

Oral History Interview
Frank Kreisel
WH023
(written transcript and digital audio)

On Wednesday, December 3, 2008 at 10:15 A.M. Frank Kreisel was interviewed at the Woodbridge Main Library by Brenda Velasco

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

My full name is Frank Kreisel. I live on Elmwood Avenue in Woodbridge Proper. I was born in 1925.

Brenda Velasco: 1925, okay. So you're about 83. You'd never believe it.

2. How long have you lived in Woodbridge?

Brenda Velasco: That's a hard one.

Frank Kreisel: Yes, it is, because we came from Perth Amboy. I guess I was about 10 years old when we came to Woodbridge.

Brenda Velasco: Alright, so about 1935, during the Depression.

Frank Kreisel: Yea, yea.

3. Why did your family move from Perth Amboy to Woodbridge?

Well, the Kreisel family were in Perth Amboy and the Milano family, which was my mother's side, was in Woodbridge. They were in Woodbridge.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Frank Kreisel: And I guess they wanted to get closer together. I'm guessing that but that's a pretty good guess I think.

Brenda Velasco: Alright and you mentioned something about your family had a musical background because you're a musician.

Frank Kreisel: Yes, my uncles, the Milanos, were musicians and were involved in the old vaudeville days, they were on the road in those days. The one thing they needed with their instrumentation was a keyboard player so they got things together and the next thing I knew I was studying the accordion and it wasn't long before I started working with them.

Brenda Velasco: At what age?

Frank Kreisel: I guess 14 or 15.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, and where are some of the places that you played?

Frank Kreisel: They were what we called club dates, Brenda. You know there were no steady jobs, at least not many of them. So there would be a wedding somewhere. That kind of thing, you know, there would be one nighters.

Brenda Velasco: Were they in the area then?

Frank Kreisel: Yes, of course. And Port Reading, of course, was a very large Italian section even then and I think my uncle had all those Italian weddings. The majority of them were what we used to call football weddings. I don't know if you're familiar with that.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, you'll have to go into more detail because we're dealing with younger generations coming up.

Frank Kreisel: Well, football weddings simply were that when they brought the food in they brought it in in barrels and in the barrels were sandwiches. One marked cheese, one marked maybe ham and that was the food. Of course, there wasn't any money or anything lying around and that was it.

Brenda Velasco: But there was plenty of food of what they had though.

Frank Kreisel: Yes, no complaints.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, so now we know what football weddings were about. Did you play in any clubs in the area other than weddings? You had mentioned previously something about Fords had a nightclub.

Frank Kreisel: Yea, but that was maybe a year later. Clubs, you and I discussed Montecalvo's Mayfair.

Brenda Velasco: Which is now called Mulberry Street.

Frank Kreisel: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: On Rahway Avenue. Okay.

Frank Kreisel: Mike, at least according to consensus at that time, had the best pizza in town. If you're interested in that one.

Brenda Velasco: I've heard that rumor anyhow.

Frank Kreisel: Have you?

Brenda Velasco: Oh, yea. It still survives. They have the best pizza because I had worked on the Turnpike when I was in college giving out directions telling people where to go and the best pizza was from Mayfair Montecalvo.

Frank Kreisel: Training for politicians.

Brenda Velasco: I'm sure.

Frank Kreisel: Tell them where to go.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, and you could get away with it then. Alright.

Frank Kreisel: Oh, you asked me about the club in Fords.

Brenda Velasco: Yea. There was a nightclub in Fords?

Frank Kreisel: The club dates were numerous, the weddings and things, and the steady jobs were not. So they were kind of prime things that everybody wanted to do and a club opened in Fords called The Alamo. If you look at it today, I drive past there, the building is still there and it looks like the smallest thing I ever saw. But in those days.....

Brenda Velasco: That was big for you.

Frank Kreisel: It was big for everyone. They had a floor show every night. The floor show would include dancers and a singer and the band that worked there not only had to play for dancing but had to play for the acts as well. There were many bands trying to get that job including my uncle's. We took the audition and we got the job. So at 15, I was working there six nights a week. I had to join the union at that time and the union scale had to be \$3.00 a night. So we made \$18.00 a week working till 3:00 A.M. in the morning. Happy to have the job and I was going to high school at the time.

Brenda Velasco: And how did you manage to juggle that?

Frank Kreisel: Not very well.

Brenda Velasco: But you were bringing home money.

Frank Kreisel: Now there you just hit the key because you look back at that day, Brenda, and I think my mother was working in a dress factory here. Piece work they would call it and she was making, I don't know, a dollar a day or two dollars a day or something. We got through.

Brenda Velasco: Where in Fords was the Alamo nightclub? That Club? On what street? Do you remember?

Frank Kreisel: Yea, it was on New Brunswick Avenue on the corner of, I don't know what that street is Brenda. (Currently, it is the Lemon Tree)

Brenda Velasco: But it was on New Brunswick Avenue?

Frank Kreisel: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, alright, okay. And then when the war came you were also involved in World War II.

Frank Kreisel: Yes, I was.

Brenda Velasco: And when did you enlist or were you drafted?

Frank Kreisel: I was drafted.

Brenda Velasco: And how old were you?

Frank Kreisel: Right out of high school. In fact my mother had to go and got my diploma when they graduated and how far do you want to go with this?

Brenda Velasco: You were in the Navy or Army?

Frank Kreisel: I was in the Army.

Brenda Velasco: And which campaign? Was it the Pacific or the Atlantic?

Frank Kreisel: Pacific.

Brenda Velasco: Were you able to continue to play music in the Army?

Frank Kreisel: Well, this is where I made some adolescent boo boo's. Very, very dumb. Didn't know it until I was in the jungles and somebody was trying to kill me. But I could have stayed in Fort Dix in the band. I could have stayed at Camp Kroft in the band. These are the camps I went into and Fort Meade.

Brenda Velasco: That was in Maryland.

Frank Kreisel: And I said no, give me a gun. I just got a bb gun maybe six months before and now somebody's going to give me a real gun and I could really shoot. There's a mentality, its 18 years old. Without that mentality, you don't win the war, Brenda.

Brenda Velasco: No.

Frank Kreisel: I'll tell you that.

Brenda Velasco: You're right. You're right.

Frank Kreisel: Yea.

Brenda Velasco: And this was a nasty war.

Frank Kreisel: And I wound up in the infantry. But as things would happen, do you want to carry this a little further?

Brenda Velasco: Go ahead.

Frank Kreisel: As things would have it, I wound up in a hospital in Bougainville which is in the Solomons. They brought over a little show, an outdoor show, it was three musicians, and I recognized one of the musicians as Sid Feldstein who played with Tommy Dorsey's band and I sat there when it was over and everyone left and I stayed there until they were packing up the instruments and I looked at him and said Sid, how are you? And he said, Frank, what the hell are you doing here? I said I'm in the infantry. He said, what band are you in? I said, none. He said I'm in a division that has three regiments. I was in 132nd. We had the 164th. He was from

the 164th. He said, listen I'm in special service he says and I could get you in there and you could play an accordion with the special services. I said, all of a sudden I see the light.

Brenda Velasco: Good, did you follow up?

Frank Kreisel: And he said, okay I'll go back. So now I'm waiting to hear something and finally one day I get a message from the message center saying that the Colonel wants to see me. Now, no one has ever seen the Colonel. You never see colonels. You go blind if you see colonels so you know they're there. Now he wants to see me so I went all the way back where his tent was and I walked in and regulations say that I go up to the Colonel's desk and I salute and I hold that salute until he returns it. He was looking down at the papers. I held my hand there until my muscles let go and my arm fell down. Finally he looked and he said, Kreisel don't you like it here? I figured, I'm finished, now that's the end of it. I said, oh sure I do Colonel. He said it cost us \$10,000 to train you. He said, and now we can't let you go. I said, oh, that's it? He said but I'll tell you what; obviously if they want you over there you must have something on the ball. He said, so when we're not in combat, he said I want you to go through the personnel records and see if you could find enough musicians to put a band together for us that you can operate while we're in the rear area. Sure enough, I did and I put together a group called the *Jungle Cats*.

Brenda Velasco: That's appropriate, you were in the Pacific.

Frank Kreisel: And we did shows for the different groups. The Colonel, all of a sudden, was proud of this. He sent us out in a couple of ships where he knew the captains and we did that. We broadcast on Armed Forces Radio. So I was back in the music business for awhile. There was just a big article, incidentally, recently on the *Jungle Cats*.

Brenda Velasco: Do you have a copy of that article?

Frank Kreisel: I think I may.

Brenda Velasco: Could I have a copy so we could use it for the archives?

Frank Kreisel: Sure. It was on Google for a while, somebody put it on there.

Brenda Velasco: Alright.

Frank Kreisel: Somebody wrote a book called **Orchids in the Mud** and they gave me, like, two or three pages in there with the *Jungle Cats*. *Frank Kreisel and the Jungle Cats*.

Brenda Velasco: That's great.

Frank Kreisel: Yea, that was a good thing.

Brenda Velasco: So you had an unusual military experience then? You were in the infantry.

Frank Kreisel: Yea.

Brenda Velasco: Private and then you were able to also, eventually because of this chance meeting, stick with the music. And I know which one you preferred.

Frank Kreisel: Yea, definitely.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, you were no longer that 18 year old. Okay, and when did you get out of the service then?

Frank Kreisel: I was overseas a little over two years and I got discharged and I still wasn't 21 years old. So here I am.

Brenda Velasco: And did you come back to Woodbridge then?

Frank Kreisel: Sure, well, you come from an Italian family you stay where your mother is.

Brenda Velasco: Oh, that's right. Perfectly understood.

Frank Kreisel: And you would never think of leaving your elderly mother.

Brenda Velasco: No, and family is most important. Alright, so you're back in New Jersey. You continued with music?

Frank Kreisel: Oh, yea. Well you know I kind of went full guns with this. I spent some years on the round traveling in the music business, recorded for Capitol and Victor Radios and did the *Arthur Godfrey Show*, the television show. I did the *Chance of a Lifetime* which was a big show then and wound up back in Woodbridge again.

Brenda Velasco: Good, and that's why I'm interviewing you.

Frank Kreisel: Well, I'm glad.

**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: Did you live originally on Elmwood?

Frank Kreisel: No, no.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, when you moved to Woodbridge from Perth Amboy.

Frank Kreisel: We moved to Oak Street.

Brenda Velasco: Right off of Main Street then.

Frank Kreisel: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Frank Kreisel: And then my grandfather owned a building right across from the Town Hall. He had a business there at the floor level: two businesses. He had apartments upstairs and then we moved into one of those.

Brenda Velasco: Do you know, if there were as many businesses on Main Street as there are now? Were there more houses than when you moved?

Frank Kreisel: You know I really don't remember that, Brenda, but it seems to me that not too much has changed on the Main Street.

Brenda Velasco: Yea, okay.

Frank Kreisel: Of course there was Chopper's Store and Mr. Chopper, God bless him, would sell people suits for their kids and take a dollar a week.

Brenda Velasco: On a lay away then?

Frank Kreisel: Yea. No, no, no he would give you the suit and just bring the buck every week.

Brenda Velasco: Wow!

Frank Kreisel: I know because I got a new suit each Easter. You know my mother would go and Chopper's was where that Italian restaurant is now, on the corner.

Brenda Velasco: Il Castello's?

Frank Kreisel: Yea.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Frank Kreisel: But the rest, pretty close. There are certainly more professional businesses now. We didn't have that kind of thing.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, more lawyers?

Frank Kreisel: Oh, yes.

Brenda Velasco: Just like Jimmy Nolan?

Frank Kreisel: Yes, and the type of stores obviously has changed. There are no more meat markets, you know, that kind of thing that we used to frequent.

Brenda Velasco: No more Mom and Pop stores so much.

Frank Kreisel: Or Jackson's Drug Store.

Brenda Velasco: Right. Okay, how about houses of worship?

Frank Kreisel: Well, our church was always St. James and I remember the old St. James before they built the new church.

Brenda Velasco: Where was the old St James located?

Frank Kreisel: Pretty much in the same area, I think Brenda, but I do remember there was a used car lot like where the church is now going towards Main Street. That lot there was a used car lot. I guess they bought them out. I went to St. James School. I graduated 8th grade there.

Brenda Velasco: So you're an alumni of St. James then?

Frank Kreisel: I took my first piano lesson in the rectory.

Brenda Velasco: Wow!

Frank Kreisel: A beautiful nun named Sister Mary LaSalette Kelly (RSM). God bless her. 50 cents a lesson.

Brenda Velasco: Today that would be a bargain. It was a bargain back then, too.

Frank Kreisel: Of course.

Brenda Velasco: So you had it from your family, your uncles and then you had it from the church that influenced you, the nun. They recognized your talent back then. Alright, did you attend Woodbridge High School then?

Frank Kreisel: Yes, that's a good area to talk about isn't it?

Brenda Velasco: Yes.

Frank Kreisel: In the entire Woodbridge Township, we had one high school and you look today and you see three.

Brenda Velasco: Quite a difference from today.

Frank Kreisel: We have a picture of our graduating class somewhere in front of the Barron Avenue School. It looks like one English class or something, you know, this entire thing.

Brenda Velasco: What year did you graduate?

Frank Kreisel: '43.

Brenda Velasco: 1943, okay, and it was the Barron Avenue School which is now the Middle School.

Frank Kreisel: Yea.

Brenda Velasco: But that was the original high school

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

Brenda Velasco: You mentioned the Town Hall, it was on Main Street.

Frank Kreisel: Yea.

Brenda Velasco: And the new Town Hall is the same site. Where was the post office? Was it in the same location?

Frank Kreisel: I remember one time when the post office was on Pearl Street but I think when I was a kid, somehow in my mind, I think the post office was almost where it is now. I don't know if that's true. You could check that out.

Brenda Velasco: I'll check that out.

Frank Kreisel: I'm guessing on that, Brenda.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, what about the firehouse?

Frank Kreisel: The firehouse is where it was.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Frank Kreisel: Do you want me to just expand this a bit or not?

Brenda Velasco: Yea, go ahead.

Frank Kreisel: Growing up if someone said, well what did you look forward to in Woodbridge, what events did you look forward to, it would be the fireman's carnival on School Street. It

would be the Decoration Day parade which Woodbridge was eons ahead of every other city and I think one of the things, unfortunately, that happened and I don't know why, why we ever lost that. I mean, it's a sad sad thing here.

Brenda Velasco: Alright, you're talking about July 4th for Decoration Day?

Frank Kreisel: Yea.

Brenda Velasco: Yea, because we do celebrate it down at Sewaren Park now with fireworks.

Frank Kreisel: I know, but you know.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Frank Kreisel: They just obviously switched that into something else and that went south. That's too bad. I think they're not treating the Veterans the way they should be in that area.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, well we have the Veteran's Day parade today.

Frank Kreisel: Yea, I know.

Brenda Velasco: We just started. We just started having the parade. This was the second year of the Veteran's Day parade.

Frank Kreisel: Well, I hope they keep expanding it.

Brenda Velasco: I do too. It was so nice. It was very nice and it grew. It enlarged from last year and we had a band. Not too many people come out for it to watch it though.

Frank Kreisel: Well, you know, the Woodbridge parade back then must have had a dozen bands.

Brenda Velasco: Wow!

Frank Kreisel: I mean real parades. But we can pass on that.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Frank Kreisel: The other thing was the circus.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, where was this held?

Frank Kreisel: The circus was behind St. James up about two blocks. Everything there, there was nothing but cows there in that field. Do you know where I'm talking about?

Brenda Velasco: It's by Bunns Lane around there? Oak Avenue/Bunns Lane?

Frank Kreisel: Oak Avenue, yea, but not as far down as Bunns Lane.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Frank Kreisel: Like bordering on Grove Street and in, you know, towards Bunns Lane.

Brenda Velasco: Okay and when did the circus come? Do you remember? Was it in the summer or spring?

Frank Kreisel: I don't know but I'm guessing it would have to be in the summer or spring.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, so you enjoyed that? That was a big event.

Frank Kreisel: Yea, of course. For the kids that was great.

6. What did you do for recreation?

On Pearl Street, Pearl runs parallel with the railroad, you know that.

Brenda Velasco: Yes.

Frank Kreisel: And you know where the brook goes through?

Brenda Velasco: Oh, yes!

Frank Kreisel: Okay, well if you come from, let's say School #1, and follow the brook that way, it goes underneath Pearl Street and then continues on the other side. Well on the other side, before they fixed everything, it was kind of an area and we'd go there and take all our clothes off.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Frank Kreisel: In the daytime. Can you imagine that and that was like a swimming hole. Now you couldn't be seen because of the contour of the, you know, land and everything. Then when we really got to be able to travel a little bit we used to go down to Berry's Dock.

Brenda Velasco: And where was that? Off Berry Street?

Frank Kreisel: Way down Berry Street somewhere.

Brenda Velasco: And did you fish there or crabbing?

Frank Kreisel: No, we went swimming but I guess there was crabbing there.

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

I think there was a time, Brenda, where Woodbridge had so many open spaces for boys particularly to play ball or do what they wanted to do so and that started to disappear. In fact, we used to play football right across the street. I lived across from Town Hall and where the parking lot is now, for the Municipal building, was a big grass field and we played football out there and I learned to play tennis on the side of the State Theatre which faced the Town Hall which was a brick building and I'd stand out there and hit the tennis ball against the brick building. Yea, I'll tell you, I think we got the best of it.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Frank Kreisel: Now, we're not going to talk politics. Am I happy with everything, certainly not but every town in the United States has got the same problem so.

Brenda Velasco: It's human nature.

Frank Kreisel: Of course it is. When it affects your pocketbook it all creates a problem.

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

I'll tell you I think Woodbridge, after traveling all over the world I'm going to tell you I really believe this sincerely, I believe "Woodbridge is the best possible place to live in in the United States" and you can quote me on that one, Brenda.

Brenda Velasco: I am going to put that in quotation marks because you have traveled. You've gone all over whether it was with the military or with your music career.

Frank Kreisel: Yea, and I'm telling you, I believe that.

Brenda Velasco: And why do you say that?

Frank Kreisel: Because that's how it affected me. Growing up, you talk about tolerance you know, I must have had a dozen friends, close friends, there must have been twelve nationalities in there. I found about ethnic food. Every time you went into your friend's house you ate, whatever they were and today I'm not interested in eating steak. You know, give me some pierogi or give some cabbage soup or give some things that kids don't even hear of today.

Brenda Velasco: You had a well balanced diet, didn't you?

Frank Kreisel: I had great food. It wrecks the rest of your life because you can't find it. Try to find some papikash somewhere, just like the old days, or even stuffed cabbage which is a simple thing. When you taste it, the way it's supposed to be, it's not like you're going to get in a restaurant. I don't have to tell you. I'm sure you're aware of that. Now Italian food, I grew up with that. So you go into 57 restaurants before you find something that reminds you of home.

Brenda Velasco: And Woodbridge Proper had it with your friends and their families with the diversity of food.

Frank Kreisel: And no one had any money so if you didn't have any soles in your shoes neither did anyone else. There wasn't any class thing there that was happening.

Brenda Velasco: The classes weren't as stratified as they are now. You grew up in a nice time.

Frank Kreisel: I believe so. Fortunately, for me, my father always worked and, you know, we were never on what we used to call, relief. But my friends were and I would go with them and they would take their wagon and they would go over to where Bittings is now and that's where the distribution point was and they would throw the food in the wagon and take it home to their parents.

Brenda Velasco: And there wasn't a stigma.

Frank Kreisel: No, no, not at all.

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

Woodbridge had a semi-pro football team called the Golden Bears and that was kind of exciting to go and watch.

Brenda Velasco: Where did they play then? Was it at the high school field?

Frank Kreisel: I think it was the high school field. It was run by a fellow named Cacciola. Now the interesting thing about that was every time he went by they said, there's Cacciola, he went to college, he graduated from Notre Dame. You see there it was almost like a hero worship when you met someone that went to college. There's the change.

Brenda Velasco: Yes.

Frank Kreisel: They went to college. Now, did anyone I know think about going to college? Thinking about getting the next meal on the table here and keeping things together, you know, but go to college?

Brenda Velasco: Those times were different though. We were just getting out of the Depression.

Frank Kreisel: Oh, sure.

Brenda Velasco: And there was a war to fight. Okay, any construction that you can recall; turnpike or?

Frank Kreisel: Well, of course, we saw the Turnpike being built and that kind of thing. I happened to be on the road, I was working in Toronto, Canada, when that train crash came so.

Brenda Velasco: Oh, in the 1950s.

Frank Kreisel: Yea and when I was a kid I remembered that, I think it was the crossing on Main Street, the railroad was at the bottom level at that time and the train hit a gasoline tanker. I don't know. You'd probably have the information on that. I don't remember what year that was but that was.

Brenda Velasco: That was when you were living in Woodbridge then as a kid.

Frank Kreisel: Yea.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, alright, we can look that up.

10. What do you like about Woodbridge today?

I think pretty much everything. This sounds like a commercial, but you know it's not. You know, I have no ax to grind. I have nobody to smooth over here. You know, Main Street was a dirt road going to Fords. Whoever went to Fords? No one. You know, we didn't know where that was but that's where that road went. And Colonia, I think in high school we had two black families and strangely enough at the dances I would dance with, I wish I could remember her name, one of the girls and after like 40 or 50 years I ran into her. I don't know if you know my wife had the Vern Fowler School of Dance in Colonia.

Brenda Velasco: Oh! Okay. Yes I know that place.

Frank Kreisel: We were there for 30 years.

Brenda Velasco: So she's talented too then?

Frank Kreisel: Oh, she has a great background.

Brenda Velasco: You are really into music then with the Vern Fowler Dance School. That was right on St. George Avenue.

Frank Kreisel: Yea, it still is.

Brenda Velasco: Yea, and was she originally from Woodbridge too?

Frank Kreisel: No, she was born in Margate.

Brenda Velasco: From down the shore.

Frank Kreisel: Yea.

Brenda Velasco: And she came up here for you.

Frank Kreisel: Not for me, but when she came up here I got her.

Brenda Velasco: Okay. I guess living in Woodbridge was when you had to go on your jobs, because this was a location that was close to many of the highways or the trains. How did you get to play in Toronto, Canada? Did you fly out there?

Frank Kreisel: No, no, we drove everywhere.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, so this location was central then for where you were going to go?

Frank Kreisel: Yea, but I don't think we thought about that at all.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Frank Kreisel: It just happened to be where we are. You asked about any vast differences, you know the one thing that we're all unhappy about, but I don't see any answer to it, is the traffic. I can't get out of Elmwood on to Main Street there some days.

Brenda Velasco: No, Main Street heading out your way is very difficult. Especially if you want to make that left turn or go across traffic. It's very difficult. You're absolutely right and I don't know the solution to it unless people walk more but still you need a car.

Frank Kreisel: And you know to hang any sign of inaction on the Woodbridge politicians for that is unfair and I know that because I had a cousin who left here because the traffic was too much. He left here about 40 years ago.

Brenda Velasco: And where did he move to?

Frank Kreisel: He moved to Greenville, South Carolina and I went down there now and he admits that it's worse down there now than it is in Woodbridge.

Brenda Velasco: Did you gloat at the time?

Frank Kreisel: Of course, of course.

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

Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Do you have sons or any children living in Woodbridge?

Frank Kreisel: Yea, one of our sons, Kurt Kreisel, and his wife Judy. Judy incidentally teaches at Woodbridge High School.

Brenda Velasco: Where you weren't a star pupil.

Frank Kreisel: You're going to make everyone know that. But you know what, I had probably one of the most popular and intelligent woman that I ever met in my life, a teacher in Woodbridge, named Margaret Mauro, who you may have heard about.

Brenda Velasco: Margaret Mauro, yes.

Frank Kreisel: What a wonderful woman and she'd just grab me by the neck and make sure that she'd drag me through the whole thing see. She wouldn't let me throw in the towel on that.

Brenda Velasco: Good, she was an inspiration to you.

Frank Kreisel: Yea, she was.

Brenda Velasco: And I know you have some nephews in Woodbridge too.

Frank Kreisel: Yea, I do. My son Kurt, I just told you that, he lives over on Rowland Place and our other son, Frank Jr., lives in Wilmington, Delaware and our other son, William is in Princeton. And now your question was, oh relatives.

Brenda Velasco: Yes.

Frank Kreisel: Well, of course, Jimmy Nolan.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, our Township attorney.

Frank Kreisel: My sister lives over on Grove Avenue

Brenda Velasco: Not very far from you.

Frank Kreisel: No, well see that's the generation again, Brenda.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, so you have a lot of family contacts still in Woodbridge, other than your two sons, but one lives in Princeton which isn't far away and Delaware isn't that far away either.

Frank Kreisel: No, it isn't.

Brenda Velasco: Is there anything else you want to add to this interview before we conclude it?

Frank Kreisel: What are you after here? I want to be sure that I give you whatever I can.

Brenda Velasco: I wanted to capture the changes that have undergone in Woodbridge, physical changes, in your section. You lived in Woodbridge Proper and any events that you remember, which you did. You gave me some good information but I also wanted to highlight your musical ability and the diversity within Woodbridge Township whether it's ethnic or whatever. Your family is musically inclined to me and I wanted to capture that down here and let the kids know Woodbridge High School, we have three high schools now in Woodbridge, and yes we've grown. We have three high schools.

Frank Kreisel: We sure have.

Brenda Velasco: And we have the traffic which you complained about, which is a common complaint of many people.

Frank Kreisel: Being involved with members, in a union situation, you're familiar with all that.

Brenda Velasco: Yes.

Frank Kreisel: You turn into a politician yourself. You almost have to.

Brenda Velasco: Well because negotiations **involved compromise**.

Frank Kreisel: Of course. I was in on negotiating the original contracts with the Arts Center.

Brenda Velasco: Our Barron Arts Center?

Frank Kreisel: No.

Brenda Velasco: Performing Arts Center?

Frank Kreisel: The Garden State Arts Center. I don't know what it's called now, some bank.

Brenda Velasco: PNC?

Frank Kreisel: Yea, PNC.

Brenda Velasco: Oh, wow!

Frank Kreisel: And we handled all the musicians there and in those days the biggest stars in the business were there. Maybe they still are there but we don't know who they are because I never heard the name before, you know, that's the way life goes.

Brenda Velasco: I think that's a generation gap. I have that problem, too.

Frank Kreisel: Of course, of course.

Brenda Velasco: Let's also state some of your other titles. As a musician you were president of some unions so why don't you mention that in this interview, too, because I don't think I included that or we didn't mention about that before. We only discussed it prior to the recording.

Frank Kreisel: The union?

Brenda Velasco: Yea, you were president of the American Federation of Musicians, the local.

Frank Kreisel: Local 373, yea.

Brenda Velasco: Local 373.

Frank Kreisel: Which encompassed Woodbridge and Perth Amboy which encompassed a lot of venues in those days. You know Route #35 and Route #9 were loaded with clubs using live music. Try to find one today.

Brenda Velasco: And sometimes you don't want to find one. And how long were you president of that local?

Frank Kreisel: Oh, about 25 years.

Brenda Velasco: So that was a long time.

Frank Kreisel: This was after my music career, Brenda

Brenda Velasco: What was your band called? Frank Kreisel and, in the service it was the *Jungle Cats*, but what was your band called?

Frank Kreisel: Well though the years it was *Frank Kreisel Trio*, *Frank Kreisel Quartet* and then we recorded under the name *The Gallahads*.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Frank Kreisel: And then I went into the managing business. I went into the record producing business and I went into managing acts; all those things that lead you in the same place.

Brenda Velasco: So you had a long career in music?

Frank Kreisel: I did.

Brenda Velasco: And you're still going strong. Are you still involved in it?

Frank Kreisel: No, I'm involved in the music. I'm doing arranging now for wannabe singers, you know, that kind of thing; vocal coaching.

Brenda Velasco: Getting back to that union, you were also president of the State American Federation.

Frank Kreisel: For four years, yea.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, and what years was that? What years did that involve, in the '60s?

Frank Kreisel: '69 or '70.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Frank Kreisel: Until '95.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Frank Kreisel: Incidentally, never lost an election and I got out because I thought we were being mistreated by the home office in New York and I resigned. I was irrelative to the art center but I don't want to get into that with you. It's unimportant.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, and that's not Woodbridge but that's quite a pinnacle to be involved with the negotiations because that's a beautiful facility.

Frank Kreisel: But, you know, just off the record, unless you want to fish it out, it's up to you. It's just that the truth of the matter is that Las Vegas, back then, had a strike and it killed the musician's union in Las Vegas. They lost that strike. They lost that strike to such an extent that today, if you've been to Vegas recently and we went out there every year for the last 25 years and very familiar because the president of that local was one of my dear friends, it's almost difficult to find a live act, a live musician in Vegas. Is that sad? They're bringing in projection

shows and in the projection shows you can see the sound man sitting there, everything is prerecorded. And if you really want to get things stirred up I'll tell you this, I spent four weeks in court in Trenton because one of the most famous ballet dancers in the world, who works with 101 musicians in New York City, came into the art center. A clause in the art center's contract said, no tapes, electrical devices, or so and so will ever be used in this theatre without the permission of Local 373. Flat out, signed. He came over here with a tape in his pocket and he stuck it in the machine and he went to work and I filed charges and after running back and forth to court for four weeks, guess who lost. How could you lose that case?

Brenda Velasco: And you lost it.

Frank Kreisel: Sure, because the State was running the art center.

Brenda Velasco: Right.

Frank Kreisel: And who am I appealing too?

Brenda Velasco: The State and they run the show and times have changed unfortunately and you're right there's very little live music. It's mostly all prerecorded.

Frank Kreisel: Of course.

Brenda Velasco: Yea, yea, yea.

Frank Kreisel: These kids studying music today in music colleges. A close friend of mine, that played drums with me, he's a professor in New York State University teaching musicians. He called me up the other day and he said, Frank I don't know what to tell these kids. They're all full of vinegar and excitement. Am I going to tell them there's nowhere for them to go when they leave here? There's nowhere to work, to play or to apply their trade and that's the case.

Brenda Velasco: Is this true throughout the world? Is this true through, for example, Russia or England or Italy where they also have music?

Frank Kreisel: I don't know.

Brenda Velasco: Alright.

Frank Kreisel: My guess is, yes.

Brenda Velasco: Yea, it's a trend.

Frank Kreisel: Because, can you imagine, what the casinos and what those places are saving.

Brenda Velasco: Right.

Frank Kreisel: Now, the sad thing is that when the judge said to me Mr. Kreisel have you had any complaints about the fact that there's no live music at your art center? Has the public complained about anything? I had to tell the truth and say, no. There's a sad thing, isn't it. If the people do not care, Brenda, why should anyone else care? I don't understand.

Brenda Velasco: No, the attitudes have changed. Attitudes have changed and we've been conditioned to accept the prerecording.

Frank Kreisel: Absolutely. You know I joined the Y up here to get some exercise.

Brenda Velasco: Good. How do you like the Y?

Frank Kreisel: I like it. I don't know.

Brenda Velasco: It's close enough for you.

Frank Kreisel: That's good and for \$140.00 that's a big bargain there so, you know, because I was in another club that cost like four times that and who needed it. I'd go in with one or two machines for a half an hour and I'd go home.

Brenda Velasco: Yea, just to get out of the house.

Frank Kreisel: But where am I going with this?

Brenda Velasco: It's only five minutes away. That was built on a dump too.

Frank Kreisel: Oh, I know. We used to go out there and shoot rats with 22s.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Frank Kreisel: Well, I wasn't out there alone.

Brenda Velasco: No, okay. Now we're going to have to conclude because I know you have to go somewhere and I do too.

Frank Kreisel: Yea, I do but I'm having fun, fortunately. I thought it was going to be a chore but it didn't.

Brenda Velasco: Surprised you, right?

Frank Kreisel: I want you to know that you've been very kind and very professional and I wish you good luck with this project and I'm glad you asked. I didn't feel that way this morning.

Brenda Velasco: Well, I'm glad I changed your mind then.

Frank Kreisel: Well, I didn't know.

Brenda Velasco: And you haven't met me before, so I enjoyed it thoroughly. You opened up another venue for me in Woodbridge with the music and Vern Fowler. I never connected. I never connected your wife's school with you and with Jimmy Nolan. But I want to thank you very, very much for giving me a good hour of your time and agreeing to meet with me.

Frank Kreisel: Well, I want to thank you for doing something for Woodbridge, Brenda. Thank you. Good luck.