

**Oral History Interview**  
**Dominick LaPenta**  
**WH109**

(Written transcript and digital audio)

On October 25, 2012 Dominick LaPenta was interviewed by Brenda Velasco at 10:30 A.M. at the Fords Library.

*Brenda Velasco:* Dominick LaPenta is also known as Donald LaPenta of the famous LaPenta family in Woodbridge Township and also **LaPenta Oil**.

I'm going to turn this over to Dom and start with the questioning because we've got a lot of information to extract from him about the family, himself and about a bygone Woodbridge.

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

*Dominick LaPenta:* My name is Dominick S. LaPenta. I go under Donald because one time I used to tap dance and my mother took me to dancing school. So Donald, Don and Dominick are the same thing. I lived all my life in Woodbridge. I went on the road with a musical outfit and traveled around. But I can only say that there was really no place I feel more comfortable in than Woodbridge, New Jersey.

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

*Brenda Velasco:* You're still living here, right?

*Dominick LaPenta:* Yes I am. I'm in Fords right now.

*Brenda Velasco:* You're in Fords but when you grew up.....in what year were you born?

*Dominick LaPenta:* 1929.

*Brenda Velasco:* Wow, the crash! (Stock Market Crash of 1929)

*Dominick LaPenta:* That's right. I was born in August and I think the crash came in October.

*Brenda Velasco:* Yes, Black Friday.

*Dominick LaPenta:* I guess I was a lucky baby or so.

*Brenda Velasco:* So you grew up basically during the Depression.

*Dominick LaPenta:* Yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* What was your location in Woodbridge where you lived at that time?

*Dominick LaPenta:* My dad says we lived going into Sewaren, Woodbridge Avenue, right by the Town Hall. Then I moved around a little bit. We ended up going.....mother found a house over on Grove Street in Woodbridge, Grove and St. James Avenue, and my parents ran up there and it was for rent. The Sabos owned it. They took the house over and my father eventually bought the house and he bought it for five thousand dollars.

*Brenda Velasco:* Let me stop here because when we deal with the LaPenta family there are a lot of LaPentas. Who was your dad? Which one was your dad?

*Dominick LaPenta:* Sam.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, Sam was your dad and that's the oil company.

*Dominick LaPenta:* Right.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, so you're his son but you're also related to Frank LaPenta and Bob LaPenta whom I previously interviewed and they're your uncles: you're their nephew. So your dad bought his house. Do you remember the exact address?

*Dominick LaPenta:* 255 Grove Street.

*Brenda Velasco:* 255 Grove Street and he bought it for five thousand dollars.

*Dominick LaPenta:* Yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* Which was a lot of money during that time.

*Dominick LaPenta:* I guess so.

*Brenda Velasco:* So you are about the second generation in Woodbridge.

*Dominick LaPenta:* Right.

*Brenda Velasco:* And then your son also....you have a Don as a son.

*Dominick LaPenta:* Donald, yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* And he lives in Woodbridge, too?

*Dominick LaPenta:* No, he lives in Forked River.

*Brenda Velasco:* But he runs the business with you?

*Dominick LaPenta:* Yes, and I have another son Billy, William, and he lives in Howell right now. He's in the oil business with us, too.

*Brenda Velasco:* So it's still a family business, Sam LaPenta Oil Company or LaPenta Oil Company.

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

*Brenda Velasco:* Do you know why your grandparents moved to Woodbridge at all?

*Dominick LaPenta:* Well, my grandfather came from Italy in a little town called Caserta which is right across from Naples. When he came out here he was living in Thomas Edison's house. I guess you know about that?

*Brenda Velasco:* Yes.

*Dominick LaPenta:* Then he met my grandmother, who is Irish but she could speak very good Italian. She was bought up by an Italian family and it was cute because she was sixteen years old and my grandfather was twenty-six and him living over in Thomas Edison's house because it had boarders and my grandfather and my grandmother ran the boarding house. Everybody had to pay by the week to my grandmother and then Edison would come down at a certain time and my grandmother turned the money over to him. I guess you might have that under Frank LaPenta because.....

*Brenda Velasco:* A little bit but it's good to hear it from you. What was your grandfather's name again?

*Dominick LaPenta:* Dominic.

*Brenda Velasco:* He's a Dominic just like you are a Dominick. Then eventually they came to Woodbridge though.

*Dominick LaPenta:* Yes and my father was born on Chain O Hills Road in Iselin.

*Brenda Velasco:* This is Sam?

*Dominick LaPenta:* Yes, Sam. And my grandfather at that time worked for the water company so when he went to work he had the water company horse and wagon so he would have to get up early and get the horse and wagon.....

*Brenda Velasco:* Not a car, not a truck, but a horse and wagon.

*Dominick LaPenta:* And then they drove it all the way down to the water company and then, of course, he went to work.

*Brenda Velasco:* And that was on Port Reading Avenue the water company?

*Dominick LaPenta:* Yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* But you grew up in Woodbridge Proper.

*Dominick LaPenta:* Right.

*Brenda Velasco:* Alright, so we're going to get you down to Question #4 there.

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

*Brenda Velasco:* Were there a lot of houses where you lived on Grove Street?

*Dominick LaPenta:* No, there wasn't that many.

*Brenda Velasco:* Did you have paved streets?

*Dominick LaPenta:* No, St. James Avenue was a dirt street. In fact, the people used to come up and one guy broke a spring on his car and he got very mad. He didn't want to come over anymore.

*Brenda Velasco:* At least he had a car.

*Dominick LaPenta:* There was one thing that I loved up there which was a lot of land. Now it's all covered with houses.

*Brenda Velasco:* When you say a lot of land you're saying fields.

*Dominick LaPenta:* Yes. In fact, the circuses used to come in.

*Brenda Velasco:* And where were they?

*Dominick LaPenta:* They came up on Grove Street right where all those fields were and they had more than enough room to put a three ring circus and all the other things that go with it. I saw the elephants push trucks out of the mud because they were stuck. I cherish this because when they're putting the stakes in for the tents there would be maybe about three or four or five guys around us and each one had a mallet and they just went one at a time, bang, bang, bang, bang.

*Brenda Velasco:* In rhythm.

*Dominick LaPenta:* And they'd put that in and went to the next one. It was really an experience that I cherish because you don't see that anymore.

*Brenda Velasco:* No, and you're not going to see that in Woodbridge anymore either.

*Dominick LaPenta:* There's no land.

*Brenda Velasco:* Right, there are no fields. So who sponsored these circuses?

*Dominick LaPenta:* I guess the township.

*Brenda Velasco:* And this was off of Grove.....

*Dominick LaPenta:* Grove Street.

*Brenda Velasco:* Quite an unusual experience. How about services, did the township pick up garbage and supply your house with water?

*Dominick LaPenta:* Yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, so you had all of that living there. How about the stores?

*Dominick LaPenta:* Most of the stores were down in Woodbridge Proper. You know you had the **A&P** down there and there was the **Acme**.

*Brenda Velasco:* Where was the **Acme**, Main Street or Rahway Avenue?

*Dominick LaPenta:* No it was on Main Street in fact where Elek has his real estate business over there, that's where the **Acme** was and there was a 5&10 there.

*Brenda Velasco:* **Woolworth's 5&10?**

*Dominick LaPenta:* Yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* And that's the same side.

*Dominick LaPenta:* Yes, the same side. So there was an **Acme, A&P** and then the **5&10** and then **Christensen's** was there, the department store. **Publix Drug Store**, at that time, took part of **Christensen's** store. That's where he started and then a little later on there was a lot maybe two doors away that he bought and built this drug store. It's not a drug store. I think it's the Visiting Nurse facility. Then right across the street was **Choper's**. He was a great guy. My grandmother did a lot of business with him. Don't forget she had a lot of kids.

*Brenda Velasco:* She had about eighteen children so your grandmother ran up the bills with all those kids.

*Dominick LaPenta:* That's true and she put everything on charge. I guess you know how my grandfather died.

*Brenda Velasco:* Well let's talk about that because this is through the eyes not of his son but the eyes of his grandson and that's what you were. So tell us how he.....

*Dominick LaPenta:* Well he worked for the water company and he was always out on the road; he just got over pneumonia and he was going to go back to work. My grandmother said what do you have to go back to work for, you just got out? He said that's all right he said I'm going to be inside today and I won't have to go outside. Of course that was bad because when he went in there somebody.....right next to the water company was a business, a building that they made caps for the trains. When the trains were coming up, they would run over this cap and it would explode and then they knew that a train was coming so then they would put the barricades down to stop the traffic. Well somebody threw the wrong switch, and that building went up, the water company went up and my grandfather went up. It was very drastic because he left five or seven kids that were still living at home.

*Brenda Velasco:* And your father was one of them.

*Dominick LaPenta:* Yes, my father was one of the kids that survived. I was in the seventh grade. (1940)

*Brenda Velasco:* So you were in the seventh grade when your grandfather died...well he was killed by that accident at that flare company or signal company. That wasn't too far from your home because you lived on St. James and Grove Street, right?

*Dominick LaPenta:* Yes and the school is still there. It's the one that's.....

*Brenda Velasco:* School 11?

*Dominick LaPenta:* Yes, School 11 right.

*Brenda Velasco:* You were in school at that time so you must have heard the explosion too.

*Dominick LaPenta:* Yes. In fact what happened, George, my uncle who is eight months older than I am, came into the room and said I want my nephew to come and I came out of school and said why. He said my father died and we want the family together. So I left and went over.

*Brenda Velasco:* That was quite a tragedy.

*Dominick LaPenta:* Yes it was. It was bad.

*Brenda Velasco:* Because your grandmother.....

*Dominick LaPenta:* She was all by herself and she had all these kids. Woodbridge was different then. I mean I'm sure that the people here are good but for some reason they seem to be closer when somebody was in need of something. Everybody watched out for everybody else.

*Brenda Velasco:* Yes, your population was a lot less and you didn't have as much of the government and pensions and medical benefit.

*Dominick LaPenta:* They got nothing.

*Brenda Velasco:* So we depended on each other to support us and that's something we've lost in this process.

*Dominick LaPenta:* I'm jumping around. I hope you don't mind me.

*Brenda Velasco:* No because I'm going to get you back but I want your observations, too. So we've got some of the stores, you went to School 11 which wasn't too far from your house.

*Dominick LaPenta:* I went to School 1 first.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, School 1 first. What grades did you go to School 1?

*Dominick LaPenta:* I was up to fourth grade.

*Brenda Velasco:* Did you go to kindergarten there?

*Dominick LaPenta:* There was no kindergarten.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, so it was grade one through four and then School 11.

*Dominick LaPenta:* School 11 was from 5 to 8 and then we went to the high school.

*Brenda Velasco:* Now the high school.....

*Dominick LaPenta:* Barron Avenue.

*Brenda Velasco:* Barron Avenue and that was from 9 through 12.

*Dominick LaPenta:* No, there were two sessions.

*Brenda Velasco:* Oh!

*Dominick LaPenta:* The first session started at 7:30 in the morning and went to 12:30 and that was the juniors and the seniors. Then the freshmen and sophomores went in the afternoon from 12:30 to 4:30 or 5:00.

*Brenda Velasco:* So on a day like today or December you'd be.....

*Dominick LaPenta:* Coming out in the dark.

*Brenda Velasco:* I didn't realize they had the double sessions at the Barron Avenue High School then. What was your class of graduation, do you recall?

*Dominick LaPenta:* 1947. We just had our sixty-fifth reunion.

*Brenda Velasco:* Wow!

*Dominick LaPenta:* But that's our last one.

*Brenda Velasco:* Sixty-fifth reunion my goodness. How many people attended?

*Dominick LaPenta:* Classmates?

*Brenda Velasco:* Yes.

*Dominick LaPenta:* I'd say maybe a little more than twenty but we had about forty or fifty there.

*Brenda Velasco:* Alright, with spouses, girlfriends, boyfriends or companions whatever.

*Dominick LaPenta:* Right. They came from all over. They came from California and they came from all over the states.

*Brenda Velasco:* It must have been great to see everybody.

*Dominick LaPenta:* Oh yeah.

*Brenda Velasco:* So you stayed in school during the Depression and then World War II.

*Dominick LaPenta:* I just missed World War II.

*Brenda Velasco:* Good. I'm sorry.

*Dominick LaPenta:* No, that's good.

*Brenda Velasco:* Yes it is good.

*Dominick LaPenta:* No it was. What happened is that what they were doing is you would graduate and then they'd take you right into the Army. By the time I got up there (I graduated in '47), the war was over in 1945.

*Brenda Velasco:* And they were demobilizing by then.

*Dominick LaPenta:* Right, and so what happened is I missed World War II but then Korea came and they got me for Korea.

*Brenda Velasco:* You were in the Army then?

*Dominick LaPenta:* Yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* How about houses of worship when you were growing up?

*Dominick LaPenta:* Around?

*Brenda Velasco:* Yes.

*Dominick LaPenta:* I think we just about had the same thing. We had the Catholic Church.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, St. James was there.

*Dominick LaPenta:* We had the Methodist Church.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, right on Main Street.

*Dominick LaPenta:* We had the Hungarian Reformed Church on School Street and then we had the church that's over there on Grove Avenue and Barron Avenue.

*Brenda Velasco:* Now what church are you talking about?

*Dominick LaPenta:* That's a good question. I should know it. I've been by it a hundred times. (Congregational Church)

*Brenda Velasco:* So have I.

*Dominick LaPenta:* Right by the high school.

*Brenda Velasco:* By the Middle School now.

*Dominick LaPenta:* Yes, that's right, the Middle School.

*Brenda Velasco:* Your high school but it's the Middle School now.

*Dominick LaPenta:* We went back one year on our class reunion and we went into the school and we couldn't imagine how small it is because it looked so big. Where we used to have our senior prom, the gymnasium, we would fix up the gymnasium and now it looks so small.

*Brenda Velasco:* As we get older dimensions change for us. Okay, so we covered Question #4 and now we'll go to Question #5.

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

*Dominick LaPenta:* The post office moved all around.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, it was a traveling post office.

*Dominick LaPenta:* They would stay there for five or ten years and something like that and then move. I'm trying to think of where the first post office was. I think it was on Main Street, Main and Pearl.

*Brenda Velasco:* How about the library? What library did you attend?

*Dominick LaPenta:* There was a library in the high school. I can't think of where there was another library.

*Brenda Velasco:* Did you go to the Barron Arts for the library or did you play sports or you just weren't interested at this time?

*Dominick LaPenta:* I loved sports.

*Brenda Velasco:* Good, then let's hear about some of the sports that you did. Did you play in high school then?

*Dominick LaPenta:* Let me say that at my size, not quite 5' 6", I loved football but I was too small for football.

*Brenda Velasco:* And this is a football town.

*Dominick LaPenta:* So we had these other little clubs. Like St. James had a football team, a league of its own. So I got in on that so I had my football and we had more fun than anything else.

*Brenda Velasco:* What about parks? Did you have parks around here?

*Dominick LaPenta:* We had the park right next to the firehouse over there. There was a pool in that park and it was only about four inches deep but when it was hot the snug came out of the middle. It was just like a big rain fall and it just filled up everything. My aunt lived on School Street and she was minding me at that time, my Aunt Nancy, and I'm looking at the kids and I was small and my aunt said you'd like to go in the water and I said yeah. She said why don't you go in the water and I said I don't have a bathing suit. She said you got your underwear on so I said yeah so she stripped me down to my underwear and in I went.

*Brenda Velasco:* And had a ball.

*Dominick LaPenta:* I had a ball.

*Brenda Velasco:* Well that fountain is no longer there and things change. But the parks are. And the firehouse was still on School Street?

*Dominick LaPenta:* Yes, they have rebuilt the firehouse since.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, let's go down to Question #6.

## **6. What did you do for recreation?**

*Brenda Velasco:* As you were growing up, what did you do for recreation because there were no computers and there was no TV.

*Dominick LaPenta:* It was great.

*Brenda Velasco:* Tell me why it was great, though.

*Dominick LaPenta:* Well I had a bicycle that I bought off of Eddie Van Decker. I bought it for six dollars and it was a skinny tire bike, it was a 26. I rode it all over Woodbridge. I rode down Rahway Avenue and into Avenel and coming back again. Then I rode into Fords and I went over by the clay pits; we had a lot of clay pits. In fact, the Woodbridge Mall is on one of the clay pits. They had these places where you would swim and you know you shouldn't swim there.

*Brenda Velasco:* This was in the clay pits by Woodbridge Center?

*Dominick LaPenta:* Right where Woodbridge Center is. In fact there was one right on Main Street. We used to call it Dog Patch. You know Woodbridge was a brick town and clay, clay was the thing; there was plenty of clay in Woodbridge. So they would go over and they would dig this clay out and when they were finished they

would just leave the hole. Now the hole would fill up with water and then of course that became a swimming hole. A few kids drowned there because it would walk right off and then it would go down.

*Brenda Velasco:* And that's where you went swimming?

*Dominick LaPenta:* Yeah, but it was all stagnant water and my mother always knew when I went swimming because you could smell the water on me.

*Brenda Velasco:* So that was part of your recreation, your bicycle and your swimming.

*Dominick LaPenta:* Then we had different things like baseball. You had little baseball teams that popped up. Not Pop Warner or.....

*Brenda Velasco:* No, they were spontaneous.

*Dominick LaPenta:* They were spontaneous and then one team would play another and we would have a lot of fun. You know you got some great athletes that came out of Woodbridge and one was Lou Creekmur.

*Brenda Velasco:* That's right.

*Dominick LaPenta:* He became All American.

*Brenda Velasco:* Do you know what team he played for?

*Dominick LaPenta:* I don't know.

*Brenda Velasco:* Was it Detroit?

*Dominick LaPenta:* I keep getting them mixed up.

*Brenda Velasco:* We have a memorial to him right at Town Hall in the parking lot. He came from Hopelawn.

*Dominick LaPenta:* I think so.

*Brenda Velasco:* Let's go down to Question #7.

### **7. What was the focal point of your community?**

*Brenda Velasco:* In your eyes what was the center of your community?

*Dominick LaPenta:* Woodbridge and the Town Hall.

*Brenda Velasco:* Town Hall, Main Street?

*Dominick LaPenta:* Yes. Now you know they had a mayor and he was a part time mayor at that time for the longest time. I think his pay was two thousand dollars a year.

*Brenda Velasco:* Which mayor was this?

*Dominick LaPenta:* Well when I got in there was Augie Greiner (1934-1951) and then Quigley (1952-1959) came along and I don't know the order of the ones that were there but then people like Joe Joe of course came. (Joseph DeMarino: 1980-1983, 1988-1991)

*Brenda Velasco:* Joe Joe came in the 1980s.

*Dominick LaPenta:* That's when the town started getting real big. But if you wanted to talk to somebody Andy Desmond will tell you.

*Brenda Velasco:* Who's Andy Desmond?

*Dominick LaPenta:* He's a judge in Woodbridge. If you got in trouble, you know, what would happen is Andy or somebody would call your house and talk to your father. Now the trouble that we got into was nothing compared to what they're doing today. But you know, he'd say listen Sam he'd say I got your kid down here. He'd say don't come down right away. And he'd say, excuse the expression, I'm going to



scare the hell out of him. Then he'd straighten it out and my father would come down and then he would come up. But I'll tell you he did his job. I never went back in there again.

*Brenda Velasco:* What did you do?

*Dominick LaPenta:* It was like making noise with the bicycles and everything else like that and somebody complained about it. We never destroyed anything; never took anything.

*Brenda Velasco:* No, it wasn't destructive.

*Dominick LaPenta:* No.

*Brenda Velasco:* Little things.

*Dominick LaPenta:* Yeah.

*Brenda Velasco:* Which kids do. Okay, you know, we skipped something. There was the **Strand Theater**.

*Dominick LaPenta:* Oh, yeah.

*Brenda Velasco:* Talk to me about that because I saw a picture that you had before and you were up on stage.

*Dominick LaPenta:* Yeah.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, let's hear about the **Strand Theater**. Where was it located?

*Dominick LaPenta:* It was in Perth Amboy. It was on Smith Street. There were five movies in Perth Amboy. Let me see if I can name them all. **Majestic** was the biggest and then it was the **Ditmas**, the **Roky**, the **Crescent** and the **Strand Theater** used to have vaudeville.

*Brenda Velasco:* Oh, okay, so this is where the vaudeville was in Perth Amboy then.

*Dominick LaPenta:* But a lot of people in Woodbridge, you know, they were very musical and entertaining. There were some great people such as Frank Kreisal.

*Brenda Velasco:* Frank Kreisal also had a band or something. (Interview 23)

*Dominick LaPenta:* Yes he did. They called themselves *The Gallahads*. He had a couple of hits out there.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, he's from Woodbridge Township and you also did something, too. So let's hear something, too. So let's hear about it Don.

*Dominick LaPenta:* My mother had a bunch of lady friends and they all had daughters. So they all took their daughters to dancing school. My mother wasn't going to be outdone so she took me and I went over to Perth Amboy, right across from Perth Amboy School there was a Masonic building there, I think it's still there. And Mr. Korvette was up there and he taught dancing. So I was up there and learned how to tap dance. Then from there the shows came out and the minstrels came out. I guess they either called or something and my father offered my services. Then I was in these minstrels and they were great. You met a lot of people. I think the captain of the police force, Jack Egan, was an end man. St. James had a lot of minstrels. I think they were the last of the minstrels that I know of. The whole township would get together and go to these minstrels because it was local talent. They had Dorothy Langan who became Dori Langan and she married Andre Previn. I'm trying to think and I should know them but it's skipping my mind as far as who else was around. I should have written them down, I'm sorry, but there were so many of them.

*Brenda Velasco:* This was popular then, very popular. How old were you at this time?

*Dominick LaPenta:* I was about eleven or twelve.

*Brenda Velasco:* Wow! You had a large segment of Woodbridge either involved or just coming to be a spectator.

*Dominick LaPenta:* Especially the minstrels that were in Woodbridge. We got just about all the town out of Woodbridge or maybe such as the towns around Woodbridge such as Fords and maybe even some from Perth Amboy.

*Brenda Velasco:* You tap danced but you also sang too, right?

*Dominick LaPenta:* Yeah, they were the old time numbers.

*Brenda Velasco:* What were some of the songs that you sang?

*Dominick LaPenta:* *If You Knew Susie, Five Foot Two*, all kinds. I had a shoe shine outfit and a box and I would come out and everybody was sitting on the stage, and the interlocutor was there, and I went to everybody to try to get them so I could shine their shoes and nobody wanted to have their shoes shined. So I think the interlocutor came over and would say come over and you can shine my shoes so he would put his foot there and then I started to shine the shoe and of course then the piano took off and I sang *Shoeshine Boy*.

*Brenda Velasco:* Oh, this was all staged.

*Dominick LaPenta:* Yeah. What happened is that he gave me a half dollar for shining his shoes and you know what my father did?

*Brenda Velasco:* What?

*Dominick LaPenta:* He let me keep the half a dollar.

*Brenda Velasco:* Wow!

*Dominick LaPenta:* And half a dollar was a lot of money.

*Brenda Velasco:* Yeah, because we're dealing with the 1930s at this time.

*Dominick LaPenta:* The average wage for a man was fifteen dollars a week.

*Brenda Velasco:* Did your dad have the oil business at this time?

*Dominick LaPenta:* I guess he was just starting it because he worked for the water company, too. Actually Mundy did all the work for the water company. I'd like to ramble a little more. I'll tell you my father told me this story and this is off the record. He worked for Mundy and Mr. Mundy said Sam I want you to go up to Metuchen and I want you to dig a hole there's a leak up there. So he took his men and went up there and dug a hole. And he had the two guys in the trench, they were going to fix the leak, and a cop came along. He said what are you doing and my father said we're here fixing a leak. The cop said do you have a permit for this and my father said well listen I think Mr. Mundy would be smart enough to have a permit. He said well you better go call him and find out if he's got a permit. He says get your men out of the hole. So he did, he got the men out of the hole. He went over and he called Mr. Mundy. He said: Mr. Mundy there's a cop out there and he says he wants to know if you got a permit and if we don't have a permit he's going to arrest. So Mr. Mundy says Sam did I send you up there to fix that leak and he says yeah and he says then what are you bothering me for. So he went back out there and he was ready to put the boys back in the hole and the cop says well did you find out what was going on and he says he told me to fix the leak. He says if you go back in there I'm going to arrest you. And he says: my boss says I got to go back in there, I'm going to go back in there. So he told the boys to get in there and the cop arrested him. So do you know what Mr. Mundy did? He shut off the water to Metuchen.

*Brenda Velasco:* Oh, wow!

*Dominick LaPenta:* Well that's how they got things done, you know. Well that's funny.

*Brenda Velasco:* Yeah.

*Dominick LaPenta:* He shut off the water to Metuchen. You see how fast he let those guys out of jail I'll tell you that.

*Brenda Velasco:* Of course, because they were getting all the complaints and the mayor was after him by that time. That's a good story. Okay, we're going down to Question #8.

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

*Brenda Velasco:* Because you lived in Woodbridge Proper and you're still in Woodbridge. Its Fords, you're still in Woodbridge.

*Dominick LaPenta:* My mother came from Perth Amboy and when she was moving to Woodbridge my aunts all said, oh, she's moving to the hick town but they didn't realize how great it was. You had all these fields to play in. And there were a lot of young people where you get up a game of football and sometimes there were twenty-two on a side.

*Brenda Velasco:* Wow!

*Dominick LaPenta:* So everybody played. It just was great. Then the school was there and you knew everybody in the school. There were less robberies.

*Brenda Velasco:* You felt it was safe.

*Dominick LaPenta:* It was safe. That's the word, safe.

*Brenda Velasco:* It was a nice environment to grow up in.

*Dominick LaPenta:* Oh, yeah. Do you know my father never took the keys out of the trucks?

*Brenda Velasco:* Wow!

*Dominick LaPenta:* You wanted to start the truck the key was right in there until later on somebody took one of our service trucks. And then we started taking the keys out but that was much, much later.

*Brenda Velasco:* Probably in the '60s or '70s.

*Dominick LaPenta:* You know I do want to say this. That after World War II, the guys were coming home from World War II and what they did is that field now was being cut up with streets. There's Grady Drive and DeSoto Avenue and DeKalb Avenue and all those houses went in there. Now those guys from the services walked in there with no down payment and all they would have to do is pay their mortgage payment and those houses went for seven thousand dollars.

*Brenda Velasco:* That was great and they were right by Route 9.

*Dominick LaPenta:* And they're still up. They were all cape cods.

*Brenda Velasco:* Yes. I just interviewed the Elek sisters, Margaret and Helen, around this area and they live in one of these small houses. But seven thousand dollars and no payment down; and they probably got the GI mortgages too.

*Dominick LaPenta:* Probably.

*Brenda Velasco:* Because you missed out on that but then you had the Korean War. Okay, let's go to Question #9 then.

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

*Brenda Velasco:* You already hit on that construction of the post-World War II houses. You anticipated this question.

*Dominick LaPenta:* Oh yeah, we got a great library system.

*Brenda Velasco:* I'm in total agreement.

*Dominick LaPenta:* I think it's one of the best around and we just put up a new Town Hall but I hated to see the other one go.

*Brenda Velasco:* It has a lot of memories for you.

*Dominick LaPenta:* And you know all that brick on the old one came from the clay pits. I got a couple of bricks home that I put in the back. What else? We got a new train station.

*Brenda Velasco:* Yup, you have a newly renovated train station but you always had that train station there though in Woodbridge. That's one of the other advantages for living in Woodbridge ;you got the trains and the highways and the traffic.

*Dominick LaPenta:* And the Parkway and the Turnpike.

*Brenda Velasco:* You got it. We are the crossroads.

*Dominick LaPenta:* You know the Turnpike took our football field.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, why don't you tell me about that?

*Dominick LaPenta:* It was just before we graduated I'd say maybe about 1945 or so and yeah they were taking our football field because the Turnpike was going right through it.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, and that's by American Legion.

*Dominick LaPenta:* Yes, in fact the American Legion building is the lockers. That's where the guys used to go in and change into the football uniforms.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, so you saw a lot of changes.

*Dominick LaPenta:* Oh yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* We don't have the fields and you have a new high school now.

*Dominick LaPenta:* Yup, a new high school. You know right where the football field now is where the new high school is was the old racetrack for the cars back when my father was a young man.

*Brenda Velasco:* Did you ever attend?

*Dominick LaPenta:* I was born there.

*Brenda Velasco:* You were a kid. But your father, Sam LaPenta did.

*Dominick LaPenta:* There were trees there and some of the kids used to go up and into the trees and watch the racing. He said one time one of those racing cars went off the track and went up and hit the tree and I don't know if he hit the kid or not.

*Brenda Velasco:* Wow! Okay, so even if you were a spectator you've got to watch out.

*Dominick LaPenta:* Well you know that field is the center of Woodbridge Township.

*Brenda Velasco:* What do you mean the center?

*Dominick LaPenta:* If you put your finger on there all of Woodbridge Township is around it.

*Brenda Velasco:* I didn't realize that. Okay, anything else you want to add about Question #9, significant happenings that you saw: any sporting events, riots, discrimination, accidents?

*Dominick LaPenta:* All I know is that Woodbridge is very big in sports now for the younger kids. They're really with the Little League and the Pop Warner and all the families getting involved. I like that because we didn't have it.

*Brenda Velasco:* No, yours was mostly unorganized.

*Dominick LaPenta:* Yes, I just want to say that we had a football team and I was quarterback. I had a cardboard helmet, I had a set of shoulder pads and I had a sweatshirt on top of me and my jeans and my sneakers. Then we'd hike the ball and run like anything. You know it was great. I mean the teachers were fine. We had Mr. Ferry who opened up the first pizza place around and that was over on the Iselin circle. I'm trying to think....I should write names down. I'm 83 years old.

*Brenda Velasco:* You're doing pretty good; you're doing very well.

*Dominick LaPenta:* But anyway we got all this going on. Let's finish this and then maybe if we have some time I'll.....

### ***10. What do you like about Woodbridge today?***

*Brenda Velasco:* You mentioned about recreation, that's how we got sidetracked. And that's keeping the kids within the township, keeping them busy after school and just having them have a stake in society and that's one thing to do with sports.

*Dominick LaPenta:* There's one thing. We'll go back because it just popped into my head is that during World War II, Woodbridge went out completely for our men in service and the war over there. The women used to save fat in these little cans. Then a guy would come around and take it and they needed it for munitions I guess. They used to get together and make all sorts of clothing. Then, of course, they had the things about getting the letters out to the boys.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay and you know what? We're still doing that with the men and women in Iraq and Afghanistan. (Blue Star Families)

*Dominick LaPenta:* Isn't that great.

*Brenda Velasco:* Yes, it's a continuation. The continuity of what Woodbridge is about.

*Dominick LaPenta:* I was in Korea and we were over there waiting for the mail. The mail was one of the biggest things going.

*Brenda Velasco:* What years were you in Korea?

*Dominick LaPenta:* I went into the Army in 1951 and I was in Korea May of '52 and then I came home in October of '53. The cease fire was I'd say about September of '53.

*Brenda Velasco:* Then when you came back you came back to Woodbridge.

*Dominick LaPenta:* Yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* Did you work in your father's.....

*Dominick LaPenta:* Oh yeah, I came home and he said you'll start Monday. I said give me two weeks off at least. So he gave me two weeks off, and then we went back into the business.

*Brenda Velasco:* And you still report to the business.

*Dominick LaPenta:* Yeah, my sons are running it now and I go in and I always try to put my opinions in.

*Brenda Velasco:* And you answer phones.

*Dominick LaPenta:* Answer phones.

*Brenda Velasco:* I know that but that's why we couldn't interview you there because the phones are always ringing and I needed you to sit down in a quiet place. Okay and you're still in Woodbridge, do you like it?

*Dominick LaPenta:* Oh I love it.

***11. Do you have any family members still living in Woodbridge Township today?***

*Dominick LaPenta:* Oh yeah. We got Bob.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, you have your uncles, Bob and.....

*Dominick LaPenta:* And then his son Robert Jr. We got Frank and Audrey. We got Ethel's kids, Ethel is not with us anymore, but its Darlene and Janine and the son, Lenny, is living in Florida. You know you really got to put them down so you don't miss anybody. You got Warren and Sandy and their daughter Amy is now a school teacher in Woodbridge High.

*Brenda Velasco:* Terrific. Well the LaPenta family....there are a lot of people.

*Dominick LaPenta:* Oh yeah. I asked Marjorie out of these two people, my grandmother and grandfather, what do you think the numbers are of the family? She said about two hundred.

*Brenda Velasco:* Wow!

*Dominick LaPenta:* You know we're related to the Tomassos and to the Massendra's in Iselin. In fact Johnny Massendra went into the service in World War II, came back home. He went back to Woodbridge High and got his diploma. My grandfather's sister, Philomena, she married Tommy Tomasso from Iselin and that's how we're related.

*Brenda Velasco:* There was a Judge Tomasso.

*Dominick LaPenta:* Did you remember Gene Tomasso?

*Brenda Velasco:* Yes, he was.....

*Dominick LaPenta:* He was with the township.

*Brenda Velasco:* The council. Okay, so you're all related to that family. That was Philomena.....

*Dominick LaPenta:* Yes, my grandfather's sister.

*Brenda Velasco:* So you've got lots of relatives.

*Dominick LaPenta:* Yeah, they're all over. Some of them moved away but we've got George, of course. And George got a place down in Florida. He's my uncle and I told you he's eight months older than I am. I'm trying to think of what George is doing now. He's got one son and he's doing very well. It's quite a family. And you know what I liked? My grandmother lived on Main Street and for lunch I used to go over to her house and have a sandwich. She was feeding so many that one more sandwich didn't mean anything. But she would fight if anyone of her kids..... and for some reason she liked me, I was her favorite you know.

*Brenda Velasco:* Was your father the oldest son?

*Dominick LaPenta:* Oldest son.

*Brenda Velasco:* Well, that says it all. The oldest son is always somebody special to a mother.

*Dominick LaPenta:* Oh my grandmother would go over and give her own kid a whack and leave me alone.

*Brenda Velasco:* Grandchild even though you were only eight months different. A grandchild is something special to lose and she could see you, she lived so close.

*Dominick LaPenta:* And I loved it down there because the gang was there.

*Brenda Velasco:* Of course.

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

*Dominick LaPenta:* The train wreck, I remember the train wreck. (1951)

*Brenda Velasco:* Were you here for the train wreck?

*Dominick LaPenta:* Yes, that's just before I went into the service and I was coming back from **Lincoln Tech** over in Newark. I came back and I seen all this commotion going down around Fulton Street and I asked what happened. They said we had a train wreck. So **Shell Oil** was sending in gasoline for all the vehicles that were involved with helping out because of this train wreck. So I just jumped on one of the trucks and helped out. It was bad.

*Brenda Velasco:* This is the **Shell Oil Refinery** or the **Shell Oil**.....

*Dominick LaPenta:* In Sewaren.

*Brenda Velasco:* In Sewaren, yeah. And you jumped on one of your dad's trucks?

*Dominick LaPenta:* Yeah one of the **Shell** trucks. I said you need any help and he said jump on so I jumped.

*Brenda Velasco:* And once again that reflects Woodbridge, the volunteerism.

*Dominick LaPenta:* I mean, Brenda, the whole town just jumped in. They were looking for welders, everybody that could weld, they went down there. They stopped trucks. I think somebody said they stopped a chicken truck that had all these chickens on it and took the carts that had chickens in it and had to put all the bodies in it. They were bringing them down to the emergency squad and anyplace that they could bring them. All the nurses and doctors came out. Frank has got all that information.

*Brenda Velasco:* Yes, he knows a lot about that. And when you were returning from **Lincoln Tech** you were returning by car?

*Dominick LaPenta:* Yeah, I had my car.

*Brenda Velasco:* Otherwise you couldn't have gotten back because the train stopped, it was a bad accident, and that was in '51 just before you went into the service. Okay, anything else.

*Dominick LaPenta:* I want to thank you for listening to me. I babble on.

*Brenda Velasco:* I loved it.

*Dominick LaPenta:* I just babble on and all of a sudden something comes up and I say wait a minute, you know.

*Brenda Velasco:* Well that's what we want; we want it all down on the recorder and then that will be typed up. So I thank you very much for giving me the time and it's been a fascinating interview.

.....

After the formal interview concluded, Don elaborated on his experience during the Korean War. Since he was the sole support of his mother and an only child he was deferred for a while. Eventually he did report to Fort Dix where he met Jerry Jardo of Woodbridge. Jerry was the head of the radio station at Fort Dix and knew the

LaPenta family and Don played the sax and tap danced. Jerry asked for an audition and told Don that the Army band was recruiting entertainers to boost morale for the platoons in Korea. So Don and his friend, Tony, were both sent to Korea as entertainers. They performed for UN troops which included the Turks, Brits, Americans and Canadians. They performed within 50 yards of the frontline and got the best food. Don eventually became the show director. Fortunately, he never participated in combat.