

**Oral History Interview
Emma and Donald Aaroe
WH29**

(written transcript and digital audio)

On February 20, 2009, Emma and Donald Aaroe was interviewed at their home on 427 Elmwood Avenue, Woodbridge, New Jersey by Brenda Velasco at 2:00 P.M.

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

Brenda Velasco: Emma would you introduce yourself?

Emma Aaroe: I'm Emma Mary Burley Aaroe and I've always lived in the Woodbridge section; my date of birth is December 27, 1920.

Brenda Velasco: Thank you and Donald Aaroe would you introduce yourself?

Donald Aaroe: My name is Donald Henry Aaroe. I live in the Woodbridge section and my date of birth is July 15, 1918.

Brenda Velasco: Just as World War I started to end.

Donald Aaroe: Yes, I started the first one and ended the second one.

Emma Aaroe: With a little help from his friends.

2. How long have you lived in Woodbridge?

Brenda Velasco: Emma we'll start with you.

Emma Aaroe: Ever since my family moved here in 1931.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, Donald Aaroe, how long have you lived in Woodbridge?

Donald Aaroe: Well, to start, I was born in Perth Amboy in the hospital there and my mother passed away shortly after I was born. So for the first two years I lived with my grandmother on Compton Avenue in Perth Amboy. My father was a carpenter and was building a new development in Avenel; he was able to rent a house out there in the development that he was building so we lived there until I started school at the age of 6. Then he moved back to Perth Amboy and I went to school from kindergarten until 5th grade. I think that it was in 1928 that we moved to Woodbridge and lived in a house on Linden Avenue; bn I lived there until I left to go in the Navy in '41.

Brenda Velasco: Alright, so your dad moved here because the job.....

Donald Aaroe: The job was here.

Brenda Velasco: Okay the job was here and where in Avenel was he building that.....

Donald Aaroe: Manhattan Avenue.

Brenda Velasco: I just interviewed a person, Millie Albrecht.

Donald Aaroe: Did you? Albrecht, that's not Sam Albrecht's

Brenda Velasco: It may have been. She used to work in the township or her husband.

Donald Aaroe: He was the purchasing agent for Woodbridge Township.

Brenda Velasco: I think that's the same person.

Donald Aaroe: Yes, old Sam Albrecht.

Brenda Velasco: I can't recall what they paid for those homes.

Donald Aaroe: Oh yes, that was a nice little house that Sam lived in.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Donald Aaroe: So I've lived here since 1928 and came over because of my job.

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

Brenda Velasco: Emma, why did your family move to Woodbridge?

Emma Aaroe: Well, it was in 1931. In 1929, my father lost his job, my parents lost their house and my father struggled to find a place to work. So he took the civil service examination to become a prison guard and when he passed that it was touching; because he, at that time, was 42 years old. The cut off age was 40. But because he served in the Army for two years they subtracted that.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, did he serve in World War I then?

Emma Aaroe: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: The Great War.

Emma Aaroe: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: So he was very fortunate because he had to alter everything at age 42.

Emma Aaroe: Yes he did. We had nothing when we came here. My mother felt that my father had a job, she liked this little town and she thought the gates of heaven had opened because all the bad stuff was behind her as far as she was concerned.

Brenda Velasco: She had a positive attitude.

Emma Aaroe: Yes she did.

Brenda Velasco: Where did your dad work at this time?

Emma Aaroe: He worked at the prison in Avenel which then was a reformatory, it was for younger men. It had a farm and they kept animals there and raised crops for the feeding of other inmates and other places.

Brenda Velasco: Wow! I did not know that about that. It's the East Jersey State Prison?

Emma Aaroe: Yes.

Brend Velasco: Now where did they come from originally when they moved here?

Emma Aaroe: All of us were born in Paterson. The last home we lived in was in Haledon which is right nearby.

Brenda Velasco: Paterson was the silk capital of the United States at one time.

Emma Aaroe: Oh, yes, and my mother worked as a winder in the silk mill from the time she was about 13 or 14.

Brenda Velasco: Child labor.

Emma Aaroe: Well she didn't consider it that, you know. She went through 7th or 8th grade which was about as high as they went to school and then if your mother was a widow and you reached that age you went to work.

Brenda Velasco: So she was happy with Woodbridge then?

Emma Aaroe: Oh yes, she loved Woodbridge.

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

Brenda Velasco: Donald Aaroe, I'm going to start off with you. We're going to confine it to Woodbridge Proper.

Donald Aaroe: Well, since I worked for the Board of Education the most obvious changes has been in the #2 School during the time I was there. Originally there was plenty of open space around Woodbridge so we had a lot of room to build ballfields and play and do our own thing so we played outside a lot. The most changes I can think of are the buildings. Years ago I think the township had about 10,000 people in it and when I was working for the Board of Education the population of the school system peaked out at 22,500 children. So with that part of it and all of the houses going up after the war, that was one of the biggest changes.

Brenda Velasco: That was that post-World War II suburban boom.

Donald Aaroe: Then the baby boomers were the reason for the schools being booked. We booked two new high schools, five junior high schools and about eight elementary schools during the time I worked with the Board of Education.

Brenda Velasco: So you were busy.

Donald Aaroe: Very busy.

Brenda Velasco: Now what were the years that you worked and what was the title that you had?

Donald Aaroe: I went to work as a Director of New Construction for ten years and then the construction stopped and we started to sell schools and I became the Supervisor of Buildings and Grounds for the last ten years I was there. That's what I retired as.

Brenda Velasco: When did you retire?

Donald Aaroe: I started in '63 and ended in '83.

Brenda Velasco: So you really saw that explosion.

Donald Aaroe: Oh, yes. Believe me it was like a tsunami.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, because in '63 they only had one high school. Am I correct?

Donald Aaroe: Oh, yes.

Emma Aaroe: As a matter of fact, our daughter was in high school when he was building JFK. So that was the new thing.

Brenda Velasco: Today the school population is about 13,000.

Donald Aaroe: That was the real spike.

Brenda Velasco: Yes and that was the baby boomer post-World War II. You saw and experienced a lot. Then they had to sell the schools because they sold the school where Evergreen is. (BOE annually leases the former School #17 to the Township)

Donald Aaroe: Oh, yes School #17. I never got used to the names of the schools, numbers were my thing. I think we had a total of 36 buildings. Now, I don't know, I think they have about 24 now.

Brenda Velasco: So how about the services then or stores or houses of worship?

Donald Aaroe: Well, churches are about the same.

Emma Aaroe: I think what was common then is not so common now. I hardly knew a person who didn't go to church. If you were a Christian, you went to church every Sunday. If you were Jewish, you went to temple every Friday. It was taken for granted that you went someplace for worship. If you didn't, I guess they weren't very proud of it but didn't say anything. But now it is common,

very common. One thing, just as Don said, the fields and the woods disappeared. The old clay pits which were dangerous and forbidden and therefore wonderful places to play.....

Brenda Velasco: Did you go there?

Donald Aaroe: Oh, sure we used to hang around there.

Emma Aaroe: Only around the edges. It was just where Woodbridge Center is so it wasn't that far from here.

Brenda Velasco: No, there were clay pits quite near you.

Emma Aaroe: Our family lived on Berry Street for a short time and then we moved to Grenville Street which is up behind St. James and two blocks up was Columbus Avenue. There were fields beyond there and there were cows there; people kept cows which seems a little unusual today, but they were there.

Brenda Velasco: It was quite rural then.

Emma Aaroe: Yes it was.

Donald Aaroe: Up where Menlo Park shopping center is now, Parsonage Road, there was a fellow named Vic Bry and he kept horses there, riding horses. This was back in the '30s and '40s. We used to ride from Parsonage Road all the way to Mountainside up on Route #22 and hardly go on a main road.

Brenda Velasco: Wow!

Donald Aaroe: Lot of agriculture going on.

Emma Aaroe: We used to be able to hike. We sat here one day trying to remember. We would hike from here to Roosevelt Park and the only road I can remember is Green Street.

Donald Aaroe: Route #9 wasn't built.

Emma Aaroe: Route #9 wasn't built and we just went up Green Street to, I guess, it's Middlesex/Union Turnpike which I guess is near Route #27.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, and then you just turned down there.

Emma Aaroe: That's right and we just went to Roosevelt Park.

Donald Aaroe: And our 14 mile hike for the boy scouts was up to Menlo Park up on Route #27 where the Edison Light is now and there used to be what they called copper mines up there.

Brenda Velasco: Wow!

Donald Aaroe: So we would go up there and play "steal the flag" and all those games kids played.

Brenda Velasco: So that was your Boy Scout hike and there were copper mines by the.....

Donald Aaroe: Well they called them copper mines. It was obvious that there had been some extensive digging up there.

Brenda Velasco: It was great to explore though, wasn't it?

Donald Aaroe: Oh, yes, and I don't know, did you ever hear of the whoopee track?

Brenda Velasco: No, you go ahead and tell me.

Donald Aaroe: Do you know where the library is now by the railroad tracks? (Amboy Avenue) There had been, at one time, a kind of a trolley, rapid transit, that went from Newark to Trenton and they had like hills up there, you know it was elevated. They tore that down in the '30s, and cars were becoming

much more used. In the early '30s, somebody built a track out of wood; it was just a series of hills and it went around I guess about a half mile.

Brenda Velasco: So that was the whoopee trail?

Donald Aaroe: And that was the whoopee track.

Emma Aaroe: You'd pay them to take your car on it.

Donald Aaroe: You'd pay them to drive your own car around the whoopee track.

At one time, at that same area, when we were kids in school, I think it was '38 when Emma was a senior, they had a carnival up there in that area which was supposed to raise funds for the new high school that they were going to build.

Emma Aaroe: They were going to start with the football field.

Donald Aaroe: And the guy that was running it absconded with the funds. That was a very interesting time.

Brenda Velasco: Do you remember what his name was?

Donald Aaroe: No.

Emma Aaroe: It probably wasn't the right name anyway.

Brenda Velasco: No, you're right; Emma, you're right. It wouldn't be the right name. Alright so there went your funds for the football field and the new high school.

Donald Aaroe: Our football field, at that time was down, I don't know if you remember what was called the Parish House, it was on Rahway Avenue and it was a parish house and it had remains of a Presbyterian Church on it. That was where the minister lived except for the White Church that's down on the corner of Port Reading Avenue, that's the Presbyterian Church and remains from that Parish House and behind it they have a big huge field. There was a building on the field that housed the recreation area, basketball court and some bowling alleys and there were two tennis courts there. That's where the high school had their baseball field and football field. That was back in the '20s and '30s. We used to have to go to football practice and run across the tracks which were on grade levels then at that time.

Emma Aaroe: When the team played there, of course, they went to Perth Amboy; we played on the Perth Amboy field.

Donald Aaroe: Home games were in Perth Amboy.

Emma Aaroe: Then we had a problem, you see, you could get a bus to Perth Amboy and it cost 10 cents to go from Woodbridge to Perth Amboy.

Brenda Velasco: Bus ride?

Emma Aaroe: But if you walked as far as the boundary between the two towns, which was down where the bakery is down here now, it only cost a nickel. So if you had dime and you walked to the border you could buy a milky way or something for a nickel when you got to the game.

Brenda Velasco: Okay so from the bakery that was only a nickel.

Emma Aaroe: You'd have to decide how you were going to spend this vast sum of money that you had clutched in your fist. But that's what we did and sometimes we walked all the way and saved the dime.

Brenda Velasco: Wow!

Emma Aaroe: If we had a jolly crowd it wouldn't take long.

Brenda Velasco: Well you were busy talking and time went.

Emma Aaroe: And I don't think there was a single sidewalk between here and there.

Brenda Velasco: There weren't too many cars then either.

Emma Aaroe: No.

Donald Aaroe: And we used to go to the pool in Rahway at Rahway Park and we'd swim there.

Brenda Velasco: Do you remember how much it cost for the pool?

Emma Aaroe: Oh, yes, it cost ten cents until you were 13 and then it was twenty cents. Now they let children under 12 in free in the morning from about 10 A.M. to 12 Noon. At 12 Noon they blew the whistle and you had to go or buy a ticket for the afternoon. We were 10 years old for as far as we could stretch it; you see I was small.

Brenda Velasco: But Donald couldn't tell.

Emma Aaroe: Oh, we really felt like big shots when we had a ticket and could still stay in the afternoon.

Brenda Velasco: Well, you did what you had to.

Emma Aaroe: What I was thinking about when you mentioned the post office and the library and the parks, now I can remember when we moved to Berry Street, the first time I went out, you know, to inspect this new place that I lived on I'm sure I had some kid from the neighborhood take me over to the playground in the park. Well after that I used to take my sister and brother, my little brother was too little, but we would play in the playground and the fireman, I guess it was, who was in charge of it, there was a wading pool that was up by where the firehouse is now and it had a sprinkler that came out of the top and the water accumulated. We could wade in that pool. I don't ever remember anyone wearing a bathing outfit. You just ran in with your shorts and top or whatever and the sun dried you off. But we played there and that was fun. I waded in the brook all the way up to the clay banks. So that was really a great attraction to me. I thought that was very good.

Brenda Velasco: So we're talking about Heards Brook over there.

Emma Aaroe: Yes, Heards Brook.

Brenda Velasco: And we're talking about School Street and that general area?

Emma Aaroe: School Street, yes, right.

Brenda Velasco: This is where the park was with the sprinkler?

Donald Aaroe: And it comes to a narrow little thing.

Brenda Velasco: And it comes across Route #35.

Donald Aaroe: It's still there.

Emma Aaroe: Except there was no pond there; it was not developed as it was later so that was just a brook that went up and then dwindled into the clay banks.

Donald Aaroe: The firehouse was there, not the one that's there now, there was an old firehouse for many years, and across the street from the firehouse was School #1 which has been there since 1876. But along side of School #1 was a beautiful little building; it was a Jewish synagogue and that stayed there until.....

Emma Aaroe: Yes, shortly before that the township bought.....

Donald Aaroe: And that became the parking lot for School #11 and School #1 and as a matter of fact, we did all the carpenter work on the Jewish synagogue when they built it in the '50s.

Brenda Velasco: On Amboy Avenue?

Donald Aaroe: Which is now a veterinarian's office.

Brenda Velasco: Yes.

Donald Aaroe: That was a beautiful job.

Brenda Velasco: That was a beautiful job that the architect did because it's a beautiful building.

Emma Aaroe: And of course the Barron Arts Center was the library and I laugh because I said to Don, we always call it by its full name, *The Barron Free Public Library*. I know shortly after I went to school, I got a library card and I loved that library but it was kept in perfect condition at all times by a Miss Brewster. Miss Sadie Brewster would not let you make a sound in that library.

Brenda Velasco: Wow!

Emma Aaroe: And heaven forbid if you were under 21 and you went into the adult section. You were not allowed to leave the children's section. But I found it a wonderful place. When my children grew up I took them. As soon as they learned to read they were allowed to get a library card. It was a little looser then. But Miss Brewster, who by the way, is entombed in the White Church cemetery.....

Brenda Velasco: Okay and we're talking about the First Presbyterian on Rahway Avenue.

Emma Aaroe: Yes, and she lived to be, I think, 102 or more.

Brenda Velasco: Wow!

Emma Aaroe: She certainly kept everything going for a long time. Then when I think about the post office, you know the mail was delivered twice a day when we were kids?

Brenda Velasco: No.

Donald Aaroe: Right, twice a day.

Brenda Velasco: My goodness. Every day?

Emma Aaroe: Every day except Saturday.

Brenda Velasco: Okay Saturday was one and Sunday, we know there was no delivery.

Emma Aaroe: Right.

Brenda Velasco: But it was delivered twice a day.

Emma Aaroe: And you had great faith in the postal department. Now as the years went on and Don was in the Navy all during World War II, it was during that time that well he went immediately. He enlisted.....

Donald Aaroe: I enlisted the day after Pearl Harbor.

Brenda Velasco: Oh my.

Emma Aaroe: So it wasn't long before he was gone. We were quite interested in each other but we decided since he was going and we didn't know for how long we didn't make any commitment. Now the next time we saw each other was about fifteen months later.....

Donald Aaroe: Not six months.

Emma Aaroe: And when we greeted each other with warm affection we decided that maybe this was a serious commitment. So he said, well, we can be engaged, he said, but I haven't got the money for a ring because I need what I have right now to get back to California. He was stationed in California. He never left the Pacific

either. So the mailman delivered the engagement ring in a few months and my mother called me at work. She said, "Emma the postman left you a box and I think it's important". So when I came home from work, I was working at the *Perth Amboy News* then, sure enough there was the little jewelry box with the diamond ring in it and I put it on my finger. I'm like Napoleon, you know, Napoleon crowned himself, I engaged myself.

Brenda Velasco: Look how long it's lasted though.

Emma Aaroe: A lot longer than Napoleon.

Brenda Velasco: That's right.

Emma Aaroe: It just seems like such a contrast today, you know, where things get lost and everything needs to be so carefully.....

Brenda Aaroe: Insured and everything else. So you enlisted on December 8, 1941?

Donald Aaroe: Yes and I left on January 29th when they actually called me. Then I got out after the war was over on November 19, 1945. When the war was over I was stationed in Saipan on the submarine repair shop. I had been on that for three years. So I stayed the whole war in the Pacific there all the way from Midway and I spent most of my time in Australia in Perth, western Australia.

Emma Aaroe: Tell her about your trip home from Saipan.

Donald Aaroe: Oh, we left Saipan shortly after the surrender, I think the surrender was in the Augustines, I don't know what ship it was on. But anyway, they had surrendered and we left Saipan and we were supposed to go back to our home port which was Seattle, the Bremerton Navy yard. So we were on our way to Bremerton Navy yard out of Pearl Harbor and all of a sudden the ship changed course and we didn't know what was happening. We thought somebody was firing something at us. But anyway, they passed the word that we had a change in orders and we were directed to proceed immediately through the Panama Canal to go to New York Harbor to take part in Navy Day on October 27th, 1945. So we came all the way up through the Canal up to Yorktown, Virginia where we pulled in to unload all of our ammunition. They wouldn't let us into New York with ammunition. So that's when I went to the executive officer and said, you know I haven't had any leave for three years; I live a few minutes from New York. We were then supposed to leave Yorktown to go to Tompkinsville, Staten Island. So I talked them into letting me leave. So they gave me time and I was supposed to join the ship in Tompkinsville on such and such a day. In the meantime, we left and I came home and we got married.

Brenda Velasco: Finally.

Emma Aaroe: I was just thinking that, you know, I wrote to him every day. Of course, this was not difficult for me because where I worked, for the news, I had a typewriter in front of me all the time so....

Donald Aaroe: She was a social editor.

Emma Aaroe: Yes, words were my thing. Well, I wasn't an editor, I was a writer. So one time he wrote home and said, "when I get home we'll get married and I'll build you a house in Woodbridge and we'll live there for the rest of our lives". I wrote back and said, when you come home I'll be standing on the dock in white satin and pearls.

Brenda Velasco: You were eager there.

Emma Aaroe: That's right. Now when I heard that he was coming home my mother and I went to Newark on the train to Bamberger's and we were looking at wedding

dresses. I tried this dress on and, of course, it was lovely and my mother said to me, if you really like that dress, she said, I suggest you buy it because he is not the only one coming home and you are not the only ones who will be getting married. So yes indeed, I was in possession of a white satin gown and veil before he got home.

Brenda Velasco: It was a good thing, too.

Emma Aaroe: Oh, yes, it was because that's exactly what happened. Not only was there a great rush for these things but there was a strike in the garment area in New York because they could see that they should really be making more money.

Brenda Velasco: And that was the heyday of the unions.

Emma Aaroe: Oh yes indeed.

Donald Aaroe: Oh, yes.

Emma Aaroe: You looked for the union label in those days. So I was glad I had it in that box and we got married on Navy Day.

Brenda Velasco: So you got married on Navy Day and what day was that then?

Donald Aaroe: October 27th; it still is.

Emma Aaroe: October 27th in the First Presbyterian Church in Woodbridge. It was just wonderful. You know when the war ended and I think of it so often and I think maybe we couldn't help but be happy. Our homes were still here. It wasn't like Europe. Life returned the way we had hoped it would be. There was euphoria of happiness you know if your loved one came home, that was it. That was the whole thing that made you happy. Everything else was just coincidental.

Donald Aaroe: That picture in the paper of the Navy guy kissing the girl that said it all.

Brenda Velasco: That is a photo that is memorable. It always brings back the day the war ended. Now what newspaper did you work for then?

Emma Aaroe: It was the *Perth Amboy Evening News* then.

Brenda Velasco: Where was it located?

Donald Aaroe: The corner of Jefferson and Madison Avenues.

Emma Aaroe: In Perth Amboy. Then it became a morning paper. Then that began to coordinate all these papers around. They all had little parts of other papers names in them.

Brenda Velasco: And right now they're going through another tough time with the newspaper industry.

Donald Aaroe: Oh, yes, they're all talking. They'll never get rid of them.

Emma Aaroe: Working for the news during that time, my desk was in the newsroom right next to the door. I was sort of the first one anyone saw when they came in. Through those years there were so many who would come to the door. They would have the pictures of the ones that were missing from there. Every afternoon they had one that sounded like a ticker tape and the news came in. These lists and lists and lists of missing and dead. We would hear that, you know, and then if there was a geographical name it would go bing, bing, bing and the city editor would go in and he would rip it off and he would bring it out. I saw names of kids that went to dear old Woodbridge High, you know, and other people. It was a sad time but it was funny too, because somebody would come running in and say, they're selling cigarettes at such and such a place. Well, I didn't smoke cigarettes but my father did so, you know, I would hippity hop on my lunch hour and go down and buy daddy a pack of

cigarettes or they were selling butter. A quarter pound of butter you could buy. I would bring that back to the office and keep it cool and bring it home to mother. She was very happy to have it.

Brenda Velasco: Because it was rationed back then.

Emma Aaroe: Oh yes, and hard to get.

Brenda Velasco: Do you remember what you paid for a quarter pound of butter.

Emma Aaroe: Yes, I do. It was 25 cents and actually that was an enormous price to be paying, a dollar, for a pound of butter. That was high.

Donald Aaroe: And they used to sell it in bulk.

Emma Aaroe: Oh, that was before the war, yes. You'd go down to the A&P and say I want a pound of tub butter.

Donald Aaroe: In one piece.

Emma Aaroe: My mother didn't say that but some mothers did. So we took the scrapps. We weren't too fussy and nylon stockings. A pair of nylon stockings, you know, this was before pantyhose was \$1.65.

Brenda Velasco: How much did you make as a reporter?

Emma Aaroe: I think I made \$25.00 a week; before I left I was all the way up to about \$32.00 but that was my first job. In Prudential, in Newark, I made \$60.00 a month and we got hot lunch every day. There weren't many deductions. A monthly ticket to Newark from Woodbridge was \$10.00. I think that's the price for one round trip ticket today; I'm not sure.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, I think you're right too, from Woodbridge, yes.

Donald Aaroe: Well I worked in New York at the same time she was working in Newark and I was downtown at the AT&T building and we got \$60.00 a month too. I don't remember what a ticket to New York cost but it wasn't much.

Emma Aaroe: That's when the true romance bloomed, you see. Don was out of school a couple of years before I was. Although I always told our kids that the first time I saw their father he was dancing the minuet. He was in 8th grade and when we moved to Woodbridge I was in 6th grade. The 8th graders put on this little skit about George Washington's Birthday and it closed with them dancing the minuet.

Brenda Velasco: He impressed you that long ago.

Emma Aaroe: I knew he was a special person at that moment because only the tip top students were encouraged to be in these little dances and things. I just can't imagine now if somebody came and asked him to dance the minuet. Commuting was great because we had all these friends, we'd get on the train in the morning and we would kid around until we got off at whatever station and there were always a bunch that got off in Newark and then they went to New York.

Donald Aaroe: We used to fight to see who would sit between the girls.

Emma Aaroe: Yes, they had the flip over seat and we would sit three and three. There were three girls and three fellows, his pals and my girlfriends. So they would try to maneuver and sit between the two girls. They didn't care what girl they sat by. But he and I began to make google eyes at each other, as my father would say. One day the train started with a jerk and he and this other fellow was not quite seated so he stuck his arm out and he hit me in the mouth and by the time I got off the train my lip was all swollen. He didn't know it.

Brenda Velasco: What a way to go to work!

Emma Aaroe: It was gone by then. I always said that was why he asked me out. He felt sorry for me.

Brenda Velasco: What year did you graduate from high school?

Emma Aaroe: I graduated in '38.

Brenda Velasco: Don you graduated in.....

Donald Aaroe: '36.

Brenda Velasco: 1936, so then you both went to work right upon.....

Donald Aaroe: I went to work two months after I got out. I was walking down the street and met a friend of mine, a nice fellow, and I said: "Where are working"? He said, "Well I'm not right now. I just left a job but I'm going to go to school". He had graduated a year before me. So I said, "Where did you work, and he said, well I worked for the Western Electric Company at the AT&T building in New York". I said, "Oh but you left". He said, "Yea maybe you want to go over". You see there weren't too many jobs at this time.

Brenda Velasco: This was the Depression.

Emma Aaroe: Right.

Donald Aaroe: So he said, "Well you know, I don't know if they're hiring". So he told me how to get there. He said to get on the train and take the subway through Hoboken or wherever it was and go down to 195 Broadway. Well I did that and went into the place. I asked where the personnel office was and they sent me up to, I'll never forget her name, Miss Roberts. Miss Roberts was a rather large lady and very professional and I said my name is so and so and I'm looking for employment. She said, "Well I don't know if we're hiring anybody right now". I said, "Well I know there's one job open" and she said "you know more than I do". I said, Well my friend Leonard L. Bureson just left last week so his job is open. So she said, Well since you're so knowledgeable, why don't you take this note and go down to the medical department and let them see you and then come back and see me". So I did that. Then she said, "Well when would you want to go to work"? I said, Well I'm not doing anything now". She said, Well you come in next Monday morning and see me". So I did and I got a job as a runner. Western Electric and AT&T had offices all over the borough. You know they had Brooklyn and up in New Bronx and Staten Island and they had runners that carried correspondence and mail between the offices. They'd give you 20 cents and you'd get on the subway, if you got on the wrong subway you had your own money to come back. But anyway I worked there for two years and then I left to go to college. But I didn't have any money so I didn't make it in college, and that is when I joined the Navy.

Brenda Velasco: You were lucky to get a job during the Depression.

Donald Aaroe: Yes, I was.

Emma Aaroe: I think that just around the late '30s things were picking up a little and there was a network. Now I went to Prudential to apply for a job because one of my friends, who had graduated the year before, she was working in Prudential and she said I'll tell you how to get there and you just go in. I must say this also, because I think that when they were looking for help there were certain schools that would know whether you were well trained or educated or not and when I went in Woodbridge High School had a good reputation. So I started to work within a week and that was right in the beginning of January of 1939. I was so glad because

when I went to look for a job I looked like I was 12 years old; I barely had confidence. By this time, at least, I had worked in a couple of offices for short periods of time. So I was hired and I stayed there until the war broke out. Then I got the chance to work at the newspaper and I loved that job, I really did.

Brenda Velasco: And it was so close to home for you too.

Emma Aaroe: Oh, it was close to home but not only that, you know, I did write the news in the days when they wrote about birthday parties and Tuesday afternoon bridge clubs and the literary society. They had the little things, you know, Mr. and Mrs. so and so are entertaining Mrs. what's her names sister from you east Illinois. The guys in the news, you know, used to kid me about it because I'd sit down and call up ten people in the morning and they gave me news and I wrote it and anything else they wanted. They'd say, oh you write all that little stuff and I say, yes but people read what I write and they did.

Brenda Velasco: I know they did. They still read the community news; it's important.

Emma Aaroe: That's right.

Brenda Velasco: They want to look at their particular sections.

Donald Aaroe: That's what is going to save the newspaper.

Brenda Aaroe: Yes, because the internet.....

Donald Aaroe: I don't want to read in the paper what I already know from last night's 11 o'clock news; I want to know what going on. That's why I get mad at *The News Tribune* because you look at the news from our towns or whatever and Woodbridge is never in there. They're bringing in news from all over.

Emma Aaroe: Well that's because they only publish one paper really.

Donald Aaroe: Yes.

Emma Aaroe: From here to Asbury Park.

Brenda Velasco: Right, but you prefer the local news. That's the most important.

Emma Aaroe: And the weddings and the engagements and the showers. Oh every kind of party you can think of.

Brenda Velasco: The social calendar is very important.

Emma Aaroe: Once in a while I actually wrote some real news but they had on the foot reporters for the big stuff. They would never send me to cover a meeting at night; a young person all alone, goodness gracious. The only time I went out at night was when we began to have the blackout drills for people make sure that they had all their shades pulled down and all the lights out in case we were attacked. Because I was a newspaper person I had a card which permitted me to be out at this time and then I would walk up and down Grenville Street where nothing ever happened at any time and then I would come in the next morning and they would take the comments from all of us from different places where we lived. I hated the darkness, you know, when all the lights were out on Main Street. Publix's neon sign was gone and I never really liked it but I missed it. The street lights were painted, you know, there was just a little bar of light that came down and that was pretty dim.

Brenda Velasco: And that's why when the war was over that euphoria that you mentioned before that you could have light again. It was just a happy time.

Emma Aaroe: One of these questions said something about Woodbridge and where

did you have fun and all that kind of thing.

Brenda Velasco: What did you do for recreation?

Emma Aaroe: We had Main Street. Main Street had the movie, it had the two drugstores that had fountains and there were ice cream stores and there were shops of various kinds. But for big shopping you went to Perth Amboy or Rahway or Newark. But Jackson's corner was the spot. All the boys would stand and watch the girls go by and girls would walk by but not very fast.

Brenda Velasco: Of course, the mating game.

Emma Aaroe: That's right and everybody knew everybody and if they weren't related, most of them were, you know, somebody's cousin or second cousin twice removed. When my mother first started going to the Presbyterian Church, someone said to her, "Don't talk about anybody in this town because they are all related".

Brenda Velasco: Yes, and if you followed that advice you can survive. Otherwise, you had a lot of people angry with you.

Donald Aaroe: Oh, boy is that right!

Brenda Velasco: When you were growing up, now you moved here when you were in 6th grade, right?

Emma Aaroe: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: And we mentioned the hiking for recreation and you did mention the movies and there were plenty fields around here.

Donald Aaroe: Oh, yes.

Emma Aaroe: Oh we played. We went to the movies and then we would reenact it, you know. There were woods enough to play jungle and there were other things.

Donald Aaroe: You used to put on shows.

Emma Aaroe: Oh yes. When I moved to Grenville Street there were more girls up there that were within 2 or 3 years of age, you know. We were early teenagers from 12 to about 14 or 15 and so we just had a lot of people to play with. Then there were five of us who were born within this two year period and we all went to Woodbridge High together. I was in the Class of '38; the rest of them were in the Class of '37. We did everything together. We would trek back and forth to school every day. My goodness, we couldn't get along without that trip back and forth from school. We talked about everything and everybody and we just had a wonderful time.

Brenda Velasco: Let me just stop you because when we're talking about the high school we're talking about Barron Avenue where you went to school.

Emma Aaroe: Yes, Barron Avenue.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Emma Aaroe: That was it. We went, you know, to the dances, we went to the football games, the basketball games and even the baseball games sometimes. So whatever we did centered very closely around either the schools or the churches.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, so the focal point that you felt were the churches or the schools.

Emma Aaroe: And schools.

Brenda Velasco: And that was one of the questions that I had asked, Question 7 and Main Street was the dominant place where the boys met the girls.

Emma Aaroe: Oh, yes.

Brenda Velasco: How about you Don, did you feel the same way?

Donald Aaroe: Yes, well actually Jackson's corner was there long before Publix came along but Publix kind of took over as the center point because it had a bigger fountain and it was more interesting. But anyway, that was it, and the churches too. The churches all had Boy Scouts troops and there were no Cub Scouts at that time.

Emma Aaroe: We were children longer.

Donald Aaroe: Yes, we stayed children longer.

Emma Aaroe: I was a Girl Scout until I was 15 or 16 years old.

Donald Aaroe: And mostly, with these empty fields, we did do our own baseball fields. Our fathers even helped us. We went on hikes together and going back and forth to school was wonderful. We had a short cut that took about 20 minutes longer to go from our house on Linden Avenue to School #1. But we went through everybody's backyard. I was just saying to Em the other day, I could go from Creemer Street to Church Street through about eight backyards without a fence or anything in my way. Now they've all got fences up and you look around here and there are all fences up. The whole relationship has changed; neighborhoods aren't neighborhoods anymore.

Brenda Velasco: You're right. People don't want other people on their property and we also have a lot of litigation too.

Donald Aaroe: Yes.

Emma Aaroe: Yes.

Donald Aaroe: If you look, you'll see that my neighbors behind me and the neighbors on the other side all put up fences and they made me a nice little carport.

Brenda Velasco: Very good, your advantage.

Emma Aaroe: We were talking about too, you know, everybody's mother was your mother and you'd walk home and, of course, windows were open, people were looking out of windows, there were porches; you couldn't get away with much.

Donald Aaroe: One of the things we did, we lived on Linden Avenue between Freeman Street and Church Street. Church Street and Freeman Street would come at a point as you'd go down toward the White Church; so it was a triangle. We used to have six day bike races but we only had one guy that could stay up all night. Anyway, and around the corner there were big fields on Freeman Street we had kite flying contests; we kept kites up overnight. We had to attend to them because the wind started to die down and you had to move then around. So we were very busy with our bicycling. Also there was a wooden racetrack up where the high school is now and every Saturday they'd have time for us for the races, auto races they were at that time. So we would go up and hang on trees and look over the fence and watch them. For the timed trials we could go inside and we got to know the drivers and they would give us money and send us down to the Reo Diner to get sandwiches and coffee for them. Then on Sundays we'd sneak into the races and watch the races. Of course, a lot of people didn't want it because it was kind of noisy. But every Sunday they had them.

Emma Aaroe: Small boys loved them.

Brenda Velasco: Of course. What years were the races? Do you remember?

Donald Aaroe: This was in the '30s, early '30s.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Donald Aaroe: Then the wooden track got torn down and became a flat track, a very dangerous track really, until they stopped the car racing and then they had motorcycle racing. The whole didn't last more than 8 or 9 years I think.

Brenda Velasco: And when did they stop all the races altogether?

Donald Aaroe: When they built the high school.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, so the new Woodbridge High School.

Donald Aaroe: Which was '54. They were gone by '54.

Brenda Velasco: You had a lot of activity here then.

Donald Aaroe: Yes.

Emma Aaroe: We were busy all the time.

Brenda Velasco: Yes.

Emma Aaroe: Well in School #11, 7th and 8th grades were also kids from Avenel and Sewaren; they had to be bused to Woodbridge for 7th and 8th grades. So you made a whole new bunch of friends. I said to Don, you could walk to Avenel, I walked to Avenel with some of my friends many times but now it would be impossible with the highways and all. But I still walk to Sewaren to get my hair cut.

Brenda Velasco: That's great.

Donald Aaroe: Yes.

Emma Aaroe: Sewaren is just a place that you go. It's hard for newcomers to understand how you can park the car and look across the water at the tanks. But you see, we don't see the tanks; we see the water and the boats. We remember when we actually used to go swimming there.

Brenda Velasco: Wow!

Donald Aaroe: Yes, that was a great place.

Emma Aaroe: It wasn't the Riviera I'll tell you that but it was a place to go, cool off and see your friends and play in the water.

Brenda Velasco: Well you had Boynton Beach there.

Donald Aaroe: No, that was a little before that.

Brenda Velasco: That was before you because it burnt down around 1915 or something.

Emma Aaroe: It was gone because Shell was built by then.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Emma Aaroe: We still go there and I'll walk around and look down at what is the "shore" edge. It's icky and black. Then it was more stones than sand, I think, but it was clean. When a motor boat would go by and make little waves we'd yell, rollers and rollers and we run it down and jump up and down.

Donald Aaroe: They used to have the Land and Water Club down there. That was where they would have dances and parties and there were a couple of taverns. That was after the Boynton Beach thing went. Now they built up the tavern that's right there on the.....

Brenda Velasco: Moby Dick?

Donald Aaroe: Yes, Moby Dick that was the Lighthouse for years and that was there back in the '30s too.

Brenda Velasco: Alright now do you feel you fully answered Question 6?

Emma Aaroe: We did recreation?

Brenda Velasco: Yes, I think we did recreation and focal point.

Emma Aaroe: What about living?

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

Emma Aaroe: This is where it was at.

Donald Aaroe: This was really the only downtown.

Emma Aaroe: Yes, you know Iselin, Avenel and Fords that might have had a store or two but Woodbridge had a downtown. We had Christensen's and Chopper's that sold clothing and everything else that you could think of. After the war we really had a busy place. You could buy hats and shoes and suits and anything. You really didn't have to go out of town.

Donald Aaroe: But you know I have a bone to pick with Woodbridge. I don't know but they seem to be changing the makeup of Woodbridge Township. Woodbridge Township was nine sections, nine social sections. Now all of a sudden they've got Menlo Park Terrace, which wasn't there before 1960. It was built by the Sommer brothers after the war. It's one of the many real estate developers that went up after the war and I get a little upset because there is already a Menlo Park up on Route #27.

Brenda Velasco: And it's in Edison.

Donald Aaroe: And it's in Edison.

Brenda Velasco: It's confusing.

Donald Aaroe: And that's Menlo Park?

Emma Aaroe: It's really Fords.

Donald Aaroe: But I want to know why they don't make subdivisions of Woodbridge like Evergreen. Why isn't Evergreen or why isn't Shorecrest a.....

Brenda Velasco: I don't know why.

Donald Aaroe: Who is behind this?

Brenda Velasco: It goes back before I was even on the Council in 1996.

Emma Aaroe: I think it's because they built a school there.

Brenda Velasco: They have a school there.

Donald Aaroe: School #19, yes.

Brenda Velasco: Well you know your numbers. They have a school there on Maryknoll and their zip code is Metuchen.

Donald Aaroe: Is it really?

Brenda Velasco: Oh, yes. It's a Metuchen zip code.

Donald Aaroe: Then it's not part of Woodbridge; that's another thing.

Brenda Velasco: And yet it is because it's surrounded by Iselin and the Iselin Fire District, I think it's Iselin 9, the one on the side of the tracks heading towards Route #1 on Green Street in Iselin has a substation in Menlo Park Terrace. Yes Woodbridge is confusing. As an outsider moving in, many people think that they live in Colonia or Iselin or Fords and don't realize that they also lived in Woodbridge. That's where their taxes went. So, yes, this creates confusion and Menlo Park Terrace is a big question mark.

Donald Aaroe: Yes it is.

Brenda Velasco: It's across from Fords and it's bordered by Iselin.

Emma Aaroe: It was completely cut off by.....

Brenda Velasco: Route #1.

Emma Aaroe: Yes, Route #1 and Parsonage Road. Yes, it is an isolated spot.

Brenda Velasco: That would be a good project to why it was it included.....

Donald Aaroe: Somebody was pushing this.

Brenda Velasco: And it goes back to probably World War II at that time because you're mentioning the homes were built by Sommers Brothers after World War II.

Donald Aaroe: Well if you get a chance to bring it up at a Council meeting.....

Brenda Velasco: And have everybody from Menlo Park Terrace in an uproar, no. They're in enough of an uproar right now with construction. But you both liked living in Woodbridge?

Emma Aaroe: Oh, yes.

Donald Aaroe: Oh, yes, I love it.

Emma Aaroe: We made that vow.

Donald Aaroe: I built this house.

Emma Aaroe: And he did build this house.

Donald Aaroe: Fifty houses within walking distance of this kitchen.

Brenda Velasco: Wow!

Emma Aaroe: And he did build this house for me. But I was pregnant, you see, so he had a little pressure.

Brenda Velasco: Yes.

Donald Aaroe: She beat me though.

Emma Aaroe: Then we had the baby and we lived in this little, well it was either one or two rooms, but the other room wasn't very big, it was just a kitchen.

Brenda Velasco: What address was that then Emma?

Donald Aaroe: Rahway Avenue.

Emma Aaroe: Rahway Avenue near the Barron Arts Center, you know, in the big white.....

Donald Aaroe: Do you remember of hearing Dr. Rossi's?

Emma Aaroe: That was the big white house. It's still apartments now.

Donald Aaroe: We were putting a third floor on this house.

Emma Aaroe: When he says we, he means his father and company.

Donald Aaroe: So I was talking to the doctor one day and Emma, as I said.....

Emma Aaroe: I wasn't pregnant yet. We were living home with my mother and father.

Donald Aaroe: We were living home with her mother and father and so I said to the Doctor, "Hey doc, while you're doing all this work here how would you like to have a little apartment? In the main house, there was a main house, there was a little apartment on the end. So I said, how would you like to have third floor on that little place down there? Make it a little apartment and he said, well that would be nice. He said, draw it up for me. So I drew him the thing up and he said, yea, okay. So, I said, well I'll build it on one condition, that you rent it to Emma and I. So he said, okay. So we built it and we moved into it. Then we stayed there for three years.

Emma Aaroe: Yes, yes.

Donald Aaroe: Then we built the center.

Emma Aaroe: Right.

Donald Aaroe: She took nine months and I took eleven.

Brenda Velasco: Well you made it though. You moved in. So you lived in this house for.....

Donald Aaroe: 62 years.

Emma Aaroe: We brought all the furniture we owned in his father's pickup truck and we spread it about and we didn't even have a bed. We still had, you know, a sofa bed and the baby's crib hadn't arrived; she was in the basinet in the dining room there. We had to see how she liked having a room of her own. She loved it. And there were woods. This was solid woods behind us.

Brenda Velasco: Not anymore.

Emma Aaroe: No, not anymore.

Brenda Velasco: Woodbridge has really built up. Like you enjoyed, other people wanted to move here too.

Emma Aaroe: Oh, yes, that's when they moved in, you know, when they built all of those houses. Of course, then my children got their friends from the first houses that were built. It seemed everyone in it had a boy. They may have had a couple of girls who lived on this street.

Brenda Velasco: That was great though; it was great for them to grow up here.

Emma Aaroe: Oh, yes. Well the other favorite old tale that I love to tell is, the day we moved into Woodbridge, we pulled up in front of the house on Berry Street, this little girl came from around the corner, her name was Mary Reed, and she was a year or so older than I was. So we got to talking and running all around because nobody was paying any attention to us and she said to me, where do you go to Sunday School? I said, I don't know. I said, we haven't been here on Sunday yet. She said, ask your mother if you could come with me. So we went in and she asked my mother. She said, Mary, where do you go to church? She said, the Presbyterian Church, and she pointed down Rahway Avenue. My mother said, oh, that's good, okay. Well I started going there that first Sunday and I'm going there again.

Donald Aaroe: Now she owns the place.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, you were highly recommended. Andy and Shirley said, you got to ask them, and I followed up and you agreed.

Emma Aaroe: Right.

Brenda Velasco: So that's how they got you hooked into the First Presbyterian Church and it was just down the street.

Emma Aaroe: Yes, but the thing was, this was in June. When I started school, in School No. 11 a couple of those girls from the church were in my class. So, as I say, it all blended together in Woodbridge Proper. So, I just went. When my sister was old enough to go, she trekked along with my mother and the other kids. My father dragged his feet a little but eventually he joined us, too.

Brenda Velasco: He joined the group.

Emma Aaroe: Then he would say, someday I'm going to be buried under a tree in that old church yard. We loved that church yard.

Brenda Velasco: Well that's on the Historic Registry now.

Emma Aaroe: Yes, it is.

Donald Aaroe: Yes.

Emma Aaroe: And he is there and my mother also. Our plot is picked out. So I have a great feeling of friendliness with it. I say to people, if you see me walking around there don't think I'm having morbid thoughts, I'm really just saying hello to all my friends.

Donald Aaroe: When I go to Sewaren, I do almost every day I cut through the back,

there's a little strip road that goes into the back.....

Emma Aaroe: Trinity Lane.

Brenda Velasco: Yes.

Donald Aaroe: No, not Trinity Lane.

Brenda Velasco: No.

Emma Aaroe: Oh no. Oh, in Sewaren.

Donald Aaroe: I'm coming up Port Reading Road, there's a little road that goes in behind the church. Then you go through the cemetery. It's very dismal.

Brenda Velasco: It's nice and quiet.

Donald Aaroe: Oh, yes.

Brenda Velasco: In spite of the traffic whizzing by.

Donald Aaroe: We're both quite interested in, not only the church's history, but the township too, you know. And the church is part and parcel of the town

Brenda Velasco: Oh, yes.

Donald Aaroe: That's where the current green which was in that area, a little different configuration. I researched that old driver, Mr. Patel, who was the curator of the mid-East Jersey Proprietors. The little brick building next to the Perth Amboy Town Hall was the archives of the East Jersey Proprietors. That's why they worked down there. Well, anyway, the church was part of that parcel. The original building was built in 1675. Well they laid the mud cell down in 1675. They built the building and it took them about 10 years. That stayed there until 1803 when they built this building that's there now which was in 1972 but it was built on the old, and I was co-chairman of the Restoration Committee in '72 when we did the rebuilding, and it's built on the original juggled foundation of the 1803 church. So there's a lot of history in that building and that cemetery.

Brenda Velasco: And hopefully we're going to have trolley tours, from the county, this year and Trinity and First Presbyterian will be included because there is so much history: colonial and revolutionary.

Donald Aaroe: That's just a wonderful building. I put together a book of all the ministers from there from the 1700 to 2000. It took me about a year to research it.

Brenda Velasco: Oh sure. Is it on our website now?

Donald Aaroe: No, part of it is on the Presbyterian Church website.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Donald Aaroe: If you want to look at it its oldwhitechurch.org.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, I'll make sure Wendy Rottweiler from the library, she's our local historian, that she's also aware of that. I'll get that address later from you, okay.

Donald Aaroe: Yes, okay, that's definitely here.

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

Brenda Velasco: We mentioned your experiences during World War II already.

Emma Aaroe: I think that was when I thought it was the blackout. What did they call them when they were practicing.

Brenda Velasco: Air raid drills?

Emma Aaroe: Air raid drills. It was the air raid drills. And, of course, other things but it wasn't right on top of them, like the railroad accident.

Donald Aaroe: Yes, the railroad accident in 1951.

Emma Aaroe: When Don and I were first commuting the railroad was flat. It was down on the ground. There were accidents there from time to time.

Donald Aaroe: Yes, there were three or four deaths.

Emma Aaroe: Who was the?

Donald Aaroe: Harriet Short.

Emma Aaroe: Harriet Short.

Donald Aaroe: Harriet Short was killed. (February 1934)

Emma Aaroe: Someone who had been in school just a few years before us, she was killed. So it was a dangerous place.

Donald Aaroe: Yes.

Emma Aaroe: We were living in the apartments when the Port Reading explosion occurred.

Donald Aaroe: Oh golly, yes. Kelly Torpedo Works (United Railroad Signal Corp., November 12, 1940). He made the things that they use on the railroad, a little explosive device, and the trains would run over them and then you would know there was a problem. But, yes, I was on my way to work in Carteret, I was going to do this building in Carteret, and all of a sudden the truck went up in the air and moved over to the side in a ditch and I looked down and all I could see was rubble; the whole plant was down. There were people in there. At that time they had just been coming to work.

Brenda Velasco: Wow that was quite an explosion!

Donald Aaroe: Yes, it was a big explosion.

Emma Aaroe: That's when the windows in the back of the church got blown out. They were the same as the ones in the sanctuary and so many windows were broken and we had to use what we could salvage that was good to use for the sanctuary and we had put different windows in the back but actually that was the only damage to the building.

Brenda Velasco: Do you recall the year that that occurred?

Emma Aaroe: Well it had to be.....

Donald Aaroe: Well I'll tell you where you can find it, in one of Bobby McEwen's books.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Donald Aaroe: In one of his calendars. He and I were very active in the history of the church. I used to love his calendars. I don't know if you ever saw them.

Brenda Velasco: Yes.

Donald Aaroe: He was great. I miss him terribly.

Brenda Velasco: He just recently died within the past two years, right?

Donald Aaroe: Yes, right. We were very active in the church. Our main source of information was Dalley's book. I know Reverend Dalley. His book has got a great history of Woodbridge. That's all it is really, the history of Woodbridge. It stops just around the Civil War.

Brenda Velasco: Oh I'm glad you mentioned about this explosion. Were you there for the train accident at all?

Donald Aaroe: The day?

Brenda Velasco: Yes.

Donald Aaroe: No.

Emma Aaroe: He was.... Where were you working? Probably in Charlie's.

Donald Aaroe: Probably. I don't know if you remember Charlie Molnar?

He was a councilman. (Bob Molnar was a Councilman, not Charlie Molnar)

Brenda Velasco: Oh, yes.

Donald Aaroe: Well he had a little tavern down on New Street and that would be our gathering place. (Later this tavern became Almasi's)

Brenda Velasco: There were quite a few taverns down around there.

Donald Aaroe: Oh yes, there were a lot of them (inaudible.....)

Emma Aaroe: Oh there was one on every block.

Donald Aaroe: You know, that's another thing, the architectural things that change our society. The disappearance of the neighborhood tavern and the entrance of the kitchen counter where you could get a bite to eat.

Emma Aaroe: Instead of the table in the middle of the room.

Donald Aaroe: But he got a lot of new stuff in there.

10. What do you like about Woodbridge today?

Emma Aaroe: Its home.

Donald Aaroe: That's basically it.

Brenda Velasco: And I know you still are members of the First Presbyterian Church.

Donald Aaroe: Yes.

Emma Aaroe: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: And you mentioned you go to Sewaren.

Donald Aaroe: Yes.

Emma Aaroe: Oh, yes.

Brenda Velasco: When you go to Sewaren, you go right down to where the boats are or Sewaren Peninsula Park?

Donald Aaroe: Well sometimes she likes to walk down where the county park is.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, that's the Peninsula Park.

Donald Aaroe: But I go down by the little boat landing and meditate.

Emma Aaroe: It's funny when we go down there, nowadays, you know, sometimes he'll get out of the car, of course it's winter now, but I will get out and then I walk up to where the marina is. Then I'll turn around and walk back. But I must go down and look at the place where the people fish. I often wonder, do they really eat that fish.

Brenda Velasco: I don't know. It's chancy.

Emma Aaroe: I just think about so many things. My father swam in that bed of water. He would go down and swim out to the buoy and swim back. My mother would say, oh Ed, that's a dirty place, you shouldn't swim there. This was still in the '50s when he was doing it. He would say, the germs kill each other.

Brenda Velasco: We wish.

Emma Aaroe: But we go down, we look there, we look at the birds and look at the aspen tree. It looks so pretty in the fall.

Donald Aaroe: Oh, yes the aspens down there. I love to sit right under them and listen to them.

Brenda Velasco: Alright, so you still keep busy in Woodbridge then.

Donald Aaroe: Pardon.

Brenda Velasco: You still keep busy and you enjoy Woodbridge.

Donald Aaroe: Oh, yes. We keep busy. We did a lot of traveling. I've been retired now longer than I worked but we did a lot of traveling. We belong to the Elder Hostel. I don't know if you're familiar with them.

Brenda Velasco: I've heard of it but I.....

Donald Aaroe: It's a wonderful organization.

Emma Aaroe: We feel, of course, that we hit it in its prime and that means it wasn't quite.....

Donald Aaroe: It was cheaper then.

Emma Aaroe: But it was for a reason. It all started because they used the college facilities in the summer. You know we would stay in the college dorms.

Donald Aaroe: University of New Hampshire started it.

Emma Aaroe: So it was not meant to be very fancy but you know through the years.

Donald Aaroe: We stayed in college dormitories, you know, we did.

Brenda Velasco: Well I know when I visited Israel I stayed at Hebrew University.

Donald Aaroe: Oh, did you.

Brenda Velasco: That was on Mount Scopus so that was quite an experience.

Donald Aaroe: We've been to Israel.

Brenda Velasco: Did you stay at a hostel then?

Emma Aaroe: No we stayed in a hotel.

Donald Aaroe: No, hotel.

Brenda Velasco: Oh you went fancy, I didn't. But I was there as a teacher just traveling throughout the country.

Donald Aaroe: I thought Israel was a wonderful experience.

Brenda Velasco: Anybody affiliated with their religion. I'm a lector at church, and when we started reading the passage you were there. You shook the dust from your feet.

Donald Aaroe: We'll watch television and seat in our respective chairs and say, "been there, done that".

Brenda Velasco: Okay let's get down to Question 11.

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

Emma Aaroe: No.

Brenda Velasco: No family members.

Emma Aaroe: No, our son moved to North Carolina and our daughter lives in Cranford.

Brenda Velasco: Oh, she doesn't live far.

Emma Aaroe: No, she's not far away.

Brenda Velasco: And it's in an old town too; Cranford's an old town.

Donald Aaroe: Oh yes, it's a nice town.

Emma Aaroe: And Don's sister moved to Virginia. So we really.....

Brenda Velasco: You're it.

Emma Aaroe: But, as I said when I lived on Grenville Street and I had these girlfriends, we are now fading away. But after we married, all but one married somebody from Woodbridge; she was the one that lived out of the state, you know. But the rest of us lived within a few blocks of each other. We

lived near where our parents used to live. So we were together for a long, long time.

Brenda Velasco: That was nice raising children and sharing notes.

Emma Aaroe: Our children knew each other and played together and they were sort of like cousins. I don't think in the beginning they realized they weren't related. We found that most unusual because, you know, people in the United States are movers.

Brenda Velasco: Yes.

Emma Aaroe: We still lived in the same area and followed the same old pattern which we found quite comfortable.

Brenda Velasco: And it was nice for your children. They have an extended family.

Emma Aaroe: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: To me that's the extended family. Because you've got aunts that weren't real aunts.

Donald Aaroe: We always traveled with five generations.

Emma Aaroe: Yes, that was another thing.

Donald Aaroe: We've got a 22 year old great grandson.

Brenda Velasco: Well, congratulations!

Emma Aaroe: Well of course our daughter had her daughter when she was quite young and her daughter was the same so that went pretty fast. But besides that we still had parents and Kirsten's other grandparents had grandparents. It got to be a joke, you know. You'd meet people and so, oh this is my grandmother and this is my great grandmother and there's Kirsten and there's.....

Brenda Velasco: But that's nice. It kept the continuity, the continuity of traditions and everything. Well, is there anything else you wanted to include that we have not included? That we missed?

Emma Aaroe: You know where I see this discrimination, now, I never even thought of it because my sister and I discovered discrimination when we were fully grown. We didn't realize that there was a kind of discrimination. Maybe we just took it for granted. I mean people used expressions that today would be politically incorrect. But somehow we didn't feel there was any malice or forethought. But, of course, we were white and we were growing up here.

Brenda Velasco: But that was your prospective.

Emma Aaroe: Yes and when my sister was still a teenager she was working in a cleaners downtown. She knew the presser, and I guess somebody else who did work in the back, who were black. We didn't call them that, either, we called them colored in those days. She said to me one day, you know Em, she said, and she named the fellow's name, and she considered him a very fine man because he was a religious man and a good man. But she said, you know, he can't go in the place downtown that we called the greasy spoon. I'm sure it had a better name. She said, he can't go in there for a sandwich. I said, what! She said, no he has to go around to the kitchen door and tell them what he wants and they would make it. She was wounded.

Brenda Velasco: She was stunned. She realized there was another world in Woodbridge.

Emma Aaroe: So we thought about that and then, I guess it was some years later, I'm sure we were married and we talked about going to Charlie's and somehow something was said and Don said, oh, there was this one black man who came into

Charlie's, I guess, every day but he only drank beer and he drank it out of the bottle. Now, I'm sure, this was not unusual other people may have drunk from bottles also but Don says no. If Charlie gave him a glass, he would have to break that glass. Now knowing Charlie, because there was a man who had a big beautiful heart, but I guess if he wanted to run his business he had to run it. Before that, I think there were two black people in my graduating class, two women. I don't know what happened to the one but the other one, who happened to be a very attractive and talented girl, she used to sing, you know. Another friend of mine who worked in Newark said, I saw, and I can't think of her name, she said she was cleaning the toilet in Bamberger's and I said to her, what are you doing here? And she looked at me and said, "Where else would I get a job"? Now this was the late '30s. So, you know, these were things that we never even thought of.

Brenda Velasco: And it doesn't become apparent to the majority community until after World War II and it hits back after the Holocaust after World War II when we asked people to fight and this is where the movement starts integration.

Emma Aaroe: Yes, right.

Brenda Velasco: Long overdue.

Emma Aaroe: I know when my son was sitting in somebody's office in Rutgers, you know, they were complaining about something. I don't know whether it was discrimination but it was something they felt should be corrected, and do it right now, which would never have occurred in our generation.

Donald Aaroe: I think we made great steps over the last few years.

Brenda Velasco: I think this election says a lot. Obama, I heard him speak in 2004 and I was so impressed in 2004 and I said, he's got to be the next president.

Donald Aaroe: When I listened to him, when he did that first speech, I said, "that guy has got to be doing something really...."

Brenda Velasco: I felt that same way and he should be going someplace. I'm not going to go into politics now.

Donald Aaroe: No, we've had enough of that.

Brenda Velasco: But I thank you both.

Emma Aaroe: Well I read both his books and, it was funny, our granddaughter was the one who, very early in the campaign.....

Donald Aaroe: She was the Union County chairman.

Emma Aaroe: All of a sudden she's asking us for these \$25.00 donations. She was asking everybody she knew for these \$25.00 donations. So grandparents are swell to have on the list, you know, because we would have given her anything for anything. And then she got really into the committee and the committee work.

Donald Aaroe: She was co-chair of Union County.

Brenda Velasco: Wow!

Emma Aaroe: When I saw her enthusiasm and there was no history of that in our family. Well Don's father was on the Board of Education but this was like a hundred years before she would be thinking about. She was heartfelt. Of course, as it went on, it was taking more and more time and more and more work and after the election, of course, she was happy. Then she was sick around the holidays and I knew she wanted to go to Washington for the inauguration but she did go, where she could stand in the street. So we were kidding her about what she was going to wear but she said it was a

tremendous feeling, a tremendous feeling to be there.

Brenda Velasco: That's a collective memory she'll never forget. That's great for her because she's young and she has so much to look forward to just as we do but she's at a different stage in her life.

Emma Aaroe: Oh, yes.

Brenda Velasco: So that's great.

Donald Aaroe: I see him now he's on television every night. I can't believe he has that depth of words, saying the right things.

Brenda Velasco: And complex issues. There's no cure-all; no panacea.

Donald Aaroe: When I think of the last eight years and I think of George W., how could we have elected him in there twice? But we did. I think he's such a big person, whatever his culture is or even mentally, that he's not going to let the Republicans get him down. I think, you know, they're down there, you already see, you know, ratings and they're going to get him somewhere. But he's so sure that he can be a healer and he can.

Brenda Velasco: And we need it.

Donald Aaroe: And we need it. Oh, you have to have that.

Brenda Velasco: But it also has to be from the Democratic far out, left wing.

Emma Aaroe: And that if you wrote a book and put a chapter in about the governor of Illinois doing his shenanigans you couldn't believe it. You'd say, they're really making this up.

Donald Aaroe: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: This is Illinois. But I want to thank you both for consenting to the interview.

Emma Aaroe: But did you.....

Donald Aaroe: Get the date of the train wreck.

Brenda Velasco: I got the train wreck, 1951 and then we'll have to look up, in Port Reading, when that accident was. But I thank you very much for agreeing and spending so much time with me.

Donald Aaroe: Well, thank you, you're the busy one.

Emma Aaroe: You know that it's very seldom that the old folks get a chance to tell all their old stories.

Brenda Velasco: Well you got your chance today, both of you. Thank you again.