

Oral History Interview
Dominick Coppola
WH047

(written transcript and digital audio)

On June 19, 2009, Dominick “Tat” Coppola was interviewed at 89 4th Street, Port Reading by Brenda Velasco at 10 A.M. Also in the room was Dominick’s wife, Madeline Ciardiello Coppola.

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

Dominick Coppola: My name is Dominick Coppola. I was born on January 1, 1919 in Port Reading.

Brenda Velasco: So you are over ninety years old?

Dominick Coppola: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: You celebrated your birthday.

Dominick Coppola: Right.

2. How long have you lived in the Port Reading section of Woodbridge?

Dominick Coppola: All my life.

Brenda Velasco: Alright, that’s ninety years except you were in World War II.

Dominick Coppola: In 1940 I went in.

Brenda Velasco: 1940 you went in.....

Dominick Coppola: I went in the service, yes. I was drafted.

Brenda Velasco: And that was the first draft?

Dominick Coppola: Right.

Brenda Velasco: After that Selective Service Act passed. (1940)

Dominick Coppola: There were eleven fellows from Woodbridge Township and they gave us a parade when Greiner was mayor in the Town Hall, the old Town Hall. (1934-1951)

Brenda Velasco: They gave you a parade.....

Dominick Coppola: And a dinner up there.

Madeline Coppola: Then they went to service.

Brenda Velasco: Parade and dinner and then off to service.

Dominick Coppola: Service the next day.

Brenda Velasco: So you went in 1940. That’s before the United States.....

Dominick Coppola: November in 1940, I remember that.

Brenda Velasco: How long did you remain in the service?

Dominick Coppola: Around five years.

Madeline Coppola: Yes, he got a purple heart.

Brenda Velasco: Excellent, congratulations on that! You know, I forgot to introduce Madeline. To my left is Dominick’s wife Madeline. Just introduce yourself and your maiden name.

Madeline Coppola: My name is Madeline Coppola and I’m living in Port Reading about sixty-two or sixty-three years, something like that.

Brenda Velasco: And what was your maiden name?

Madeline Coppola: My maiden name was Ciardiello. Do you know any other Ciardiello's in Port Reading?

Brenda Velasco: No, offhand I don't. You know I may though, but we're going to concentrate on Dominick right now; the Coppola's.

Madeline Coppola: Okay.

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

Dominick Coppola: Oh, he came from Italy my father.

Madeline Coppola: This was the first town he came in.

Dominick Coppola: And he got a job on the railroad.

Madeline Coppola: He was a foreman, his father.

Dominick Coppola: He was on the docks as a leader, what they called a leader. His name was Mike Coppola.

Brenda Velasco: Where in Italy did he come from?

Dominick Coppola: Near Naples. They call it Pietrastornina. It's a small town near Naples.

Madeline Coppola: Vinnie Martino would know that good. He was there.

Brenda Velasco: He told me. I already interviewed Vinnie (Martino) and Jo Jo (Joseph De Marino).

Madeline Coppola: He was there.

Brenda Velasco: And they had visited there, I believe.

Madeline Coppola: Right.

Brenda Velasco: So this was the first place your dad came to?

Madeline Coppola: And stayed.

Brenda Velasco: And stayed and got a job for the Reading Railroad.

4. What role did the Reading Railroad play in your town of Port Reading?

Madeline Coppola: A lot, they all worked.

Dominick Coppola: Yes, they had quite a few places where they had coal docks.

Madeline Coppola: And he worked nights too.

Dominick Coppola: And men worked on the docks and they were opening the coal cars and dumping them into boats.

Brenda Velasco: Like that McMyler coal dumpster.

Dominick Coppola: The high docks they used to call that.

Brenda Velasco: Oh, the high docks.

5. Did any of your family members work for the railroad? What jobs did they perform?

Brenda Velasco: Madeline mentioned that and you mentioned that your father worked.....

Dominick Coppola: On the docks.

Brenda Velasco: On the docks and your brother also.

Dominick Coppola: Yes, my brother worked down there too.

Brenda Velasco: And that was your brother Orlando.

Dominick Coppola: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: He worked on the docks.

Dominick Coppola: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: And where did you work?

Dominick Coppola: I was a foreman on the docks.

Brenda Velasco: You were a foreman on the docks. Okay, when you mentioned that they worked on the docks what specifically did they have to do?

Dominick Coppola: Well, they used to put the boats under the machine there and they used to make sure that the boats went out.

Madeline Coppola: Like in the barge or something?

Dominick Coppola: They made sure the boats were onto the stern all the time when they used to load.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, this is the McMyler coal dumper that was there.

Dominick Coppola: Right.

Madeline Coppola: It's still there.

Brenda Velasco: I know we had a history tour that stopped there. We were on a trolley tour.

Madeline Coppola: I didn't know that.

Dominick Coppola: They're going to keep it there ain't they?

Brenda Velasco: It's very expensive to dismantle it and it's one of the top ten.....

Madeline Coppola: That's the only thing that was here.

Brenda Velasco: Yes.

Madeline Coppola: Of course, everybody who came here from Italy went there to work.

Brenda Velasco: And they needed labor and were hard workers and the people from Italy needed jobs and the men worked hard.

Madeline Coppola: That's right.

6. At what age did you begin work for the railroad? How many years did you work for the railroad?

Dominick Coppola: Oh I'd say around '22.

Brenda Velasco: Alright so after service.....

Dominick Coppola: Excuse me I first worked, I worked myself from on the tracks, they were putting the ties and the rails in, and then later on I went at the dumper and worked up there on the docks. People took their pension and I went and worked up on the docks where my father was working.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, so at first it was the tracks and do you remember the salary?

Dominick Coppola: No, it was cheap in the thirties about thirty-two cents an hour or something.

Brenda Velasco: And you were about twenty-two at that time?

Madeline Coppola: No you were younger when you were at the track.

Dominick Coppola: I was younger. I was about eighteen.

Brenda Velasco: Then you went to the docks to work on the docks.

Dominick Coppola: Right.

Brenda Velasco: And that paid more?

Dominick Coppola: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Do you recall how much?

Dominick Coppola: Forty-five or forty-seven cents an hour.

Brenda Velasco: We're not talking dollars we're talking.....

Madeline Coppola: Cents.

Dominick Coppola: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: And then mention how many full years you worked for the railroad then.

Dominick Coppola: Full years I worked forty years. Plus I went in the army in 1940 then I came out but my seniority kept on going. I didn't lose no time.

Brenda Velasco: So that five years you were in the Army.....

Dominick Coppola: They gave me credit for it.

Brenda Velasco: That was good.

Dominick Coppola: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Alright, you started off with the tracks, then we went to the docks and then what were some of the specific duties that you had to do?

Dominick Coppola: Well, I made sure that the boats went out in the right way and they used to give the boat, there were captains that give them their tonnage of the coal. What they had on there, they would bring it into the power plants where they used to go in New York.

Brenda Velasco: Right because this supplied over one-third of the source of energy for New York at that time.

Dominick Coppola: Oh, yes, and they got the boats all the time. We used to put a lot of overtime up there.

Brenda Velasco: What were your hours then?

Dominick Coppola: Seven in the morning until three thirty in the afternoon.

Madeline Coppola: You were there when you used to work nights in the winter.

Dominick Coppola: Then I went as a forearm. In the wintertime, the coal used to freeze up and we had a heating house up there where we used to put the coal in there about ten to twelve cars. You know they had four tunnels and there was a man in that "heating house" they called it. He used to put the steam on the cars when they went in and dole out the coal. Maybe they kept them in there for an hour or an hour and a half or two hours. The car went with bubbles going under with the right tonnage, you know.

Brenda Velasco: And how many cars came in a day or shipped?

Dominick Coppola: On the ship what we dumped in the coal?

Brenda Velasco: Yes.

Dominick Coppola: Oh I'll say we had about a hundred and fifty cars.

Brenda Velasco: So this was a busy, busy center.

Dominick Coppola: Oh, yes.

7. What were the hours you worked? What was your pay?

Brenda Velasco: And how many shifts did you work?

Dominick Coppola: I worked from seven at night until when the boats (emptied). Some boats I used to work till three thirty, some eight hours or sometimes nine hours.

I had to finish a boat to go to New York. They needed it.

Madeline Coppola: Then you were on salary, no?

Dominick Coppola: Yes, I was on salary then.

Madeline Coppola: When you worked winter.

Dominick Coppola: Jake Steinman was the big boss over there and I worked the night shift.

Madeline Coppola: A good man.

Dominick Coppola: They were very nice people.

Madeline Coppola: He came from what Pennsylvania?

Dominick Coppola: Yes.

Madeline Coppola: They were well liked up there with the men.

Brenda Velasco: Because you were salary, you didn't get overtime anymore then?

Dominick Coppola: No.

Brenda Velasco: Because you were the foreman.

Dominick Coppola: But I was doing pretty good as a foreman, you know. We worked Saturday and Sunday and we dumped coal all the way up to Christmas Eve. We had no time off but Christmas Day. It was the only day we had off working up there giving coal to the power plants: **Public Service, Con Edison** and there was another one upstate. I can't remember the company where it was. They are all power plants and they used to come in and we used to load them.

Brenda Velasco: Because New York was so populated.

Dominick Coppola: And the boats were under Tracy, M.J. Tracy. They used to bring those boats to the power plants in New York and our tugs used to tow them all the way to New York.

Brenda Velasco: And when you say our tugs.....

Dominick Coppola: The Reading Company tugs.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Dominick Coppola: They brought them right into the power plants where they were on 70 Fourth Street, I remember. When the power plants went out in the orders the tug had the orders where to bring them.

Brenda Velasco: And who gave them the orders, **PSE&G**?

Dominick Coppola: **Public Service.**

Brenda Velasco: And **Con Ed.**

Dominick Coppola: **Con Ed** and they had stations where the power plants were earned and there is where the boats went. Like Sewaren Station it was for **Public Service.**

Brenda Velasco: Right and it's still here.

Dominick Coppola: It's still here but they ain't getting coal.

Brenda Velasco: No.

Dominick Coppola: No, I wish they were. You know how many people would be working today.

Madeline Coppola: That's right.

Dominick Coppola: Believe me, they'd make a good living. I don't know why they took them away.

Brenda Velasco: Then you had about a hundred fifty cars coming in for a shift and we went over your hours. As foreman what was your pay as foreman, you said it improved?

Dominick Coppola: It was four something every two weeks I was thinking, four hundred.

Brenda Velasco: Alright, that was better than, what was it, thirty cents or something.

Dominick Coppola: Well they used to get time and a half after eight hours.

Madeline Coppola: They got more than him some times.

Dominick Coppola: No, sometimes they used to work overtime. It took twelve hours to finish a boat.

Madeline Coppola: A lot of time.

Brenda Velasco: How about injuries, because that was a dangerous occupation?

Madeline Coppola: Oh, yes.

Dominick Coppola: Yes, well on the dock you had that but guys were careful, you know, I mean, they used to watch themselves. We used to have a tugboat and we used to put the boats on a block first. We called it the block where the cable was.

Madeline Coppola: But you lost two guys there, no?

Dominick Coppola: No.

Madeline Coppola: Didn't Susie's husband die?

Dominick Coppola: Oh, I was in the service.

Madeline Coppola: Oh, you were in the service then and how about Mary Simeone's father?

Dominick Coppola: He was working as a brakeman.

Madeline Coppola: Oh, okay.

Dominick Coppola: We called them car riders but Frank Iacovone had those guys who worked there. They used to have around five or six men working.

Madeline Coppola: Where did Mary Simeone's.....

Dominick Coppola: He fell overboard. He worked on the dock.

Madeline Coppola: He worked on the dock. He fell.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, that was her husband?

Dominick Coppola: No, her father.

Madeline Coppola: Father.

Brenda Velasco: Her father fell over.

Madeline Coppola: It was very dangerous you know.

Brenda Velasco: Oh, I imagine.

Dominick Coppola: Yes, some were old men. They didn't even know how to swim or anything. A couple of fellows that know how to swim jumped in and got him out but he took a lot of water in, you know. He died a couple of days or something because, the water, it was polluted, you know. He was taking all that.....

Brenda Velasco: Into his lungs and everything.

Dominick Coppola: Well, that's it.

Brenda Velasco: Oh, no we got some more questions.

8. Were there any benefits provided for the workers?

Dominick Coppola: Benefits?

Brenda Velasco: Yes.

Dominick Coppola: No, vacation.

Madeline Coppola: We pay our own hospitalization. Never had nothing. I pay my own today too. All the years he worked. I worked in the school for twenty-three years and they never told me about twenty-five and I have none; I pay for it.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, so your husband didn't.....

Madeline Coppola: Never got anything.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, they didn't have any medical benefits then?

Madeline Coppola: Nothing.

Dominick Coppola: No, well medical in case you got hurt.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, in case you got hurt and then they.....

Dominick Coppola: They gave you so much.

Madeline Coppola: Today they get everything.

Brenda Velasco: Yes.

Madeline Coppola: It's a shame.

Brenda Velasco: But we don't have as many jobs either.

Dominick Coppola: That's right.

Madeline Coppola: It's a shame.

9. What job/duties did you perform while working there?

Brenda Velasco: As foreman now, did you have to do time sheets to check the time sheets for the men?

Dominick Coppola: Well I had a clerk.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, you had a clerk.

Dominick Coppola: And I used to make the time sheets up.

Brenda Velasco: Did you also say who was working in what job and that?

Dominick Coppola: Yes, well it was all one job it was on the docks there. I had around maybe, say around twelve men.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, so you were in charge of twelve men per shift?

Dominick Coppola: Very right.

Brenda Velasco: Would that include the brakemen as well?

Dominick Coppola: No, that was Iacovone's department.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, that was Frank Iacovone's. So you just handled the docks?

Dominick Coppola: Dock, that was for the dock.

10. Did you work on the McMyler coal dumper?

Brenda Velasco: You worked right near the McMyler coal dumper, right?

Dominick Coppola: Right.

Brenda Velasco: Because it was right on the dock there.

Dominick Coppola: Dock, right.

Brenda Velasco: What do you remember about the McMyler coal dumper?

Dominick Coppola: Well, they used to bring the coal cars from the heating house down to the docks, to the dumper, and there'd be a man upstairs pulling the coal

cars up on the machine there. The man is on the car and he places it, once he puts the brake, so it went inside the machine. He gets off the car and he gets away from the machine and the operator picks up the coal car, dumps it into the shoot and it goes right into the boat. So it's going to get twenty cars or fifteen cars whatever the tonnage. Say the boat carried eight hundred tons, so they get the coal cars and the one in the office there he writes out the tonnage for the boat. The tonnage is say eight hundred tons or something like that and then we'll finish that boat and put another boat underneath, maybe we'd get a bigger boat for the power plants. This was maybe a hard coal boat going into New York. The yard they had the Burns Brothers and we used to ship hard coal to them no, you know.

Brenda Velasco: The bituminous was the soft coal.

Dominick Coppola: Right.

Brenda Velasco: So the hard coal was the anthracite.

Dominick Coppola: That's right, to the Burn brothers or something like that.

Brenda Velasco: Were they a power plant or were they?

Dominick Coppola: No, they'd ship it out to people that had coal and this hard coal and they had trucks which used to bring it to the people who had like heat.

Brenda Velasco: Home heating.

Dominick Coppola: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, so the anthracite was used for the home heating.

Dominick Coppola: Right.

Brenda Velasco: And the bituminous, the soft coal, for the power plants.

Dominick Coppola: Right.

Brenda Velasco: So you not only had power plants supplying the power plants but you were also supplying the middle man who would distribute.....

Dominick Coppola: We used to use Bellevue Hospital in New York. We used to ship hard coal to them.

Brenda Velasco: How long did it take to fill a barge, those boats?

Dominick Coppola: The power plant boats?

Brenda Velasco: Yes.

Dominick Coppola: I'd say it's according to the tonnage and the cars would be around fifty-six to seventy ton coal cars and it would take some time an hour or an hour and a half to fill them.

Brenda Velasco: Wow!

Dominick Coppola: Well, the M.J. Tracy they were big boats. They used to take maybe thirty coal cars or forty cars according to the tonnage of coal cars, you know.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, so not all cars were the same then?

Dominick Coppola: No there used to be all different sized coal cars and we would give them the tonnage what they carry on there to the power plants.

Madeline Coppola: Who was in charge of those boats? Do you remember his name?

Dominick Coppola: What was his name? He was in charge of the boats. He was the head captain.

Madeline Coppola: He come from.....

Dominick Coppola: From South Amboy.

Madeline Coppola: Yes, I know he came from South Amboy but I forgot his name.

Dominick Coppola: Goodie.

Brenda Velasco: Eddie Goodie?

Dominick Coppola: Ed Goodie.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, now he was employed by the railroad as well.

Dominick Coppola: As well. He was in charge of the boats, the tugboats. We had, I think it was, four of them. *Ashburn, Potsville, the Patience* and, I can't seem to get the.....

Brenda Velasco: You got three out of four. You're doing good. When was the last time you were there?

Dominick Coppola: Oh my God!

Brenda Velasco: Right, so that's three out of four.

Dominick Coppola: Another thing I want to tell you, Jake Steinman was the general foreman of the dumper there, of the docks, shipping coal and all, and he went on vacation. When he went on vacation they put me on his job and then I was in charge when the dumper burnt down. That's another dumper there.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Dominick Coppola: I was in charge and he was on vacation and he was with his family in Pennsylvania and I was in charge at the dumper while he was away for two weeks, you know.

Brenda Velasco: Do you recall the year that this happened? (July 2, 1951)

Dominick Coppola: 1940, um.

Madeline Coppola: Were we married?

Dominick Coppola: Oh, he was married, yes.

Madeline Coppola: Were we married?

Dominick Coppola: Yes, we were married. In 19.....

Madeline Coppola: It can't be in the 40s then.

Brenda Velasco: 50's then.

Dominick Coppola: Did Iacovone say anything about that?

Brenda Velasco: No he didn't. You got to remind him about this. Your memory is very good.

Dominick Coppola: And I had... Oh my God, everybody come down-FBI men and everything else. They questioned me, what happened, and I told them that we had just quit work at three thirty and when I went down to check the boat if it was alright to be towed out. The captain said, oh the boat is alright and we smelled smoke and it was underneath the dock. The timbers were all burning up.

Brenda Velasco: Did they ever find out what caused that?

Dominick Coppola: No, I told them.....

Madeline Coppola: You know, when they had a fire there you'd hear a whistle, like they blew a whistle, didn't they?

Dominick Coppola: Yes, but the men weren't there, the men all went home.

Madeline Coppola: The men went home, thank God.

Dominick Coppola: God forbid there was a fire. If I worked overtime, we would have got the fire out but it went up so fast with creosote wood and that burns quick and there was a little wind blowing.

Brenda Velasco: So that just whipped it up.

Dominick Coppola: That's right, swept away and then they got the fire boats from New York to come down. They come down and they were using the... New York they had the good fire hose on there and all that. They had worked all night putting it out.

Madeline Coppola: You didn't lose much work though, did you?

Dominick Coppola: Yes, we did.

Madeline Coppola: You did, I don't remember.

Dominick Coppola: We lost about two or three months work.

Brenda Velasco: Wow!

Dominick Coppola: They had to put a new one, they had to get another dumper and I think that the dumper they got was in Staten Island. It wasn't working and the Reading Railroad got in contact, they borrowed it from them to operate. Then they got the dumper there and they got everything of what we needed for the dumper there and they got it together. It took them about three months or something like that.

Brenda Velasco: Alright, so then they were able to resume work again.

Dominick Coppola: Yes after they got everything they called the men back to work. They were all collecting unemployment.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, so you were collecting unemployment at that time. So this happened during the summer then?

Dominick Coppola: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Dominick Coppola: In July, I think it was. It was hot because it was July.

Brenda Velasco: So they put everybody back then.

Dominick Coppola: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, we're going to have to research and find out the year for that. Then when did you finally end working for the Reading Railroad?

Dominick Coppola: When did I.....

Brenda Velasco: Finally retire.

Dominick Coppola: Retire?

Madeline Coppola: '62?

Dominick Coppola: 1982.

Brenda Velasco: 1982.

Dominick Coppola: I retired in June or July.

Madeline Coppola: When you retired it wasn't the Reading Railroad, it was changing over to.....

Brenda Velasco: Conrail?

Madeline Coppola: Yes, Conrail.

Dominick Coppola: Well they took it over.

Madeline Coppola: They took over.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, and that's the reason you left?

Dominick Coppola: That's right.

Madeline Coppola: Retired.

Dominick Coppola: That's the reason I retired.

Brenda Velasco: How old were you when you retired?

Dominick Coppola: I was about eighty two.

Brenda Velasco: Did the railroad provide housing for any of the people that worked there?

Dominick Coppola: Up near the camp, we used to call it, and they had the barracks there and these guys used to come. They left their wives; they had all kind of men over there. They stood up in the camp there. There was a place where they used to eat and sleep.

Madeline Coppola: He said they were well educated, too.

Dominick Coppola: Oh, yes.

Madeline Coppola: Drinking, you know.

Dominick Coppola: Very, very smart people they were. They'd come with their suits on to work. No gloves on them.

Madeline Coppola: They were drinking.

Dominick Coppola: We used to give them gloves. I felt sorry for them.

Brenda Velasco: What jobs did they perform?

Dominick Coppola: On the dock, working on the dock.

Brenda Velasco: And they came in suits?

Dominick Coppola: That's right. Where I'd need them, like if the coal was frozen, they'd be in the car using a pick to loosen up the coal in the car. That's why we put a lot of overtime in.

Brenda Velasco: It was worse in the wintertime for you.

Dominick Coppola: Oh, yes.

Madeline Coppola: He came home real dirty.

Brenda Velasco: Did the Reading Railroad supply hats, the hard hats? The gloves? Shoes?

Dominick Coppola: No.

Brenda Velasco: No uniforms?

Dominick Coppola: No, you'd buy your own gloves and everything else there, what you needed. The only thing they had that was theirs was the shovels and stuff like that, the equipment, to use.

Brenda Velasco: How long did these transient workers stay?

Dominick Coppola: Oh, I always used to have trouble with them. They used to get their check and then they used to go out drinking. They'd take a day or two or a couple of days off until the money was gone and then they'd come back to work.

Madeline Coppola: These were well educated guys. It was a shame.

Dominick Coppola: They would start working then when the money was down. They used to drink on the job, bring it on the job. I used to catch them with gallons of whiskey and everything they used to have.

Brenda Velasco: Was that permitted on the job?

Dominick Coppola: No, you couldn't bring that, no.

Brenda Velasco: That was dangerous.

Dominick Coppola: Oh, yes, I used to take it off of them and send them home.

Brenda Velasco: What happened to the camps because they are not there anymore?

Dominick Coppola: They took them away. They didn't need it no more. They cut the force, the gang, down. They didn't have too many men. If we needed men in the wintertime, we used to hire them just for the winter and then they used to get laid off.

Madeline Coppola: That's when Vinnie worked for you, no, and Jo Jo? They used to work in the winter.

Dominick Coppola: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Where were these camps located?

Dominick Coppola: Right up here across the street up on the railroad property.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, by ProLogis?

Dominick Coppola: There was a road here, a cinderblock place. It was up ahead. The shacktowns we called them.

Madeline Coppola: You used to walk to work. We didn't even have a car.

Dominick Coppola: They used to have the shacks where I used to eat and they had a cook there. You'd pay so much for the commissary, what they called it.

Brenda Velasco: Then there was no need after awhile.

Dominick Coppola: I don't know if you should put that in there about (inaudible) they had.

Brenda Velasco: No, this is important because this is part of the work environment and what type of people would live in the barracks.

Dominick Coppola: They'd come in by bus from Philadelphia. They used to pick them up and bring them to the Port Reading Coal Docks and work.

Brenda Velasco: We have to realize Reading Railroad, where they got the coal, was from Pennsylvania.

Dominick Coppola: Right.

Brenda Velasco: It was based in Pennsylvania so that would be why they hired them. Okay, anything else that we can think of? Madeline, do you have any stories about your husband working for the Reading Railroad?

Madeline Coppola: Just a lot of lonely nights.

Brenda Velasco: He worked nights?

Madeline Coppola: Always nights. The winter, completely. It was hard and I'd never know when he'd come because you had to stay there.

Dominick Coppola: That was more money and why I took the job.

Madeline Coppola: Once you get paid like that they keep you.

Brenda Velasco: You were a salaried worker.

Dominick Coppola: Yes.

11. What would you like people to know about Port Reading?

Dominick Coppola: Well they had work in Port Reading. A lot of men had their own mechanics and there were operators on the machines there.

Madeline Coppola: You'd never want to move, tell them.

Dominick Coppola: And that was very good for the Port Reading people.

Brenda Velasco: And a lot of people that were employed were from Port Reading.

Dominick Coppola: That's right.

Brenda Velasco: Because you could walk.

Dominick Coppola: That's right. I used to walk.

Madeline Coppola: And he never wanted to leave Port Reading. Make sure you put that down.

Dominick Coppola: And they worked in the wintertime and made a lot of extra money overtime and that was a big help to a lot of people in Port Reading.

Madeline Coppola: I wanted to move from here but not him. He said he was going to die here and he's going to die here.

Dominick Coppola: That's where I had my job. It wasn't a bad job.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, it was a good job.

Dominick Coppola: That's right.

Brenda Velasco: And a good pay.

Dominick Coppola: That's right.

Brenda Velasco: But, how about the neighborhood?

Madeline Coppola: Good.

Dominick Coppola: The neighborhood was good. You had a few grocery stores in town.

Madeline Coppola: Very good. You had *D'Alessios* right across the street.

Dominick Coppola: A couple of bars they had.

Madeline Coppola: Albina D'Alessio's father owned the store across the street, a good man, they were a husband and wife. People here are nice. It was family even if you were like I wasn't family

Brenda Velasco: You were an outsider.

Madeline Coppola: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Even though you lived sixty-two years here.

Madeline Coppola: I was going to move but he never wanted to leave Port Reading. Port Reading is a nice town. No one really bothers you. No one complains about anything and I'm here alone.

Dominick Coppola: When I was in the service, I come right out and I went right on my job. I had my seniority.

Madeline Coppola: Good thing. We grew two boys here in the railroad. We grew up two boys in Woodbridge.

Dominick Coppola: Seniority counted.

Brenda Velasco: And you had a job to come back to.

Madeline Coppola: Yes.

Dominick Coppola: That's right.

Brenda Velasco: And that was fortunate.

Madeline Coppola: The only thing is if they only had hospitalization. That's the only thing because we're paying through the nose.

Brenda Velasco: Oh I'm sure you are. As seniors you are.

Madeline Coppola: Three hundred and fifty dollars a month plus twenty-five dollars for each medicine. That's a lot. But the people here, you know, are really nice.

Dominick Coppola: That's about all I can tell you, you know.

Madeline Coppola: Years ago it was so nice like Vinnie's mother we knew them and we knew Yacovino, next door, all our life and her son was a detective. What was his name?

Dominick Coppola: Fred, who?

Madeline Coppola: Yacovino the detective. Phil Yacovino. You know, no one bothered you over here. We left doors opened.

Brenda Velasco: It was a nice neighborhood.

Dominick Coppola: It was a nice neighborhood, that's right.

Madeline Coppola: You never got robbed.

Brenda Velasco: It was a community.

Madeline Coppola: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: You had a community. Do you still know the people on your block?

Madeline Coppola: No. A lot of them died. When I had my boy I was alone and I used to go to the park with him and I made a nice friend. But we were like cousins to him and she would take care of my boy. I'd come home and finish cleaning. I was always about cleaning, cleaning, cleaning. Everyone helped one another. Today it's not.

Brenda Velasco: So when did you go back to work Madeline?

Madeline Coppola: I went to work when my boys, Jake Steinman was, right Jake? No, not Jake, what his name?

Dominick Coppola: Casey.

Madeline Coppola: Casey got me the job.

Dominick Coppola: I got her the job.

Madeline Coppola: He was with the Board of Education. He called me up and he said, how about going to work lady. So when I went to work I went to School No. 11. Only School No. 11 was open and Barron Avenue. Woodbridge High wasn't opened, nothing. And it was good for me because the boys were in school and I was working.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, so that was in the 1950s then?

Madeline Coppola: Yes, I worked first in the Administration Building but it was no good for me because in the summer I couldn't leave the boys.

Brenda Velasco: So you needed the ten months?

Madeline Coppola: So I that's why I took the kitchen because at least you're home with them on holidays and everything. But it was hard. It wasn't easy work, you know. We worked.

Brenda Velasco: When did you two get married?

Madeline Coppola: 1946. '45 or '46.

Dominick Coppola: Yes, in September.

Madeline Coppola: September.....

Dominick Coppola: 29th.

Brenda Velasco: Wow! You remember.

Dominick Coppola: Yes.

Madeline Coppola: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Terrific.

Madeline Coppola: We got married September 29th. We got married in New York.

Brenda Velasco: So how did you meet then?

Madeline Coppola: My father worked on the railroad. My father was king. He

was good friends with everyone, you know, but he didn't like working dirty. My father was a clean bug.

Brenda Velasco: And this was a dirty job with the coal.

Madeline Coppola: Yes, and he didn't want that. So I always came here for vacation and visited them and all. Really I knew him as a kid, you could say, because we always came.

Brenda Velasco: So you grew.....

Madeline Coppola: Grew up together with him but I never thought I would end up here. I never went out with him until he got out of the service.

Brenda Velasco: Well, he didn't lose any time marrying you. Very good.

Madeline Coppola: Yes, this was a nice town.

Brenda Velasco: It still is a nice town.

Madeline Coppola: People don't bother you.

Brenda Velasco: Well I thank you very, very much for having.....

Madeline Coppola: You live in Colonia?

Brenda Velasco: Yes.

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After the recording was completed, Dominick remembered that the barges loaded with anthracite coal went west to the islands, the Caribbean and the Gulf of Mexico.

After the formal interview, Madelyn Coppola contacted Albina D'Alessio and stated that Dominic forgot to mention two other facts. His daughter-in-law, Connie Coppola worked in the office of the Reading Railroad in Port Reading. He also remembered that coal was shipped to power plants in South Amboy.