

**Oral History Interview**  
**Frank Capraro**  
**WH042**

(written transcript and digital audio)

On May 22, 2009, Frank Capraro was interviewed at the Woodbridge Main Library by Brenda Velasco at 2:15 P.M. Frank Capraro has lived in Woodbridge a long time. He has been involved with education for many, many years but he'll elaborate on that.

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

My name is Frank Capraro. I live in the Fords section of Woodbridge Township. I'm 81 years old and I was born a long time ago.

*Brenda Velasco:* Can you give me the year?

*Frank Capraro:* Yes, 1928.

*Brenda Velasco:* 1928, so you are about 81 years.....

*Frank Capraro:* I'm 81 years old and one month.

*Brenda Velasco:* Congratulations, you look good.

*Frank Capraro:* Thank you.

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

Seventy-nine years.

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

Well, we were living in a basement apartment in South Plainfield and, at the time, my father had three children and he looked for a place to live and we found a place in what's now part of Iselin and we moved there.

*Brenda Velasco:* Where in Iselin was that, do you know?

*Frank Capraro:* My address was 144 Woodbridge Avenue. It's right next to where the Babe Ruth fields are now. The house still exists and is still being lived in.

*Brenda Velasco:* Wow! Okay, now how many children did your mom and dad have?

*Frank Capraro:* I had three sisters and two brothers; a total of six.

*Brenda Velasco:* You had a big family.

*Frank Capraro:* Yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* So if you lived in Woodbridge for so many years, that seventy-nine years, you've seen a lot of changes occurring in 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:* You live in Fords now but you grew up in the Iselin section so let's take it when you were a young person.

*Frank Capraro:* I guess the first change in my particular area was the completion of Route #35. The highway now is now part of Route #9 and Route #35 and it was an access from all Route #9 to Route#1 and #9 in Woodbridge. So that was a big change. It really helped the situation going to the shore. There was no question that a lot of the wooded areas have now changed into housing areas. For example, at one time the

Bamberger's Estates, which is on the other side of Route #1 where Regina Street goes through now was there but that's all houses now. It's big. When I was going to school I believe we had the one high school. There was a few elementary schools. We had like sixteen thousand people. Now, of course, we have a hundred and two or whatever it is.

*Brenda Velasco:* We have over a hundred thousand right now.

*Frank Capraro:* Yes, us and Edison are always within fifty or so who are the biggest in Middlesex County. The stores, of course, were local town stores. I mean, I can still remember Main Street in Woodbridge, I can remember **Christensen's** and the 5&10 which was a haven for the married women. My wife used to go there a lot and sit around and have coffee at the counter of things of that sort. **Christensen's Department Store**, which I said, **Chopper's**, we had everything right on Main Street. That, of course, has changed. Although I really do believe it won't be long before it comes back to that, I really believe the era of the big shopping centers are going to be dissipating and they're going to be going back there. St. James Church, when I came, it was like almost on the corner of Main Street and Amboy Avenue. Then he built a new church and, of course, all the churches in the township, a lot of new churches. The schools, well I grew up in the era of a lot of school expansion. In fact when I started teaching in Woodbridge in 1952, Woodbridge High School was where the Barron Avenue School is right now and of course, since then, Woodbridge has developed a great educational system with a lot of schools. We still have three high schools, I believe five middle schools and I don't know how many elementary schools so that's been another great big change. I think, demographically, we're going through a change right now. It was interesting, I looked up some things and found out that at the present time, nationality wise, that the Irish were like nineteen percent, the Italians were about eighteen percent and once I found those two I wasn't really too interested in messing around, you know, with the others. So that's been a pretty stable part of this community. There's been a lot of changes and I think most of them for the better I will say that.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, I'm going to go back a few because you're mentioning places that somebody in 2009 might not be that familiar with.

*Frank Capraro:* Okay.

*Brenda Velasco:* When you mentioned the Bamberger Estates that was off by Regina Street?

*Frank Capraro:* Yes, if you would go right now where the, I'm not going to know names of places, but where that Chinese restaurant is on Route #1. If you go up behind that.....

*Brenda Velasco:* **Sports Authority.**

*Frank Capraro:* I think there's a **Day's Hotel** there too.

*Brenda Velasco:* Right.

*Frank Capraro:* Right behind that that was a wooded area and that went down to, I would say, approximately down through Chain O Hills Road.

*Brenda Velasco:* So that was quite a large expanse.

*Frank Capraro:* It was a big area and it went out to now where Green Street is. In fact, Irv Rayfield, that's where his bus place was. Irv had a great big farm there and it abutted the Bamberger Estates.

*Brenda Velasco:* And they were called the Bamberger Estates after that person?

*Frank Capraro:* After Bamberger of Newark; the Newark Bamberger stores.

*Brenda Velasco:* Right.

*Frank Capraro:* Yes, they owned it.

*Brenda Velasco:* And they were the predecessors to Macy's.

*Frank Capraro:* Yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* So Macy's took over that chain and that was a big department store out of Newark, New Jersey.

*Frank Capraro:* Yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* You played in that area then?

*Frank Capraro:* If you liked the outdoors you went there. There really wasn't any open spaces. It was all trees. I remember there was heckling up trees there. You just walked more for appreciation of nature. There really wasn't any area really to play. We did play on Rayfield's farm because Rayfield, Mr. Irv, he really loved kids and he allowed us to go to the farm and he had animals on the farm including monkeys and we used to spend some time there.

*Brenda Velasco:* Monkeys?

*Frank Capraro:* Yes, that's where I think us kids got the name as monkeys.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, now where exactly would Rayfield's farm be today?

*Frank Capraro:* Rayfield's farm, if you went down Green Street towards the center of Iselin, would be on the right hand side. There's now an office building. It's almost across the street from where Dapper Bus is by Elizabeth Avenue, I believe.

*Brenda Velasco:* Yes.

*Frank Capraro:* It's right in that area; that's where it was.

*Brenda Velasco:* This is quite a while ago then.

*Frank Capraro:* Yes it is.

*Brenda Velasco:* Now did you live on this side of Route #1?

*Frank Capraro:* I lived on the north side of Route #1. In fact, the big problem with us was fire districts. Because I can remember we were on the boundary of Iselin and Avenel fire district. I can remember one time there was controversy over a fire that was taking place and our address was Iselin and we were in the Iselin fire district also. At that time, we still voted in the Woodbridge districts. I believe it was the First Ward at that time but I think know it has changed. I think now it is the Second Ward, I'm not sure of that.

*Brenda Velasco:* Then where did your mom go shopping? You said it was to Main Street.

*Frank Capraro:* Well, I think, there was a grocery store in Woodbridge, Main Street. Really, that's where she did it, mostly local stores. I don't remember like a big **ACME** or a big **A&P** around but it was mainly, there was a little **A&P** in Woodbridge I know she used to go there. They'd go to get meats in the meat market. I wish I could remember the name of the meat market, it was right on Main Street there. So most of it was local shopping even clothing and everything.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, clothing you mentioned **Choppers** and **Christensen's**.

*Frank Capraro:* Yes, and there was an Army/Navy store; **Charlie Lehr's Army/Navy Store** also.

*Brenda Velasco:* Where was **Charlie Lehr's Army/Navy Store**?

*Frank Capraro:* **Charlie Lehr's Army/Navy Store** would be if you were going up Main Street. It would be on the right hand side. Right now I think there's a European Restaurant there, right in that area.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay.

*Frank Capraro:* And across the bank is where another big store where they sell guns and hunting equipment.

*Brenda Velasco:* Warren Larson.

*Frank Capraro:* Yes, Warren Larson's store, right.

*Brenda Velasco:* So that's where the bank was. Alright, and what schools did you attend growing up?

*Frank Capraro:* Growing up I came to Woodbridge and attended Woodbridge elementary school.

*Brenda Velasco:* Which one?

*Frank Capraro:* Where the Administration building is. That's where I went from second and third grades and then I went to Woodbridge School No. 11 for fourth, fifth and sixth grades and then, excuse me, from fifth grade to eighth grade was Woodbridge Middle.

*Brenda Velasco:* School No. 11.

*Frank Capraro:* School No. 11 and then from there I went to Woodbridge High School which is in the Barron Avenue School.

*Brenda Velasco:* So you didn't bother with kindergarten?

*Frank Capraro:* I was in another school for kindergarten.

*Brenda Velasco:* What school was that, do you recall?

*Frank Capraro:* Yes, I was in a school in South Plainfield.

*Brenda Velasco:* Oh, okay, because you moved here from South Plainfield.

*Frank Capraro:* Yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, that's why I couldn't figure out that second and third grade. So how old were you when you moved from South Plainfield then?

*Frank Capraro:* Eight years old.

*Brenda Velasco:* Eight years old, okay.

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

*Brenda Velasco:* By the time you moved here you would have been aware of some of the public buildings.

*Frank Capraro:* Well, they had a post office on Barron Avenue which is now the Barron Arts Center. I guess that was one of the oldest buildings I guess we have in Woodbridge. We had the park that they have on Pearl Street; you know when I was a kid not having a lot of transportation, I can get all over the township but the firehouse, the firehouse right on School Street, was there. The firehouse in Iselin was there.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, that's the one on Green Street?

*Frank Capraro:* Yes, on Green Street.

*Brenda Velasco:* That's District #9, I believe.

*Frank Capraro:* Yes, I believe the Keasbey Fire Company was there. The schools, I think I mentioned before that we had, Woodbridge High School then I know there was a No. 15 School in Iselin on Pershing Avenue, I believe it is, and a school that was

right on Green Street. There were actually two elementary schools in Iselin. Hopelawn had a school, Keasbey had a school, Fords had two schools No. 7 and No. 14.

*Brenda Velasco:* One of them is now closed.

*Frank Capraro:* Yes, one is a very lucrative business. It looks like it. There are a lot of cars there every day anyway.

*Brenda Velasco:* On King Georges Road.

*Frank Capraro:* Yes it is. And Sewaren had a school and Port Reading actually had barracks for down in that area, I guess, where Tappen Street School is now, there were barracks there.

*Brenda Velasco:* They had a very small school there.

*Frank Capraro:* Yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* I think it was a two room school house.

*Frank Capraro:* Yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* And some of these schools have since closed.

*Frank Capraro:* I think maybe Pershing Avenue School; you notice I didn't mention anything about Colonia because.....

*Brenda Velasco:* Oh, I know you omitted Colonia totally.

*Frank Capraro:* Because, to tell you the truth, to me that was another place because that was so far away. We never even knew that existed. The only reason we knew later on in our lives that Iselin existed because we knew Father Willis was a pretty famous priest in St. Cecelia's so we knew of him. And then there was a murder case back in the old days that, you know, happened in Iselin.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, we're going to discuss that later on when it comes up.

*Frank Capraro:* Okay.

*Brenda Velasco:* Maybe Question #9 we could discuss that murder case. Alright, so we've extensively covered Question #4 and #5.

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

When I was a kid we, like all kids, boys especially, during the spring and during the summer we were playing baseball every minute of the day. We had bats that were nailed together and we had balls that were taped. Any place where we could find a field we would play. I was lucky because right next to my house was an open area and we could play there. Then, later on, the traffic circle in Iselin, which was a big area, we would go up there and play. Simple things, we had a house, a parish house, and the parish house, as we got older, was a recreational facility that really was, I think, well beyond its time and they had basketball, ping pong and boxing in there. The recreation department ran that and the WPA, of course, supplied a lot of the money and funds for that.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, two questions as a follow up to that, the parish house, which church are you talking about?

*Frank Capraro:* The Parish House Church was the parish house for the Presbyterian Church. It was on Rahway Avenue. It's pretty much right where that senior citizen home is now.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, Finn and Adams then, that's what you're talking about?

*Frank Capraro:* Yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, so that's where the parish house was?

*Frank Capraro:* Yes it would go all the way back almost to where the railroad is now and it went from, if you could say, maybe a block in from Freeman Street, whatever that is, that whole area was a parish house and a ball field. In fact, Woodbridge High School used that ball field in baseball and in football and a major league player who is a (baseball) hall of famer from Carteret played on that field many years ago.

*Brenda Velasco:* What was his name?

*Frank Capraro:* Joe Medwick.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, so we're talking about the parish house or the man's from the First Presbyterian Church?

*Frank Capraro:* Yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* And that's that Woodbridge First Presbyterian Church?

*Frank Capraro:* Yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* The old White Church.

*Frank Capraro:* Yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay.

*Frank Capraro:* In fact, I think Mr. Devanny who was the minister that I remembered his name, on Rahway Avenue is where he lived. (Pastor of First Presbyterian: 1933-1941, 1946-1959)

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, there was another question. You mentioned, let's see, about the parish house, we've got that straightened out, how did you get there?

*Frank Capraro:* Walk. In fact, my buddy lived on Brown Avenue in Iselin. We used to meet on the corner of Route #1 and Green Street and we would walk, in fact, we'd walk and we'd run. That's how we got there. We used to go there almost every single time up until I got into high school.

*Brenda Velasco:* So this is before high school. You were walking a lot.

*Frank Capraro:* I've been a walker all my life.

*Brenda Velasco:* Maybe that's why you're so healthy.

*Frank Capraro:* I think it helped. We didn't have cars so we walked.

*Brenda Velasco:* And your mom and dad had about six kids too.

*Frank Capraro:* Right and my father died when I was twelve years old.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, so you guys were on your own?

*Frank Capraro:* Yes and my mother she used to stay home until three o'clock until we got home from school and do whatever we could do and then she would walk from back where we lived to the corner of Green Street and Rahway Avenue and get a bus and work from 4:00 P.M. until 12 Midnight in **Forster Wheeler**. During the war she worked in **Forster Wheeler**. Then they would give her a ride home. She did that to help raise us.

*Brenda Velasco:* Where was **Forster Wheeler** located?

*Frank Capraro:* Carteret. It's right on the water in Carteret.

*Brenda Velasco:* Alright, so you would have a bus.....

*Frank Capraro:* She would walk and get the bus.

*Brenda Velasco:* From Woodbridge to Carteret?

*Frank Capraro:* Yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* You had a bus line there at that time.

*Frank Capraro:* Yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* And this was during World War II. Alright, well you mentioned

WPA before that would provide some of the equipment.

*Frank Capraro:* Yes, and money too.

*Brenda Velasco:* Money and the equipment. What did you mean, WPA?

*Frank Capraro:* That's Work Progress Administration. That was one of those if you would equate it today that would be one of those.....

*Brenda Velasco:* Federal programs.

*Frank Capraro:* Yes, Federal program to stimulate the economy just because in those days, I have to tell you, you know, that's Depression days, and just barely out of Depression days. In fact, we didn't get very much out of WPAs compared to some of the communities around us. I happen to teach at Trenton High School for seven years and that whole entire high school was built by WPA and WPA funds. Our grounds keeper in Woodbridge Stadium who maybe, for about twenty-five years, he started with WPA and then he moved over to the town in they got the building.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, Board of Education.

*Frank Capraro:* Yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* Alright, so it went from a Federal program and then after the Depression we're out of the war then Woodbridge would be able to take over.

*Frank Capraro:* Yes, and they would do whatever they could.

*Brenda Velasco:* I hadn't realized that that we had facets of WPA in Woodbridge because we were a smaller community.

*Frank Capraro:* Well, we were, yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* At that time.

*Frank Capraro:* Yes we were.

*Brenda Velasco:* But no more.

*Frank Capraro:* We were very small.

*Brenda Velasco:* Did you go on picnics or anything with your family?

*Frank Capraro:* It was mainly, in my particular case, any social activities like that were mainly family oriented. Where we lived right next to us was a wooded area and I could remember we cut out the woods and made like a place where we used to eat in the summer months. That was basically it. Don't forget there weren't a lot of cars around and if there were you're lucky if they ran two days in a row. So we were pretty much.....

*Brenda Velasco:* You were confined to the area.

*Frank Capraro:* Confined to the area, yes.

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

I think the focal point was, I'm going to say togetherness. I mean I can still remember for many years what occurred Memorial Day, which is coming up now. Memorial Day was a big day in Woodbridge Township. In those years, when I was a Cub Scout and a Boy Scout and even as I started to go into high school, I think they had it even when I graduated high school, every Memorial Day there would be a big parade, big parade, in town. I know that's been diminished now. I don't know if they even have one but it's been diminished because all the communities now seem to have their own little get togethers. Well they didn't have that and everybody would go to the big parade. We'd go down to the Presbyterian cemetery and WOR would come down and they would broadcast or ceremony. The ceremony always consisted of somebody reciting

*Flanders, Flanders Field*, and I think that was the valedictorian of the class and then the *Gettysburg Address* was by the solitarian of the class and it was all broadcast. We were, at that time, known as the All American Town. We had that honor for quite a few years.

*Brenda Velasco*: Okay, and once again you're talking about the First Presbyterian Church on Rahway Avenue.

*Frank Capraro*: Yes.

*Brenda Velasco*: The cemetery there.

*Frank Capraro*: Yes.

*Brenda Velasco*: And WOR is a radio station.

*Frank Capraro*: Yes.

*Brenda Velasco*: And still going strong.

*Frank Capraro*: In fact that started with the old crystal sense. You could get one station and that would be it, WOR.

*Brenda Velasco*: And so there were community activities?

*Frank Capraro*: Yes.

*Brenda Velasco*: When you were a Cub Scout and Boy Scout where did you get your uniforms?

*Frank Capraro*: I think **Christensen's** used to have the uniforms. I'm pretty sure that that's where we got them.

*Brenda Velasco*: I remember when my sons were growing up that's where we got the uniforms too. So **Christensen's** played a role even then. Okay, anything else you want to mention about the focal point of your community? How about church?

*Frank Capraro*: Well church, of course, we were Catholic. There were many churches in Woodbridge. The Presbyterian Church, the Methodist Church and Mount Carmel was in operation; this is Woodbridge Proper.

*Brenda Velasco*: Right.

*Frank Capraro*: We used to walk from where I was to St. James Church on Sundays and we also had religious instruction that the used to let us get out of school a half an hour earlier on a Monday and we'd walk over to St. James Church and have that. So the church, in those days, had things like the CYO and the biggest thing in the church in those days was bingo to keep them operating.

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

Well to tell you the truth, I really didn't know any other section. So I liked the people that were there. They were our kind of people. They were all struggling like heck to make a living. If the person had a newer car, that was a rarity. The neighbors were always ready to help you out. We were a very diverse neighborhood at that time. When we moved in I think we were the only people of Italian decent that was in that area; there were all kinds of people. It was a neighborhood, it really was.

*Brenda Velasco*: Of mixed background because Woodbridge basically is mixed Background.

*Frank Capraro*: Yes, yes it is.

*Brenda Velasco*: You have the Hungarian and.....

*Frank Capraro*: Yes, it was fairly mixed.

*Brenda Velasco*: How close were your neighbors?



*Frank Capraro:* My next door neighbor was about, I'd say, two hundred feet from me and on the other side was township property. I don't know where they got it but it was township property. On the other side of the street, maybe three hundred feet.....

*Brenda Velasco:* You were not crowded.

*Frank Capraro:* Oh, no, we were not crowded.

*Brenda Velasco:* Because right now you live in Fords.

*Frank Capraro:* Right now I live in a house that, because of variances, has six foot on one side of me and six foot on the other side of me. Thank God I have a pretty deep backyard.

*Brenda Velasco:* I'm just contrasting it to when you were growing up; what a difference.

*Frank Capraro:* Oh, yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* That reflects the changes and the increase of the density of the population; that increase in population.

*Frank Capraro:* Certain areas, like the Fulton Street area, was always crowded even then but basically there was a lot of room.

*Brenda Velasco:* You lived on the periphery.

*Frank Capraro:* Yes I did.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, of Woodbridge Proper.

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

Well, I was just talking about it. We did have a murder case in Iselin. We had quite a few.

*Brenda Velasco:* Do you recall what year and what the facts were?

*Frank Capraro:* Yes, it was a woman that was murdered; I don't really know the facts (Iselin woman was murdered in 1964). I know they had a trial and the person was found guilty. I was a young kid at the time. Back in the early '40s Woodbridge Water Company, Middlesex Water Company, had a building down where right now, Ralph Mocci has his equipment there on Port Reading Avenue and they had an explosion of signal devices and two or three people lost their lives there. In 1938, there was a tornado through Hopelawn. It did some damage there (Hopelawn tornado, 1941). Of course, in 1950, I may have that date wrong, there was the train wreck.

*Brenda Velasco:* 1951.

*Frank Capraro:* That's right it was spring of '51. We had the train wreck there.

*Brenda Velasco:* Were you home for that?

*Frank Capraro:* Believe it or not, we used to hang around on Main Street and School Street by **Jackson's Drug Store** and that was our hung out and we were there when that happened. I was going to college at the time.

*Brenda Velasco:* You saw the accident.

*Frank Capraro:* We saw the result of the accident, yes. We saw the thistle and the train sitting there. I remember they used the first aid squad as a morgue.

*Brenda Velasco:* Were you on that first aid squad back then?

*Frank Capraro:* They didn't have cadets then but let's say I was a hanger arounder waiting to become a member. I didn't want to become a member because I was still going to college and I knew I couldn't give the time I needed to give. So we had

that and, of course, we had that very bad thing that happened to Patrolman Alvin Williams when he drowned in the brook area off Route #35 down where **Home Depot** is and **K-Mart** (1979).

*Brenda Velasco:* Right.

*Frank Capraro:* He was trying to save somebody who was in the brook there. I can remember one episode they were looking for somebody they thought committed murder and the police were all out looking for them all over the place. I don't know what the exact year was but I believe I was in the first aid squad at that time. The gentleman walked right into the police station and put his gun on the police counter and.....

*Brenda Velasco:* And surrendered.

*Frank Capraro:* And surrendered. Also we had the tragedy of the young man who happened to be a basketball manager, I was a junior varsity basketball coach in Woodbridge, and he happened to leave to go home and got killed; he got run over by the chief of police.

*Brenda Velasco:* Who was this? Do you recall the names?

*Frank Capraro:* Berrardi, I believe was the boy's name and I believe the chief of police was Mr. Keating . (1937-1954)

*Brenda Velasco:* That was an unfortunate tragedy.

*Frank Capraro:* It was, it was a very bad night I remember and, of course, what happened was there was a hit and run type thing, why I don't know but that's what happened. The next morning the chief of police committed suicide. Then, of course, we had Captain Carlson who lived up there on Alwat Street and he was famous for his seamanship, he lived in the town (1952). We had our share of war heroes here too during the war, World War II. I didn't know anything about World War I so.

*Brenda Velasco:* You weren't in World War II because you were too young, right?

*Frank Capraro:* I was in the service.

*Brenda Velasco:* You were in the service?

*Frank Capraro:* I was in the service from June of '46 to October of '47.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, so this was after the war?

*Frank Capraro:* Yes, we were considered, I laugh at it I'm considered a war veteran because I was within this time span.

*Brenda Velasco:* Oh, okay.

*Frank Capraro:* I was in Japan in the Army of Occupation but I never, thank God, saw any action or anything like that. I was located in Japan between Nagasaki and Hiroshima so I did see both those towns.

*Brenda Velasco:* And the devastation there.

*Frank Capraro:* Yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* From the dropping of the bomb.

*Frank Capraro:* Yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* And you were allowed to go into these areas?

*Frank Capraro:* Oh, yes, by that time, yes. In fact, I remember umpiring the baseball game. I happened to be going by there and the kids were going to play baseball and a man who spoke English asked me if I would umpire. I said, well I never umpired but I did so I umpired the game for them.

*Brenda Velasco:* Sports are in your blood.

*Frank Capraro:* Well, let me tell you, I won't be where I am today if it wasn't for athletics. Last face it, they are very good to me.

*Brenda Velasco:* Yes, well, let's look at all the titles you've held while we're on this because this is significant too. You were a physical education teacher, then you were...

*Frank Capraro:* I was physical education, health and driver education teacher. Then I went to Trenton as a health teacher. I was an assistant to the head football coach, assistant to the head baseball coach.....

*Brenda Velasco:* Is this in Woodbridge or Trenton?

*Frank Capraro:* My head football started in Trenton and ended in Woodbridge, I was sixteen years in Woodbridge as a head coach. Then I was, for ten years, a baseball coach in Woodbridge and I also was an assistant basketball coach. Then I became athletic director at Kennedy, then I moved to Woodbridge and then I went to J.P. Stevens. So I had twenty years as an athletic director.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, with all that scheduling.

*Frank Capraro:* But a lot of fun.

*Brenda Velasco:* Can you think of anything else for Question #9? The construction because when you described where you lived.....

*Frank Capraro:* Well, yes, I mean, there's a heck of a lot of construction. Look at the difference in the highways over there right now. We've got 287, we got 440, we have the improvements on Route #1 and Route #9. So there's been an awful lot of construction going on. I notice one thing here it says riots. Well, one year, 1945, we played Perth Amboy in the football game and we weren't a very good team and they were a very good team. But, like things happen, we won. So it was down in Perth Amboy and we had to fight our way out of the bus.....

*Brenda Velasco:* So Woodbridge High School won?

*Frank Capraro:* We won, we won the game, seven to six. Police officer Joe Nagy made the touchdown, I remember that, he's a retired police officer.....

*Brenda Velasco:* Wow!

*Frank Capraro:* And we got back, the next day the Amboy people were going to march on Woodbridge. So they got down where, it used to be **Costa's Ice Cream**, it's right by **Strawberry's**, and then Chief Egan was then the chief of police (1954-1961) and he went down there with his car, got out of the car, and said, okay anybody crosses that line is going to be arrested. So the kids neatly turned around and went back. So we had that. Discrimination, I think, was never heard of in Woodbridge. I noted the first day when we moved here from South Plainfield we had to walk down and get the school bus and we weren't familiar with that area at that time and there was a black section in that area. We got on the bus and I never saw, you know, black kids before. They got on the bus and it was never, never in our mind. We played together, I ate in their homes and they used to come to our homes. I think that Woodbridge has been very, very fortunate. I think that maybe now there may be more cases but at that time I never, never heard of a case of discrimination at all.

*Brenda Velasco:* That's good. You've got a good history then. Okay, I think we've covered everything there. Any significant sporting events for you other than that Perth Amboy? Were you playing on that football team in 1945?

*Frank Capraro:* Yes I was.

*Brenda Velasco:* So that's why your memory is so good.

*Frank Capraro:* Well, you know, I remember that because I remember all the people that played.

*Brenda Velasco:* That was a good team.

*Frank Capraro:* We were lousy but we won that game. We didn't have a very good team that year.

*Brenda Velasco:* Did Woodbridge have any semi-professional football teams?

*Frank Capraro:* Woodbridge had the Golden Bears for years. I can confuse now, but I was a freshman at Rutgers, I was playing freshman football and I played with the Golden Bears by the name of Gene Franks because I was illegal, of course. When I was in Fort Lee, Virginia training we used to come up. But Woodbridge had a very good semi-pro team coach by the name of Tony Cacciola who's really a credit to the community.

*Brenda Velasco:* He was a Woodbridge resident then.

*Frank Capraro:* Yes, he lived in Colonia.

*Brenda Velasco:* Finally Colonia is being recognized.

*Frank Capraro:* Yes, I think they finally built some houses there.

*Brenda Velasco:* Among the farms because it was basically farms.

*Frank Capraro:* Yes, right.

*Brenda Velasco:* So you played for that illegally?

*Frank Capraro:* Well, I played. I won't call it illegal but it was extracurricular.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, you played with the Golden Bears. What years were they?

*Frank Capraro:* The Golden Bears were in existence, I would say, from the early '40s and then they finally, you know, became very difficult to draw and get money and stuff. They went into the '50s.

*Brenda Velasco:* That's long.

*Frank Capraro:* That was an adventure every Sunday. People would walk down to Legion Field which is now where the American Legion is and that was a football field before the Turnpike went through there. That's where we played our football and baseball games. People would walk down there and they would load that place up. It was a very nice activity for a Sunday afternoon for the people. They used to play on Sundays.

*Brenda Velasco:* Were you charged as spectators?

*Frank Capraro:* Oh, yes, they were charged, yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* Do you remember what you were charged?

*Frank Capraro:* Oh, I think maybe it was a dollar and fifty cents for kids.

*Brenda Velasco:* That was a bargain.

*Frank Capraro:* Oh, well.

*Brenda Velasco:* That was tough times; that was tough times too.

*Frank Capraro:* You know, you've got to remember that when I was about seventeen maybe, I was working in the gas station. I can remember gas was 14.7 cents a gallon. A loaf of bread was fourteen cents and a pack of cigarettes was fourteen cents. Those three prices always used to be the same but now, of course, that's all changed. You know, there wasn't a lot of money in those days.

*Brenda Velasco:* What gas station did you work at?

*Frank Capraro:* I worked at a gas station on the corner of Regina Street and Route #1; it was an **Esso Station**. There was a **Howard Johnson** right next to it. Mrs.

Sidoris, Pete Sidoris, who lived in Colonia, he owned the **Howard Johnson**. It was the first one around here.

*Brenda Velasco:* And it's no longer here.

*Frank Capraro:* It was the **Landmark** and it's a used car dealer now, right?

*Brenda Velasco:* Yes, **McGuire Cadillac**. It's changed quite a bit.

*Frank Capraro:* Yes.

*Brenda Capraro:* How were you able to afford college because your mother and all your siblings, I believe, many of your siblings also went to college.

*Frank Capraro:* Four out of six of us went to college. Two have doctorate degrees. What happened with me, basically, I had the GI Bill. Being in the service I had the GI Bill and when I went to college I commuted for four years from where I lived without a car, without a car, so when I hear people talk about they can't do this and they can't do that well I put my interjection in there; I don't think you really want to do this or do that. But anyway, that was with me and I think I had to pay like, in those days tuition, I think I paid like eight hundred dollars for the last half of my senior year which wasn't covered. So aside from that it was all covered by the GI Bill. For football they didn't have the scholarships they have now and when I first went to college I was, really, just another kid going out for football so I wasn't about to get a scholarship.

*Brenda Velasco:* Where did you go to college?

*Frank Capraro:* Rutgers.

*Brenda Velasco:* So you had to commute to Rutgers every day?

*Frank Capraro:* Yes. Luckily, there were a couple of people that lived in town that were going there and they would take me whenever they could. But I would get the bus or the train or whatever. It was a lot of fun.

*Brenda Velasco:* And you made it.

*Frank Capraro:* Yes, and you learn to appreciate things.

*Brenda Velasco:* Oh I'm sure you do. But you're still here about eighty-one years, right?

*Frank Capraro:* Yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* And you're very healthy and you're very active. When did you retire?

*Frank Capraro:* I just retired in November. I had fifty-five years in education.

*Brenda Velasco:* Quite a long stretch.

*Frank Capraro:* Well God was good to me. He gave me my health. I did have open heart surgery two years ago but aside from that I've been lucky.

*Brenda Velasco:* You look great.

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

Well I think Woodbridge has a lot to offer. I think they try to take care of all facets of the population. I think they take care of the young, I think they take care of the people of middle age, I think they try to take care of the people of my age and I think they have tried to improve facilities. I think that basically they really try to make Woodbridge a good place in which to live.

*Brenda Velasco:* Do you use any of the programs that they have?

*Frank Capraro:* I don't use very many of the programs. I mean, I get the flu shot and

stuff like that. Because of my friends, I belong to a health club that I go to a lot. We used the Community Center when I was an athletic director. We've been very fortunate to use that. I think I'm a great public relations man for that place. I think it's the most wonderful community center that I've ever seen and I've been around a long, long time. I think that's a gem. I was against it when they bailed out that outfit that was in trouble. It cost sixteen million dollars but when you look back at sixteen million dollars, I may have the number wrong, but it was well worthwhile.

*Brenda Velasco:* And it's not too far from your house.

*Frank Capraro:* Well everything is pretty much walking distance. I can go down one block and through the back way and go right into that.

*Brenda Velasco:* And we now have a hockey team.....

*Frank Capraro:* Yes, three hockey teams.

*Brenda Velasco:* That utilize our center. So it provides for all ages.

*Frank Capraro:* Yes, I think that I've been Woodbridge. I've been in Woodbridge a long, long time. When I got married I remember telling my wife, hey look I'm going to tell you right now there are a couple of things that I want you to understand. I said, number one, I'm going to live in Woodbridge, number two, I'm a first aider so therefore I'm going to be out of the house occasionally and number three, I'm a coach so I'm going to be out of the house a heck of a lot. She said, fine, and that was it. I've been very lucky that way.

*Brenda Velasco:* You're lucky with your wife, Rosemary.

*Frank Capraro:* Oh, yes, Rosemary; she's good.

*Brenda Velasco:* Was she from Woodbridge?

*Frank Capraro:* No, she's from Newark. The first time she came down here she said to me, you brought me down to this swamp. Because when we first moved into where we lived we had a septic system and we were right by the incinerator. On a Sunday afternoon you'd go out there to have a barbeque and smell that incinerator. But, you know what, it all worked out.

*Brenda Velasco:* And how long have you been married?

*Frank Capraro:* Fifty-two years.

*Brenda Velasco:* That's pretty good.

*Frank Capraro:* Yes.

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

Yes, I just have one now, my sister lives in Woodbridge. That's it.

*Brenda Velasco:* Because your brother just moved out.

*Frank Capraro:* My brother went down to a fifty-five and older and I didn't qualify for that because I'm eighty something.

*Brenda Velasco:* And you have children.

*Frank Capraro:* Yes, my daughter lives with us. She's married and she lives with us. We have one of the true legitimate two family houses in the area so she lives there and my son lives in South Brunswick; he has three children.

*Brenda Velasco:* Have we omitted anything that you might want to mention.

*Frank Capraro:* No, I probably forgot something but I try to keep up on things so I think I got most of it.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay.

*Frank Capraro:* Well, you know, I've been through quite a few mayors and through good ones.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, but we're not going into politics in this administration. I want to thank you very, very much for giving me the time and I enjoyed your interview. That's about it and it's Memorial Day weekend so get out there and enjoy it. It's supposed to be nice weather hopefully.

*Frank Capraro:* I'm going to enjoy it I'm going to be at my grandson's soccer tournament for two days.

*Brenda Velasco:* Sports again. Okay, this is Frank Capraro. Thank you.