fun at the time.

Brenda Velasco: And you didn't have to go far especially with having five children at home.

Chet Komoroski: No and everybody participated and all that.

Brenda Velasco: It made for a good community.

Chet Komoroski: It was and this was throughout all of Woodbridge because like I said we know people down through the years whether it was Port Reading, St. Anthony's over there, and then the others and down in Sewaren, the people, and down in Woodbridge. So everybody had their own St. Cecelia's and throughout the entire Avenel and all that and it was all local events that would go on and whoever ran it, you know, and conducted it. But it was good clean fun, you know.

10. What do you like about Woodbridge today?

Brenda Velasco: What do you like about Colonia today? It's changed but you have not moved out; so. You don't like the traffic, I know that.

Chet Komoroski: Well, it doesn't bother me anymore because you see before that the only thing it was across Inman Avenue and when we got a fire call and we would have to come in through Broadway so we would have one lane of traffic to cross instead of going

on both sides, we would only take one. Nothing has really changed in the last 20 years or so. You know, the stores are still the same ones except it's a shame that Vaccaro's had to leave.

Brenda Velasco: We all feel that way.

Chet Komoroski: That was ridiculous, that was a shame. All those years over there.

Brenda Velasco: And that was his first store that he opened. The Clark store was the store.....

Chet Komoroski: That's why we have, what we call at the firehouse, that was something I brought up, like we honor say someone or group that, let's say, goes out of their way and they do certain things for the fire department. Vinnie Vaccaro, down through the years, I don't care whatever the time was, the fellows were out there for hours or whatever, he'd provide some donuts or he'd provide something else. Even the installation dinners we had in house he would provide all kind of stuff. So what we'd do is we would name an award that we give out. We'd call it now, like they had the Heisman Trophy, we'd call it the Vincent Vaccaro Award. We'd present it by the fire department to any person like one of the local merchants; the year before we presented it to him with the award.

Brenda Velasco: And this year it was.....

Chet Komoroski: Now we started a new, last year, and now the second year.

Brenda Velasco: This is the second year.

Chet Komoroski: This year they awarded it to Debbie Meehan for the articles and everything else. So we called it the Vincent Vaccaro Award; you can't call it like Fireman of the Year Award or this or that. Especially now that Vinnie had passed away that it would be something good to remember him by and what he had done for the last forty years or more.

Brenda Velasco: A nice legacy.

Chet Komoroski: But the area itself, it all depends like what they want to do with it. They were talking about they wanted to put houses were the bus company and who's saying this and we can't do this, you know.

Brenda Velasco: You're always going to have differences of opinion, you know that.

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

Yes, I have a daughter and a grandson who still live in Colonia. We had all of the children, well four of mine graduated from Colonia High School. The grandchildren went to Rahway they graduated from Rahway High School. Then four of my other grandchildren graduated from Colonia High School. My great-granddaughter is going there next year, she'll be a freshman; three generations.

Brenda Velasco: Wow! Three generations, Colonia High School, can they handle it?

Chet Komoroski: I was over there yesterday. We had a meeting for the hospitalization that we carried on with the Cobra. So I said, "oh yea I still have one – he's a senior this year". And when I mentioned the name, I said, Mitchell, they said right away Mitchell.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, I just want to allude from the fact that after you retired from G.E. you worked for the township, Board of Education.

Chet Komoroski: Well, that was later on, yes.

Brenda Velasco: What years did you work for the Board of Education?

Chet Komoroski: Let's see, I think, from, how long am I out of there now-about three years now? Well I worked for the township when I was head of the Civil Defense and Emergency Management.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Chet Komoroski: From '72; I had fourteen years all together part-time and then a couple of years I had it full time.

Brenda Velasco: So you've been involved with the township two years after you moved here with the fire department.

Chet Komoroski: See, I paid my dues in this township.

Brenda Velasco: I would say that, you sure did pay your dues and I'm very fortunate to know you and to have interviewed you.

Chet Komoroski: Wait, wait we got more yet or no? What about "Woodbridge today".

Brenda Velasco: We got that and I've got that your daughter and grandson.....

Chet Komoroski: Yes, they live on the other side there on Fairview Avenue.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, you also lived with somebody on Cleveland Avenue.

Chet Komoroski: Yes, that's with my daughter and the boys, her children, the one boy is in the Navy now the last seven years, graduating from there. He's in the medical group there. The other guy graduated two years up in Johnson & Wales.

Brenda Velasco: Wow! In Rhode Island.

Chet Komoroski: Rhode Island yes. A matter of fact, he just had that in the paper about where what college had four campuses and where was the first one; it was Johnson & Wales in Rhode Island. He graduated a couple of years and now he's living in Atlanta working for AT&T down there. Then I said the one boy that's in the Navy, he's in San Diego.

Brenda Velasco: Good location.

Chet Komoroski: He was stationed here in Earle. He's been over to the Gulf, I think, three times. The last time was about five years ago. He came in from the Gulf when he was on the Enterprise when it came into Mayport Naval Base in Florida. They have what they call tiger cruises where family members and all board the ship and we sail the aircraft carrier back from Florida to Norfolk.

Brenda Velasco: That's terrific.

Chet Komoroski: That's right. Here we are to live on board for a couple of days and sail the ship and be on deck and below deck and everything else; it's fantastic.

Brenda Velasco: Could you do it permanently though Chester?

Chet Komoroski: No. Even though when they're on board when they're out to sea they have say 5,000 on board and then actually when they pull into port, unless they're overseas, all the planes are gone. They have land base and theirs was in South Carolina where their base is for the carrier when they were down to Mayport. But just to stand on deck, and see where these windows are, that's where the planes are landing, that close to you, you know. It's fantastic to see them take off and then break the sound barrier and all that.

Brenda Velasco: That was quite an experience.

Chet Komoroski: Just to be on board, right, and then they serve 17,000 meals a day. It was great. It was a good experience.

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

Chet Komoroski: You know there are many things that are very enjoyable about here. We don't have like problems that you'd find in many other places. You see there is a lot of garbage going on in Edison now with the Mayor and different groups and all of that. That's wrong. We've had, I've seen it here, where people would come in front of Vinnie's house when he was Councilman. "Oh how come we didn't get plowed out"? I said this here when I was involved, I was down at the garage one day and all the Councilman would be there because they had to make sure that the areas are cleaned. Orders were given out over the radio to "do this street now" blah, blah, blah, and it still wasn't done. One of my buddies, my oldest friend, he retired from the Army and worked for the post office and he had to open up the post office and he lived on Predmore. So Jimmy Souza's father was one of the supervisors so I said, "Jim, over at 123 Predmore, he has to open up the post office in Edison in the morning" and he'd say "okay, we'll take care of it". But what happened when the driver went up Predmore and then he came around the block and he went out back to Predmore again, they missed that street. Instead of going straight down Predmore they made the loop around and that part wasn't done.

Brenda Velasco: They do it systematically now.

Chet Komoroski: But a lot of times you didn't see the plow until the next day or something.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, when I first moved here....

Chet Komoroski: That's why you've got to jump on them

Brenda Velasco: The plowing of the streets have been done very effectively.

Chet Komoroski: But I said this for years, you got to plow to the curb. Oh, well we made the pass – no you're supposed to, especially the snow street, the snow street the people take their cars off when it snows, it's plowed and then they put their cars back out on the street.

Brenda Velasco: Yes.

Chet Komoroski: But not when its three feet away from the curb.

Brenda Velasco: No, the township has improved and we even use a reverse 911 now to get your cars off the street if it snows.

Chet Komoroski: I know, well you see my youngest boy, that's the guy that's the trooper, he's one of the experts with them on there. When I say one of the experts I mean well informed with the communications up there in Totowa and they take care of all the 911 and they get millions of call every year so that's his job, well he works down the division, he's all over the place. But anyhow, that's his expertise in the radio whether it's the trunk line and all of that stuff.

Brenda Velasco: It's important.

Chet Komoroski: Because the guys used to say, "oh wait a minute how do you do that". Wait, hold on a minute, the State Police got thousands of radios and they're all trunked in so.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, I thank you very much.