

Oral History Interview
Edward Myers
WH075

(written transcript and digital audio)

On February 13, 2010, Edward Myers was interviewed at 20 Dewey Avenue in Colonia at 10:45 A.M. by Brenda Velasco.

Brenda Velasco: Ed Myers has been with the Colonia Fire Department for fifty-four years as a volunteer. We are recording this on a very snowy day, it's not snowing any more but I couldn't find a public building open today. It's a Saturday morning and we've been closed for a couple of days. I'm fortunate to finally get Ed here at my house, 20 Dewey Avenue.

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

Edward Myers: My name is Ed Myers.

Brenda Velasco: And when were you born?

Edward Myers: May 21, 1925.

Brenda Velasco: So that makes you.....

Edward Myers: Eighty-four.

Brenda Velasco: Eighty-four years young.

2. How long have you lived in Colonia?

Edward Myers: I lived at 80 McKinley Avenue here in Colonia. I don't live there now. I lived in Colonia for at least fifty-six years. I belonged to the fire department about fifty-four years.

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

Brenda Velasco: Which was the first section you lived in? Right now you're living with your daughter in Avenel.

Edward Myers: Right now, yes. Well my wife and I went looking for a house, we lived in a place in Elizabeth that was a two room apartment with my son. A lady where my wife worked told her about these houses in Colonia being built and Canterbury was the development at that time; we went up and looked. In fact, I wasn't even going to go and look at the house and my wife said, well I'm going anyway. So I said I might as well go too and I went inside and looked and fell in love with it. I loved it but I didn't like the look of the back of it at that time because it looked chopped off but that was no way, you could put an extension on if you wanted to. We lived there all these years and we raised our children there.

Brenda Velasco: Now the house that you lived in, after a two room apartment with your son, what was the layout of the house?

Edward Myers: It was a split level, you know. We both liked the house and we got my mother and showed her the house. She loved it too, you know, and we loved it very much.

Brenda Velasco: Because it was much bigger than a two room apartment.

Edward Myers: It was and then I said what are we going to do with all of this room? Oh man, you got to see the junk I've got to throw out yet, you know, from all these years.

Brenda Velasco: And how many children did you have?

Edward Myers: At that time one.

Brenda Velasco: And then how many children did you eventually have?

Edward Myers: After that we had one more, we had my daughter after that.

Brenda Velasco: And what was the name of the development again.

Edward Myers: Canterbury.

Brenda Velasco: Canterbury, okay, and that's on McKinley, that included McKinley.

Edward Myers: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Alright, so you've lived here for about fifty-six years.

Edward Myers: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: You moved in after World War II.

Edward Myers: Yes ma'am.

Brenda Velasco: And this was when everybody was moving to the suburbs. Elizabeth was a big city at that time.

Edward Myers: Elizabeth was too big. We did want to get in Linden but that was too expensive because everybody wanted to live in Linden on account of the taxes.

Brenda Velasco: That's where I grew up.

Edward Myers: You did.

Brenda Velasco: Yes.

Edward Myers: I liked Linden, too. Before World War II, when I started working, I worked for **Railway Express** over there. I used to make deliveries. I drove a two and a half ton truck and I had all factory stops. My boss, you know what I mean, we got along good so anyhow one guy there asked me, he says, you're going right by this here place how about dropping this package off. And I said no problem because he said, I'm working all the way on the other side of town there and I have to cut all the way across there. I said no problem so when I went to deliver the package to this place off Stiles Street and St. Georges Avenue, there were apartments back in there. The guy said, oh I'm waiting for that, you got to wait until I open that up and check it out. I said, oh yeah, you got to take it or I'll take it back. So he put his finger up to my nose and said you take that back or Ill have your job. Well, I didn't know what he was going to do with that job when he got it because he didn't get the package.

Brenda Velasco: You held firm. Okay let's go back to Colonia though, you moved to Colonia and this was a split level so it was a big house. Then you've seen a lot of changes in Colonia.

Edward Myers: Oh yes, I did.

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

Edward Myers: Well I've seen Inman Avenue coming because that there was a death trap before. It was a small country road it looked like and we came back off of vacation and my son went down to the store to get the paper for us. Pretty soon he came back on his bicycle and he was crying. He didn't have a paper and this guy followed him, a colored man, him and his wife lived there and he had a practically new car and he followed my son home. Here I found out my son hit a bump in the road down there and fell into his car but didn't get hurt. So he wanted to take my son to the hospital. He said, no I'll go home and he said, well come on I'll take you home. He said I'll ride my bike home. So he said, put your bike in the car and I'll take it home. So he said, no, and the guy followed him home and he talked to me. So we took him down to the hospital; we had him checked and he was alright. But that was the best thing that happened at that time because the way that road was he took his bicycle down to Lincoln Avenue and then walked to the store and came back. But that was one of the biggest things I'd seen over there because right in back of us on Roosevelt Avenue I'd seen that thing all build in there and all around Amherst and, you know, all that going up in there. We went from a little fire department to a big one.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, we're going to hold off on the fire department just yet. Let's go back to your house. How much did you pay for that house, do you remember?

Edward Myers: Twelve thousand nine hundred and ninety dollars, that's thirteen no more which way you like at it.

Brenda Velasco: But still that was a bargain, Ed now.

Edward Myers: I'm ashamed to tell you what I got for it because I had to get another one.

Brenda Velasco: That was a good way out. It lasted for a long time too. Then you moved into a development so you had all the other houses there.

Edward Myers: Yes, well see when we built there, applied for the house, now we were the fourth to apply. My street was supposed to be a dead end street there which we thought, oh that was good. But then the builder bought the land further back but that was alright too. But anyhow we were the fourth people to buy a house there. He was going to build them as he had them ordered but then he sold them so fast, you know, so he decided to go through and build them all right away. So that was it. My wife picked the one that she wanted and I wanted the one right there on the corner because that was nice in there, you know. He said: no, you can't have this one. So I was glad my wife won that battle.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, because it was much quieter further down than on the corner because we know what happened to Inman Avenue. It was a country road when you moved in but it's become an obstacle course with all the traffic now. What about the stores?

Edward Myers: Well, there were very few stores there. I'd seen them shoot up, you know, because there were mostly a lot of old houses are up there on Inman Avenue. In fact, I know one of the bad ones up there it was that ballplayer's, if you ever remember him, Don Newcombe. I know one morning his house caught fire and we were up there and it was two o'clock in the morning and the ice was freezing on us, you know. We were fighting that fire there and Vaccaro opened up his bakery at about three o'clock in the morning and the fellows that weren't fighting the fire were

in there getting coffee and donuts. He said, go ahead fellows eat, eat, come on. A very nice man he was.

Brenda Velasco: He was always generous to the fire department and to the community.

Edward Myers: He was very generous to the fire department.

Brenda Velasco: That was Vinnie Vaccaro and this was during the winter then.

Edward Myers: It was cold out; ice was freezing on us. I think Hank was our Chief at that time. (Henry Szewczyk)

Brenda Velasco: Okay, Hank who?

Edward Myers: I'm trying to think of his last name, Szewczyk or something.

Brenda Velasco: We'll find it. It'll be in the records because there's a history in the fire department that they have all the records there. So when Don Newcombe's house burnt, caught on fire, we're talking about the 1950's then? (1975)

Edward Myers: Yes, I think it is.

Brenda Velasco: And this is where **Colonia Drugs** is right now, **Nature Pharmacy** and the **First Bank of Colonia**.

Edward Myers: It's in that center.

Brenda Velasco: Was the post office there?

Edward Myers: I don't think so yet, no. But then we had this here fire in the **Foodtown**. **Foodtown** was right over there (early or mid '60s)

Brenda Velasco: **Foodtown** was sort of where **Walgreen's** is right now and the **Dunkin Donuts**. Was anybody hurt in that fire?

Edward Myers: Not that I know of, no. But we were tied up there pretty well doing the day. And we had a lot of people traveling around and getting in the way. But I wasn't too much, I was driving the truck and then at the pumps. I tried to keep things going over there. But I don't know but Charlie Urban was Chief then.

Brenda Velasco: Going back to your house on McKinley, did you have garbage pickup at this time?

Edward Myers: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Alright, so you had a lot of the amenities you had in Elizabeth, the garbage pickup, and the city water.

Edward Myers: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: You had all of that.

Edward Myers: We had no wells anywhere.

Brenda Velasco: Because other parts of Colonia did have wells.

Edward Myers: Yes, I know.

Brenda Velasco: Did that pose a problem for you as a fireman? Because if they had well water.....

Edward Myers: Well we had hydrants.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, there were hydrants scattered throughout.

Edward Myers: Yes, we had some hydrants. We got more hydrants now but, you know.

Brenda Velasco: Because I know the house we're in right now had well water (20 Dewey Avenue). It had it until the 1990s. How about houses of worship?

Edward Myers: I was going way out to Irvington so I said to my wife, you know, this is too far to go. So we started looking for a place close by and we tried different

churches and we settled for this here one over in Avenel, Central Baptist Church. It's on Wylie Street over there in the back of McDonalds there. So we've been going over there too now.

Brenda Velasco: So you literally just moved and broke some of your ties. How did you get back and forth to Irvington?

Edward Myers: Well we used to get on the Parkway.

Brenda Velasco: So the Parkway was completed by that time.

Edward Myers: That was completed though but that was jammed, you know, in the summertime.

Brenda Velasco: It still is jammed in the summertime. Certain things don't change.

Edward Myers: Now in the morning going to church I was going against traffic.

When I came out I was going with it and then if I wanted to go to church in the evening I was going with it. I said to my wife, we can't put up with this.

Brenda Velasco: No, you didn't need that headache. How about the schools, where did your children go to school?

Edward Myers: Well, Bill started over there at that place on Inman Avenue that little school by the senior place.

Brenda Velasco: Oh yes that's Evergreen. That was School 17, I believe.

Edward Myers: He started there.

Brenda Velasco: So that was built but since it's closed down and has become Evergreen. Then your daughter went.....

Edward Myers: No she didn't go there she went to the school over, I don't know what number it is, over on Hoffman Boulevard I think it is.

Brenda Velasco: Claremont Avenue School, okay. Then from there they went to Colonia Middle School (CMS was built in 1960).

Edward Myers: Yes, they both went to Middle School there.

Brenda Velasco: Then from there it was the Colonia High School.

Edward Myers: No, well my son went to Woodbridge.

Brenda Velasco: Right he was older so they only had one high school.

Edward Myers: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Did they have bus service for your son?

Edward Myers: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Was it public transportation or was it school buses.

Edward Myers: School buses.

Brenda Velasco: So he was on split session probably at that time.

Edward Myers: No, I think he was going full time.

Brenda Velasco: Full time, alright, and then your daughter was able to attend Colonia High School because she's younger.

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

Brenda Velasco: We're going to start with the post office; you weren't sure about the post office.

Edward Myers: No.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, did you have mail delivery?

Edward Myers: Yes, we had mail delivery.

Brenda Velasco: Alright, and how about the library?

Edward Myers: The library wasn't there yet.

Brenda Velasco: How about any parks, were there any parks around here in Colonia?

Edward Myers: That I don't remember. Oh wait a minute; my son played Little League over there by Inman Avenue across from the post office.

Brenda Velasco: Inman Park.

Edward Myers: Inman Park, yes, he played over there with his ball field. Then when he went to Middle School he played in all the sports he could. He played baseball, football, soccer and that's the time they were undefeated there.

Brenda Velasco: Oh wow!

Edward Myers: Yes that year they only lost one game and that was basketball and the guy got that on foul shots they tell me.

Brenda Velasco: So he played on some good teams.

Edward Myers: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: And that was at Woodbridge High School?

Edward Myers: No Middle School.

Brenda Velasco: Oh the Colonia Middle School, okay. And then we get to the firehouse because this is where your fifty-four years with this firehouse comes. Where was it located?

Edward Myers: In the parking lot of the new firehouse and we couldn't put these trucks in that building now.

Brenda Velasco: How many rigs did you have at that time?

Edward Myers: Three.

Brenda Velasco: And when did you join the fire department? What year did you join it?

Edward Myers: I think '56; yes, December of '56.

Brenda Velasco: And how many people were members at that time?

Edward Myers: I think we were supposed to have fifty men; we could have had fifty men. At that time I was working nights and they took me right away.

Brenda Velasco: Where did you work?

Edward Myers: At that time I worked at **Allen Industries** in Rahway.

Brenda Velasco: So you weren't far away at all with your job.

Edward Myers: No, not then no. That was one good thing about that house.

Brenda Velasco: Then you worked nights there so then you were on-call during the day.

Edward Myers: Yes. In fact after a while I was the only driver in the daytime and that's why I had to stick around.

Brenda Velasco: Was there a lot of action during the day with the fire?

Edward Myers: Sometimes, you know you get them all at once. One day, do you remember when they had that there commercial "Ring Around the Collar"?

Brenda Velasco: Oh, yes, "Ring Around the Collar". That was Wisk or something?

Edward Myers: Yes, well way back then we answered a call to a house up there that the only damage was soot damage. A little television caught fire and we got in there to get it out and we threw tarps down as we went in so we wouldn't make as much damage but it was useless. So they did something they don't usually do, they let me go and see what was done, you know, because I usually had to stay with the truck,

and I'd seen that poor woman up there, she just got that television back from **Sears** and she had smoke and everything in there. She had her bed nicely made, you know, and everything. She pulled her cover back and there was soot between her sheets. You'd open her dresser drawers and there was soot. I felt sorry for that woman.

Brenda Velasco: Do you remember the location of that?

Edward Myers: It was up there around Cypress Drive somewhere. But that was a day when we started to clean up and then we get a call, another call, and they had us within an hour or two making five calls. We'd had to leave one thing, get up, and go to another. Mickey McKelligett, if you remember him.....

Brenda Velasco: Oh, yes.

Edward Myers: He was Chief at that time and he would always say to me, you're the best driver we've had Myers.

Brenda Velasco: So you had some busy days then.

Edward Myers: We had a busy morning then.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, was there anybody hurt or anything?

Edward Myers: No, nobody hurt. It was just some odds and ends we'd do real fast. We didn't even have to lay out a blind. We'd get a signature and we'd do it, you know. Just like that one I told you about that soot. I mean we went in there and it was a television. It was just a little ten inch screen. It made all that dust. Oh I felt sorry for that woman.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, she had to clean it up and that can take forever.

Edward Myers: And then another thing about call, I'd come home from work and I'd just sit down to relax, you know unwind, and meanwhile I got up and went to bed and as soon as I got in bed the alarm went off. You know, it was one piece of sheet of ice out that night. So I got down to the firehouse, the one that you have now, and I was waiting first for somebody to get in the cab because my wife yelled to me, watch it out there it's treacherous out there. Well I know that I just came home. I waited for one of the other drivers to show up. When I got up in the cab they came out of the woodwork. Anyhow, we had to go to Avenel. They had a problem at a hotel over there, hotel or motel I don't remember which, and there was a lot of snow there too. Anyhow as we started out McKee and Bob Nolan were in the front seat with me. When we went out, and the good Lord was with us that night, because when we came to the corner, I mean, I geared it down using the gears which the Transportation Department said it was impossible but I've been doing it for years now, you know. They said to me gear down and if I make my turns wide that I would be against the curb if she started swinging on me. Well I pulled it up and that truck did spin or skid on me at all. Now I didn't pay any attention to it until after the fire. Bob and Mickey were talking about it. They said it didn't skid and it didn't spin. I get to the fire and they put me in a place they wanted me to go, the offices, and they said, oh no we want you back in that there hydrant. But like I said the good Lord was with us.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, in spite of the ice and snow and this is what a lot of people don't realize that the firemen are constantly on-call no matter what the weather or time of day.

Edward Myers: And when it comes to the snowstorms you got the people down there, I haven't been down there, but you had people staying at the firehouse when you had these storms. They have cots for them down there and plenty of coffee and

they're down there as long as the emergency ends. This week they must have had a lot of firemen down there staying overnight. I stayed a couple of times like that. I remember one time we took a truck out and took it up to the First Aid and brought an ambulance down. The main streets were plowed like Inman Avenue; the sides one weren't. Oh brother, well then I drove that old clunker you see down there now, the Number Six, the open one. I had to go into Lincoln Avenue and pick up the patient, you know, and bring them out on the truck and the first aid was waiting for us when we got out there.

Brenda Velasco: We've had a lot of collaboration between first aid and fire.....

Edward Myers: Oh yes, we need the first aid they are very important to us.

Brenda Velasco: And they're located on Beekman and Hawthorne which is an off street where as our firehouse was always located on Inman Avenue. How about flooding?

Edward Myers: We had one; I'm trying to think who was the mayor at that time. Who is this guy who lives here by the golf course?

Brenda Velasco: Cassidy? Kilgallin?

Edward Myers: No, this other one here.

Brenda Velasco: Zirpolo?

Edward Myers: No, he owned the house on.....

Brenda Velasco: New Dover Road?

Edward Myers: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Yes that would be Zirpolo.

Edward Myers: Zirpolo, yes. I think he decided to take a couple of days off and he was working on a flood project over there, I think. He gets back from vacation and he sees firemen rushing people on Jordan Road.

Brenda Velasco: I know we've had flooding in that area and I know the firemen were always available by the Henry Inman Library. But Jordan Road was bad with flooding for quite a while.

Edward Myers: Oh, yes, we've had a couple of them and during the daytime it was jamming up traffic. I'd seen a young woman leaving her car there on Inman Avenue and walking out in the water there. I felt sorry for the woman. She said, wait till her husband gets home tonight, she's going to feed him good.

Brenda Velasco: She's going to have to because the car is gone. Anything else you want to mention about the firehouse?

Edward Myers: I was the first guy to back a truck into that new building. I mean I was a center bay at that time and I was coming back from a call and I was hating to think of backing into that old building because you have to pull off Inman Avenue straight and back straight into the old building because you only had a couple of inches on each side. I got down there and had seen Robert Morrissey waving me into the new building and Mickey was with me. Oh, I back in there so nice and easy. Then they said, what are you going to do with all this room? I said I'll soon find out; it was going. I think we had the third addition on the building now. And one of the fellows down there was working in television and at that time my daughter had a nervous breakdown and I wanted her to have her own television, you know, up in her room, so if we had company and wanted to watch our television she would have her television up there. So I asked one of the fellows about it. He said I'll see what I can

do. This is another one that chokes you up. So he comes over and says, Eddie is your daughter home. I said, yes she is, she's home now. He came running in with the television. Boy I remember that!

Brenda Velasco: That was nice. That's the community support that you had with the fire department.

Edward Myers: And a couple of times when I was snowed in, I couldn't do it at all, they came up here and dug me out.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, that's that camaraderie. Let's go down to Question 6. If you recall anything we'll come back.

6. What did you do for recreation?

Brenda Velasco: What did you do for recreation when you moved here because this was a relatively new part of Woodbridge Township?

Edward Myers: I used to go watch these kids play ball. A bunch of kids knew me and I would sit down and watch kids play all day.

Brenda Velasco: Especially if it's your son.

Edward Myers: Yes, daughter, grandchildren, all that and all.

Brenda Velasco: Because you've got the grandchildren right now.

Edward Myers: Not over here, maybe about two years ago. My daughter had her kids over at **Bowtie** over in Port Reading. She wanted them to learn how to swim and the kids love the water but Stephen, he's the youngest, I think he's about seven or maybe younger, I brought him over to the instructor. He didn't want to get into the water and I had to fight with him to get him in the water. When I got him in the water I couldn't get him out. I'm sitting there watching him and he was having himself a ball. One of the women said to me, you had a hard time getting him in there and now look at him.

Brenda Velasco: Now he's a fish.

Edward Myers: And now he's a fish and then when he had a woman instructor, man. So this young girl had him at one time and then he got out and the rest of them were playing in the water she said, come on Stephen come on back and play in the water. Boom, back in the water he went. Then she said to him, come on Stephen help me with the hose and he looked funny running around with the bucket. He wasn't doing anything he was just holding a bucket. I had to laugh.

Brenda Velasco: Because you live with your daughter now with your grandchildren.

Edward Myers: I've lived with her now for about the last month.

Brenda Velasco: That's an experience too with the grandchildren.

Edward Myers: I'm living out of a suitcase now.

Brenda Velasco: You're going for your operation this week as well. Anything else for recreation that you can think of?

Edward Myers: No, we used to go down the shore a lot, not too much.

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

Brenda Velasco: What do you think was the center?

Edward Myers: At that time it was, what do you call it, suburban.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, we were a suburban community. What was the main thing that drew everybody together do you think?

Edward Myers: They had a club; I forget the name, down there on Inman Avenue.

Brenda Velasco: The Civic Club?

Edward Myers: Yes, the Civic Club.

Brenda Velasco: Do you remember where that was located?

Edward Myers: Down there on Inman Avenue.

Brenda Velasco: Across from St. Gertrude (cemetery)?

Edward Myers: Yes, across from St. Gertude (cemetery).

Brenda Velasco: And also the firehouse I imagine.

Edward Myers: Yes, the firehouse.

Brenda Velasco: How many hours did you spend down at the firehouse per week?

Edward Myers: Oh, I couldn't figure that out. Sometimes I spent two nights.

Talking about the firehouse, when we had a big dinner, when my wife was alive, Thanksgiving was a big day at my place and Christmas Eve was at my son's place and Christmas was at my sister's place. But every time we'd have a big dinner we'd sit down to eat and the alarm would go off. I'd guarantee you that alarm would go off as soon as I would sit down. I had to go, you know, so my son had a friend called Emery Bicola, he belonged to the first aid at the time. Anyhow we had the fire, a boiler or something went up, and Emery was there with the first aid, and like I say my son and him were very good friends and his parents were in Florida at that time. After the fire was over he just put his ambulance away and we had to get our trucks cleaned up and have them already to go again. I got home and they all ate dinner but I see Emery at my place eating my Thanksgiving dinner. It didn't matter there was more left. I thought it was kind of funny at that time.

Brenda Velasco: That's a good example because it's not just running to the firehouse you have to get your uniform on and all the gear, going to the fire, staying there but it's also the cleanup. How long does the cleanup take with a fire?

Edward Myers: It depends how big the fire is. As I said we have to have our hoses cleaned, put clean hoses on, clean up the truck altogether, clean the hose that we used because the truck has to be refurbished and everything has to be cleaned again and that takes time.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, two hours?

Edward Myers: It takes longer than it did to fight the fire at times.

Brenda Velasco: So it may even be up to five to six hours.

Edward Myers: It didn't take that long I don't think but it did take quite a while.

Brenda Velasco: So were you part of the Civic Club at all on Inman Avenue?

Edward Myers: I joined it but that's all. I didn't stay but when I joined the fire department I dropped out of there.

Brenda Velasco: Then the fire department became your center. That was your focal point even during your big dinners they got you.

Edward Myers: I'd say, what did I do? I didn't set the fire. We had a fund drive and this place we went I was with Hank and Billy Higgins, and Harry Sica all on the other side of the road. Hank and I went to this one house and the guy came out and gave us a hard time. He said what's this money for? We said, well that money is for more training and insurance and things that the township doesn't pay for and the things that we need that the township doesn't pay for. I said the money that we need for other things and he said, well what are those Suburbans over there for? I said well the

firemen use those that go to the fire school down there. He said, didn't you ever hear of public transportation? I said, oh that. Well anyhow Harry and Bill said, hey don't bother, come over here, don't even answer him. So about a year later the fellows get a call, you know. I was at the firehouse and one of the fire inspectors was driving one of the engines and they got a call to bring the inspector's car over so I brought it over and somehow I went down and looked at the fire there. What happened is a guy had one of these propane bottles and it blew up and he was fortunate it went the other way instead of towards the house. He had it hooked to one of those cookers. So anyhow the back of the house you know he had vinyl siding and it was all ripped off. So I looked around and got nose. The guy started talking to me and he was very nice and I said, you got pretty lucky, all you got here is one window broken. So I went back out and went back to the headquarters. Harry says to me, hey Eddie, remember this house? It was a guy who was giving us a hard time.

Brenda Velasco: Okay and he appreciated your services I'm sure that day. But that another job you had as a fireman. You had to do fund driving because this is a volunteer organization.

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

Edward Myers: Well it was a good place you could rest in peace, you know what I mean. We didn't have problems more than taxes; a bigger problem with taxes.

Brenda Velasco: Oh I agree with you.

Edward Myers: But that's about the only problem though keeping up with that.

Brenda Velasco: So you liked it here compared to Elizabeth where you lived at one time.

Edward Myers: I'd rather have been here than Elizabeth: yes, sure.

Brenda Velasco: And your kids did well?

Edward Myers: My kids did well, yes.

Brenda Velasco: You lived here a long time.

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

Edward Myers: I liked it. I think it grew too fast. That's the only problem I had with it.

Brenda Velasco: I think the whole area grew very fast.

Edward Myers: Yes, it was a good place. And as I said I guess we just hit it lucky at that time.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, you spent thirteen thousand dollars for a home and we won't go into what you sold it for.

Edward Myers: Oh I was ashamed to ask for that but I had to have it, no?

Brenda Velasco: Yes.

Edward Myers: But I was ashamed. The people who got it oh they love it.

Brenda Velasco: What did you sell it for then? What do homes go for now?

Edward Myers: That one went for two five.

Brenda Velasco: So she was lucky.

Edward Myers: Yes, I got paid two hundred and twenty-five thousand.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, so, that was a good investment. You didn't realize it was going to be such a good investment at the time when you moved from Elizabeth. But that was good and you were here when Colonia was growing with all this housing going on and developments going on. Okay, you did mention that Colonia Middle School, as far as sport events, that they had an unbeatable team when your son was.....

Edward Myers: Yes, there was a young one there, I can't think of his name now, I think his wife and daughter work over at Woodbridge High. I think she's an assistant principle. I'm trying to think of his name but he was good. He worked the boys.

10. What do you like about Woodbridge today?

Brenda Velasco: You're still living in Woodbridge you're living in Avenel now with your daughter. Do you still like living in this area?

Edward Myers: Yes, I like living in the area. I don't like living where they got these here future slums I call them these houses, what do you call them?

Brenda Velasco: Apartments?

Edward Myers: Yes, apartments and all that.

Brenda Velasco: That reminds you of Elizabeth then.

Edward Myers: No, what Kim is living in, a condo. They're future slums.

Brenda Velasco: Well, we'll see. If it's condos they own them so they're going to take care of them.

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

Edward Myers: My daughter and grandchildren.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, your daughter and grandchildren and they live in Avenel because that's where you live and where does your son live?

Edward Myers: My son now is down in Maryland.

12. Are there any other stories or events that you would like to discuss?

Brenda Velasco: When we were talking before we started recording, you mentioned what led you to become a fireman because that occupies a lot of your time and its volunteer work. Let's just go back to World War II because you were one of those people, one of the greatest generation, what did you do during World War II?

Edward Myers: I turned eighteen in May and on July 12th I was in camp.

Brenda Velasco: Where did you go for training?

Edward Myers: When we left Fort Dix we went to Florida, Miami Beach and that was the hardest part of my training. Down there we had those hotels, they took all the luxury equipment out, put GI equipment in and you had about six to eight men to a room. There was one bathroom and I'll tell you we sweated. It was the hottest part of the year when we were there.

Brenda Velasco: And we have to realize there wasn't air conditioning.

Edward Myers: There wasn't air conditioning down there. I'll tell you we'd rinse ourselves off and right away we were all sweated again. Our clothes, oh yes, we must have smelled good because the other ones smelled just like us, you know.

Brenda Velasco: You were all together.

Edward Myers: We just couldn't keep clean. There was sweating all the time even when you were off duty.

Brenda Velasco: What year was this we're talking about, 1940?

Edward Myers: '43.

Brenda Velasco: 1943 and what service did you go into?

Edward Myers: The Air Corps.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, the Air Corps which at that time was part of

Edward Myers: The Army.

Brenda Velasco: The Army and what was some of the training that you had because you said that prepared you for being a fireman?

Edward Myers: Oh, the fireman was after basic training. You see Washington was where basic training was, drill and march out there in the open. I'll tell you now, they marched us into an air conditioned theatre to watch a film and when they turned the lights on everybody was sleeping. They yelled everybody out. Boy it woke us up but that was about the only rest you got.

Brenda Velasco: This was war time, too.

Edward Myers: Yes and you could get in trouble you know. Anyhow after the drill they marched us again and in fact our uniforms got so bad with sweat they turned white from the salt and they could stand up. They were real stiff you know, but you'd try to keep them clean. So the guys took drinking water to try to wash up, you know.

Brenda Velasco: What were some of the duties when you were in.....

Edward Myers: Basic training?

Brenda Velasco: That prepared you for being a fireman.

Edward Myers: That prepared you for advanced training.

Brenda Velasco: And you mentioned you were crash and rescue.

Edward Myers: When I left Florida I went to Martha, Texas.....

Brenda Velasco: Still warm.

Edward Myers: Still warm but it was dry. I don't know if you know where Martha, Texas is?

Brenda Velasco: No.

Edward Myers: Martha, Texas is about two hundred miles south of El Paso, along the border, and it was in the desert. I'd seen the airfield when we went by it in the troop train and the train stopped at Martha. The first thing I saw when I got off the troop train, no trees. So I liked it better than what I did in Florida. Then they shoved me around until I got in my position they wanted me in. Then I went to post-engineers which I was supposed to be a heavy equipment operator and I don't know nothing about it. They were supposed to train you for that. Instead they put me in as a dispatcher. Then after awhile I was supposed to attend engineering air craft school, which is a glorified body and fender man. The day they were supposed to call they called me in the office and they said to me it says here on your application that you were a truck driver and I said, yes. They asked do you know how to drive a tractor trailer? I said, no. Then they asked did you drive a tractor trailer? I said, I don't know. And then they said would you try to drive a tractor trailer? I said, yes. So they sent me over to the field department and I went over there. They told me to tell a guy to go up there where I was supposed to go and he went up there and I was in the

field department. That didn't last too long, only a couple of months. Then they put me in the fire department and that's where it began.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, so finally you're in the fire department and then what was their motto you told me?

Edward Myers: Their motto was rescue. If a guy is dead don't try getting him out get the live ones out.

Brenda Velasco: So you had some training or experience when you were with the Army Air Force. Then you stayed in Texas.

Edward Myers: No, after that they were supposed to get an outfit together and go overseas. So they sent us to Fresno, California and we were only there about a week or two. When we went up there they took our clothes from us but something told me to keep a little suitcase handy and that's just what I did. There I was in dirt and filth all over again. But then they got us together and shipped us to Washington up there.

Brenda Velasco: Seattle?

Edward Myers: No it up at Tacoma there. I forget the name of the field right now. It wasn't an air force field it was an engineer field for more training. Then from there they sent us over to Spokane for training. After we finished up there they allowed us to have a furlough home and we had to go to San Antonio, Texas after that.

Brenda Velasco: And you entered in 1943, when were you released from military service?

Edward Myers: Last day of February in '46.

Brenda Velasco: You have a good memory here. Can't forget that and you never really went overseas then?

Edward Myers: No, we were supposed to go, the ship, to California.

Brenda Velasco: Right, to Fresno, California.

Edward Myers: Then we went back to San Antonio, Texas for more training. Now down there they had quite a few airport bases in San Antonio and we were at one called Geiger Field, it was a municipal airport that they put barracks on and had runways but no planes. We went to school over in Kelly and we worked over in Brooks. That's how it was but when we went into Brooks those fellows hated to see us come. Then when they found out that we were going to take over the crash shed while they go on vacation. Then when they come back from vacation they go and relieve another crew. I think we had about four crews up there in the naval academy, well then they couldn't do enough for us.

Brenda Velasco: And what were your specific duties there at Brooks Airfield?

Edward Myers: At the airfield, fire fighter. We worked 24 on and 24 off. When we had that 24 off, they didn't let us do nothing.

Brenda Velasco: Then from San Antonio where did you go?

Edward Myers: Well after that we were supposed to go overseas and as I said we had our APO numbers and everything like that. I think we were supposed to go to San Francisco and the war ended so inside of taking us to port they put us in Kingman, Arizona.

Brenda Velasco: And what happened in Kingman, Arizona when you were stationed there?

Edward Myers: Well, they were bringing these airplanes in and recycling them.

Brenda Velasco: When you say recycle be more specific.

Edward Myers: Well, they were bringing in all those surplus planes, combat planes they're called bombers I mean there were a few planes that they were saving. They were saving the B29 and the P51 and all transports they were saving. So you could go down there and buy a plane if you wanted it.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, but when you were recycling what did you have to specifically do if they were getting rid of the plane?

Edward Myers: We stayed at the firehouse. That there recycling was done by civilians. They'd attach the planes way out in the field and drop the engines on them. They'd chop some of them up. I just don't know how they did do it.

Brenda Velasco: Okay but this was a chop shop?

Edward Myers: Yes, they weren't going anywhere after there.

Brenda Velasco: No.

Edward Myers: Unless you were buying one of them.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, so that's where they were getting rid of the surplus airplanes as I said. Then after the service, February, 1946, you came out and where did you live then.

Edward Myers: I lived on Morris Avenue in Linden.

Brenda Velasco: Oh in Elizabeth right?

Edward Myers: Linden.

Brenda Velasco: Oh in Linden, okay, Morris Avenue in Linden.

Edward Myers: I didn't live in Elizabeth too long.

Brenda Velasco: Then you moved to Elizabeth and then you had a son there.

Edward Myers: My son was born when I lived in Linden.

Brenda Velasco: Oh, okay, Morris Avenue in Linden. Not too far from Wood Avenue then?

Edward Myers: In fact that house we had on Morris Avenue my parents sold that. They had one over on Clinton Street between Morris Avenue and Linden Avenue.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, is there anything else that you want to mention?

Edward Myers: I can't think of anything now.

Brenda Velasco: Okay then I want to thank you for the interview.

Edward Myers: I thank you.

Brenda Velasco: And I enjoyed it and I think we learned a lot about what a firemen's duties were and how many of our older members such as you, fifty-four years of volunteer service, the hours that you put in to make it a safe community.

Edward Myers: Well I'll tell you when the people don't know where to turn to, they turn to firemen. If they have water backing up in their basements we went down there a couple of times, you know, and just kept pumping water. For a couple of days it went like that getting people out of it. It was a lot of work so we had to get some of these here submerged pumps, you know, electric. If you had electric, we could pump it but if you didn't then we had to bring a truck up and they had the generators in them to pump it. It was a lot of work but when people don't know what to do, they call a fireman. One of the first calls I had, this is funny now, I was riding in the back of that truck, it was somewhere off Cypress Drive and it was a little sleety out, it was in the wintertime. We'd go in the house and they smelled smoke and we smelled smoke too but we didn't know what it was. We know it wasn't wood burning anyway, so the people are putting their hands on the wall and saying see here it hot.

We go around looking for it and the chief gets over by where the kids were doing their homework. They had one of these big lights that went upwards, and they were with their crayons. Oh, were those poor people embarrassed!

Brenda Velasco: Because those were high intensity lights. So that was an easy fire then, right?

Edward Myers: You don't know when these women put their food on the cooker and they're out back talking over the fence to the neighbor. Oh, I saw a lot of that happen. And we tried to do as less damage as we could. You want to treat the house like it's your own.

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

Edward Myers: Okay you're welcome.

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After the formal interview concluded, Ed recalled that he attended the flying school at Westfield Airport on Lake Avenue, Colonia. While he had the required time for his license, he never secured it since he didn't take the test. Ed still has the log book though. He went cross country from the airport on Lake to East Hampton in Long Island in a cub airplane. It was a rough ride and took a week. The Garden State Parkway ran right beside the airport in Clark and Colonia on Lake Avenue.

Jack was the owner with his father for Westfield Airport. He ran the school and overhauled planes. Linden Airport was not operating. Ed was working Railway Express at Eastern Aircraft (General Motors). He watched GM built when he lived on Morris Avenue and Stiles Street.