

**Oral History Interview  
Helen Carracino Brunello  
WH105**

(Written transcript and digital audio)

On July 18, 2012, Helen Brunello was interviewed by Brenda Velasco at 6 Montrose Avenue, Colonia at 10:30 A.M.

*Brenda Velasco:* I have the good fortune of interviewing Helen Brunello a long time resident of Woodbridge Township and twenty-three years as a Vice-Chairwoman of the Woodbridge Democratic Party. (The years were 1977-1990 and encompassed the administration of Mayor Joseph DeMarino. Helen Brunello also ran the Woodbridge Legislative office of Senator Lawrence Weiss, Assemblyman Alan Karcher and Assemblyman George Otlowski. Her husband, Joseph Anthony Brunello was on the Woodbridge Board of Education)

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

*Helen Brunello:* My name is Helen Brunello.

*Brenda Velasco:* What was your maiden name?

*Helen Brunello:* Carracino.

*Brenda Velasco:* What year were you born in?

*Helen Brunello:* 1933.

*Brenda Velasco:* Right during the Depression then.

*Helen Brunello:* We never knew it. My father had a business.

*Brenda Velasco:* Then you were very fortunate.

*Helen Brunello:* I never knew what the Depression was.

*Brenda Velasco:* You were lucky.

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

*Brenda Velasco:* You currently live in Colonia but where did you live primarily?

*Helen Brunello:* 29 Bloomfield Avenue in Iselin for over forty years.

*Brenda Velasco:* So altogether then you've been living in Woodbridge Township for over forty years.

*Helen Brunello:* Oh yeah, much more.

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

*Brenda Velasco:* When did you first move to any section of Woodbridge, Helen?

*Helen Brunello:* In October of 1961.

*Brenda Velasco:* That's just before the big explosion or during the explosion of population.

*Helen Brunello:* Yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* So you witnessed a lot of.....

*Helen Brunello:* I did witness a lot but I also.....where I bought the house in Iselin the Miele's owned half of Iselin. I bought my house from the Miele's.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, why did you move to.....

*Helen Brunello:* My sister was living here.

*Brenda Velasco:* She was living in Iselin then, too?

*Helen Brunello:* Yes, Michael Street.

*Brenda Velasco:* Do you remember how much you paid for your house?

*Helen Brunello:* Oh, yes I do: \$17,000.00.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, I'm laughing.

*Helen Brunello:* It was beautiful. Our house was the prettiest house on the block.

*Brenda Velasco:* And this was at 29 Bloomfield Avenue.

*Helen Brunello:* Yes, sir.

*Brenda Velasco:* And how many rooms did you have then?

*Helen Brunello:* I had three bedrooms. It was a split level ranch.

*Brenda Velasco:* Where did you move from?

*Helen Brunello:* I'm going to have to say Union because I only lived one year in Newark.

*Brenda Velasco:* You only lived one year in Newark.....

*Helen Brunello:* With my husband and his family.

*Brenda Velasco:* But prior to Newark you lived in Union Township in Union County.

*Helen Brunello:* Union Township.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay.

*Helen Brunello:* My brother was a doctor in Elizabeth. Do you know anything about Elizabeth?

*Brenda Velasco:* Yes.

*Helen Brunello:* Dr. Carracino?

*Brenda Velasco:* I didn't know him but I know Peterstown.

*Helen Brunello:* He lived more uptown.

*Brenda Velasco:* He lived more uptown with the wealthy people, okay, not the Italian section then. Okay, so you chose Iselin because your sister lived here.

*Helen Brunello:* You got to remember by the time we moved I had four children.

*Brenda Velasco:* Oh, my gosh!

*Helen Brunello:* I have five daughters.

*Brenda Velasco:* So when you moved you had four children and one was coming.

*Helen Brunello:* And my brother-in-law, my sister's husband, gave us a down payment to buy the house. We didn't have any money. My husband was working two jobs, and he said come down it's opened. That wasn't the first house I bought that was the second at 29 Bloomfield Avenue. The first house was up Oak Tree Road up there.

*Brenda Velasco:* So you bought a house with enough expansion for your family because it was growing.

*Helen Brunello:* I didn't stay there too long either. I stayed there only a year and a half and then I moved from there. We sold it at a good profit.

*Brenda Velasco:* Because the Parkway had recently been.....

*Helen Brunello:* Up there yes, yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* So that was one of the other attractions to come into Iselin. You had the Parkway, people were coming out of the cities.....

*Helen Brunello:* That's right.

*Brenda Velasco:* What development did you eventually move into in Iselin? They have different names for some.

*Helen Brunello:* I don't remember what it was. Green Acres or Green Gardens or Green Meadow (Green Mansions). Sam Halpern built it. I loved it there but it got to be, because I was by myself, costing a lot to keep repairs on the house and I just couldn't do it.

*Brenda Velasco:* Yes, once you became a widow.

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

*Brenda Velasco:* You came to Iselin in 1961 so you must have seen a lot of changes going on because we didn't have all the high schools either at that time.

*Helen Brunello:* Well, Colonia is the baby I think. I don't know if that was here or not because I didn't have much to deal with it at that time.

*Brenda Velasco:* Well you had babies.

*Helen Brunello:* Yes, School 18 was my school. I got to be PTA president of School 18.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, School 18 was there then and how about when you moved in. Did you have running water and you had.....

*Helen Brunello:* Everything but it was a parcel. There wasn't a lot of houses there. This was all Miele's land and my house was one of the first to be there. My next door neighbor who bought the house and had it built was Chinese and the people who were coming into there were disturbed. They sent around a petition. She ended up being one of my best friends I ever had. I loved her dearly; she really was quite beautiful. Her husband had three master degrees to show you how smart he was. He was a mechanical engineer, an electrical engineer and he spoke five languages. Now would you ask somebody like that not to come into the area?

*Brenda Velasco:* She upgraded the neighborhood.

*Helen Brunello:* Absolutely. I love Woodbridge now, before and always. I wouldn't want to live anywhere else.

*Brenda Velasco:* You stayed here.

*Helen Brunello:* I wouldn't want to go anyplace else.

*Brenda Velasco:* You didn't grow up here. You came and.....

*Helen Brunello:* I love it here.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, let's look at.....the streets and everything we're in.....

*Helen Brunello:* Now when I came there were no streets just a dirt road into my house.

*Brenda Velasco:* A dirt road on Bloomfield Avenue?

*Helen Brunello:* Yes, there was nothing there. This is two blocks away from Indiana Avenue School #18. There was nothing there; these houses weren't there. I told you one by one they were being put in.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, so you had a lot of dust in your house, too.

*Helen Brunello:* As you can see we are neat freaks here. Yeah, we had a lot of dust.

*Brenda Velasco:* How about the services because you came from Newark/Union-built up communities. Did Iselin at that time have a lot of stores that you were used to?

*Helena Brunello:* Oh no. Woodbridge Center was here. (1971)

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, Woodbridge Center was already.....

*Helena Brunello:* But who had the money to go. I don't know how it was with your kids.....do you have children?

*Brenda Velasco:* It was tight.

*Helena Brunello:* They didn't go to Woodbridge Center.

*Brenda Velasco:* No, you went to **Daffy Dan's** or you went to **Marshall's** when **Marshall's** came.

*Helena Brunello:* Absolutely. We must have seen each other there.

*Brenda Velasco:* I'm sure we did. Okay, what stores did you go to then?

*Helena Brunello:* Not many because most of it was food shopping.

*Brenda Velasco:* Where did you go food shopping?

*Helena Brunello:* To the old **ShopRite**.

*Brenda Velasco:* The old **ShopRite** on the top of the hill on Oak Tree Road, correct.

*Helena Brunello:* Right.

*Brenda Velasco:* Were you driving at that time.

*Helena Brunello:* I always drove. I drove my husband to the train station. That's how he went to work. He worked for **AT&T** in Newark.

*Brenda Velasco:* And that was another convenience for Iselin. You had the train station and you had the Parkway.

*Helena Brunello:* And believe it or not, still today, I feel safe in here that if I walked out of the door. I could leave the door open and nobody is going to....it's sad to say but I do feel very safe in Woodbridge. We shouldn't be but we are.

*Brenda Velasco:* That's an advantage of living here.

*Helena Brunello:* That's an advantage, yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* Alright, how about houses of worship?

*Helena Brunello:* St. Cecelia's.

*Brenda Velasco:* Ok, that was the mainstay then?

*Helena Brunello:* That was the only one that was there around us.

*Brenda Velasco:* How about the public buildings? Let's go back to Question #4. You had mentioned something before we began our interview pertaining to the retention because you had flooding.

*Helena Brunello:* Right, in Iselin right up on US 1 where **Capitol One** is up there now and the **Kona Grill** is there that water from the.....it's like this, it bent like this. Here was the highway and we went like that and it ended up in, I think that's Sucker's Brook.

*Brenda Velasco:* Yes.

*Helena Brunello:* We'd end up in Sucker's Brook.

*Brenda Velasco:* The South Branch of the Rahway River.

*Helena Brunello:* It would overflow without this water but that would always.....

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, so you had a lot of flooding then.

*Helena Brunello:* We had a lot of flooding and I had the least of all of them though because I had about six big trees in the backyard that absorbed most of the water. But people more close to Sucker Brook were being flooded and the township put in a retaining pond.

*Brenda Velasco:* Do you remember what year they did that?

*Helen Brunello:* Sometime in the '80s. But you should go take a look at it. It's a magnificent structure. It's beautiful.

*Brenda Velasco:* So that prevented the runoff from Route 1 because it was higher.....

*Helen Brunello:* It was like a round circle, big circle, and it's all concrete and whatever it is. It's beautifully kept up and that would electronically let the water that comes off in a heavy storm retain it there and then by electric they let a little at a time flow in.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, it regulated the flow.

*Helen Brunello:* That took care of that portion of Sucker Brook.

*Brenda Velasco:* Because the other part of Sucker Brook.....

*Helen Brunello:* Is still flooding.

*Brenda Velasco:* Is still flooding. That's by Brookside Court. That's more Colonia.

*Helen Brunello:* Now Brookside Court, Sherry's mother-in-law and father-in-law lived up there.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, Mr. and Mrs. Wandras.

*Helen Brunello:* Both of them died from cancer. A lot of people on that block died from cancer. Their houses were flooded all the time.

*Brenda Velasco:* And we still have that problem.

*Helen Brunello:* I don't know how they're going to fix it.

*Brenda Velasco:* Don't forget Sucker Brook comes from Edison and goes to Rahway. What we're trying to do is that stream maintenance cleanup as much as possible. We even bought a new machine that can take the heavy limbs out but we had to take a two month hiatus because of the spawning season for the fish. We couldn't disrupt the spawning. (Menzi Muck Excavator)

*Helen Brunello:* Oh my God!

*Brenda Velasco:* Alright, I'm not going into that. Let's go to Question #5. Oh, did you see Woodbridge Center going up at all?

*Helen Brunello:* No.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay.

*Helen Brunello:* I wouldn't have seen it because I really didn't leave the house very much.

*Brenda Velasco:* Not with five daughters. Alright, let's go to Question #5.

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

*Helen Brunello:* We could public buildings.....we could bring in the clay pits.

*Brenda Velasco:* Well that's private buildings. Okay public buildings, the post office where was that?

*Helen Brunello:* The post office in Woodbridge was there and the post office in Iselin was there.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, so it's still basically in the same area in Iselin.

*Helen Brunello:* Same area.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, alright, and the library?

*Helen Brunello:* That was built the one in Iselin was built when I was there. I can't tell you when but it was built then because it's rather new. (1968)

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, did you have any parks?

*Helen Brunello:* We had Merrill Park.

*Brenda Velasco:* .....which is a county park.

*Helen Brunello:* Warren Park and the rest of those I didn't have anything to do with it. I wouldn't know when they were in.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, we're just going to concentrate on Iselin though.

*Helen Brunello:* Iselin had no parks. They had a baseball field.

*Brenda Velasco:* Where was that located?

*Helen Brunello:* On Indiana Avenue, I think.

*Brenda Velasco:* And Cooper back then.

*Helen Brunello:* Cooper, yes, Cooper Field. School 18 had a real big extension added on to it. It became a model school for the grammar schools. Did you know Norm Lunde?

*Brenda Velasco:* No, but the name is very familiar.

*Helen Brunello:* He was the assistant superintendent of schools (employment/personnel). He was my principal when I was there.

*Brenda Velasco:* And this reflected that whole growth of suburbia in Iselin.

*Helen Brunello:* Right there in Iselin is where you got the biggest growth. We ended up being probably one of the biggest boroughs of all five or six. Iselin is quite big, Menlo Park, Oak Tree Road.....

*Brenda Velasco:* Right, because Menlo Park Terrace and that's all.....

*Helen Brunello:* And part of up by the highway up there on both sides of Green Street that's still the 4<sup>th</sup> Ward, two sides of it.

*Brenda Velasco:* You has a lot of new homes coming in.

*Helen Brunello:* That development just went, wow! That's where the biggest developments were right there. You still had one up further by the retention pond, you have senior citizen buildings there, and you have all those apartment houses that were put in there plus all our houses.

*Brenda Velasco:* Yes, both sides of Green Street.

*Helen Brunello:* Not both sides of Green Street. This was on this side where the library was. The other side, the way it was is the way it is.

*Brenda Velasco:* So you had School 18, and that's the Indiana School, and then where did your girls go to junior high?

*Helen Brunello:* Iselin.

*Brenda Velasco:* And then Iselin Middle School and then JFK High School, right?

*Helen Brunello:* Yes. Poor Sherry she stayed right at home.

*Brenda Velasco:* Yes, because Sherry is now the vice-president at JFK.

*Helen Brunello:* She loves it; it's a beautiful school.

*Brenda Velasco:* And we're talking about Sherry Wandras and its rated very high, too. It's one of the top high schools.

*Helen Brunello:* It is. They have a wonderful principal; we're very fortunate. (Michael A. Cilento)

*Brenda Velasco:* How about the firehouse?

*Helen Brunello:* The firehouse was there but there was an extension put on to that too.

*Brenda Velasco:* Once again to meet the demands of a growing population.

*Helen Brunello:* You know where a firehouse was put in that we always thought was crazy, on New Dover Road. Do you know what I'm talking about?

*Brenda Velasco:* Yes, that's part of Iselin that's on the other side of the Parkway, west of the Parkway, and that also takes in part of Colonia, Sterling Drive and Amherst.

*Helen Brunello:* Nobody ever uses that. I've never seen a fire truck there since they built it.

*Brenda Velasco:* But that's a substation of the firehouse on Auth Avenue.  
(Fire District #11)

*Helen Brunello:* Auth Avenue had a lot of improvements done on it.

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

*Brenda Velasco:* Coming to Iselin raising five girls what did you do for recreation? How did you entertain them or how did you or your husband.....

*Helen Brunello:* My husband worked a lot of hours at that point so he really wasn't.....they just entertained each other in the backyard. We took walks but other than that when you have more than two they have to take care of each other. Again you're talking about money being short so there weren't too many things that.....

*Brenda Velasco:* Did you have a movie house?

*Helen Brunello:* Yes, the movie house was on Oak Tree Road. It was where the Indian stores are all in there now. They had no right to sell that. It was over a hundred years old and it had all the cement and woodwork. It was a beautiful building.

*Brenda Velasco:* They kept the façade; they had to keep the façade.

*Helen Brunello:* There was a bakery there.

*Brenda Velasco:* Do you remember the name of the bakery?

*Helen Brunello:* It was some German name.

*Brenda Velasco:* Herb....?

*Helen Brunello:* Yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* Herbert?

*Helen Brunello:* Yes, I think something like that.

*Brenda Velasco:* So you had a couple of things then.

*Helen Brunello:* Oh yes, we had a hardware store, the best in the business, on the corner there across the street from the movies.

*Brenda Velasco:* That was **Eagle**?

*Helen Brunello:* Yes, **Eagle**.

*Brenda Velasco:* That was on Correja and you're right it was one of the best hardware stores. I was sorry to see it go.

*Helen Brunello:* I loved that store.

*Brenda Velasco:* We all did. Now we have to **ACE** in Colonia. This was a God send for us rather than go to **Home Depot**.

*Helen Brunello:* I mean as a woman you have to look all around. I like **ACE**.

*Brenda Velasco:* Yes and the people always greeted you too.

*Helen Brunello:* Yes like hi, how are you?

*Brenda Velasco:* Unfortunately the nearest **ACE** is in Clark so we lost a good store there which is too bad.

*Helen Brunello:* We really did. Did they ever try getting back one of them?

*Brenda Velasco:* Yes, but it seems like the rents are (too high).....**ACE** had to consolidate and when you have an **ACE** in Clark and **Home Depot** was too close to this **ACE** it's.....

*Helen Brunello:* All the stores are going out of business there. The liquor store went out of business, too.

*Brenda Velasco:* He bought across the street. He bought the property where the old pool was. He moved across the street and he has a new liquor store there now so he didn't go out of business. He just bought the building and he's operating from there.

*Helen Brunello:* I heard they were going to do a lot of improvements on Inman Avenue

*Brenda Velasco:* We're trying to do some things with the county and we've got the solar light poles right now and just regulating the flow of traffic a little bit better because we've had some accidents there. As new people come in they have to provide.....

*Helen Brunello:* Brenda, I have a complaint.

*Brenda Velasco:* But we're doing the interview. Write your complaint down over here and then we'll take it up later.

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

*Brenda Velasco:* What was the focal point of your community when your girls were growing up and you moved to Iselin? What was the main center for you?

*Helen Brunello:* Just basically them.

*Brenda Velasco:* You were wrapped up in your family.

*Helen Brunello:* Yes, I was wrapped up in my family. I didn't do anything else until I became PTA president for School 18.

*Brenda Velasco:* And that's when you started getting involved?

*Helen Brunello:* Just with the PTA.

*Brenda Velasco:* What year was this, do you remember?

*Helen Brunello:* I don't remember the year.

*Brenda Velasco:* In the '60s or '70s?

*Helen Brunello:* '60s probably.

*Brenda Velasco:* Otherwise it was the family and your shopping was right on Oak Tree Road with the **ShopRite**. You had a bakery.

*Helen Brunello:* Yes, wherever we went that's it. We had everything we needed there. I'm telling you right now, Brenda, we have everything we need right now too. There's no place like Woodbridge.

*Brenda Velasco:* You've got your malls if you want. You've got fireworks if you want. Now you mentioned before, getting back to recreation, something with Merrill Park. You worked with Barbara Wyatt?

*Helen Brunello:* Barbara and I were on the Middlesex County Safety Committee together and after one of the deaths of a child we were the safety coordinators for that committee. This consisted of the President's Council. Do you know what it is?

*Brenda Velasco:* Yes.

*Helen Brunello:* They all voted that one of the projects we should take on was putting a fence at Merrill Park. So for months Barbara and I worked on it together.



We went to Freeholder's meetings, we went here and we interviewed people. The saddest part about it was we interviewed that father of the girl who got killed and he was oblivious of her being dead. It was sad but we were able to get the fence. If you talk to Barbara tell her Helen told her about the fence.

*Brenda Velasco:* Now this fence we're talking about, because Merrill Park abuts the train tracks, and there was no fence there.

*Helen Brunello:* There was no fence there until we got it.

*Brenda Velasco:* Do you remember the year?

*Helen Brunello:* No.

*Brenda Velasco:* '60s, '70s?

*Helen Brunello:* Probably the '70s. But since then part of it was coming down Middlesex Turnpike. It went all the way down and the people who lived on it smashed some of it down. So it was redone by the train station. But up to this we got the money for the first fence from the Freeholders. The railroad said: "keep your kids off our tracks." That's exactly what they said.

*Brenda Velasco:* And we know how kids' minds work.

*Helen Brunello:* They were just kids.

*Brenda Velasco:* That was a big safety issue.

*Helen Brunello:* Barbara and I that was our little project together.

*Brenda Velasco:* Barbara Wyatt I previously interviewed her and she was with the Republican Party and you were with the Democratic Party?

*Helen Brunello:* Oh, yes. Do you remember Joe Nemyo?

*Brenda Velasco:* I remember the name.

*Helen Brunello:* It was a big name in Woodbridge politics but he was a Democrat. He used to threaten me by telling me don't talk to her. The day somebody tells me not to talk to somebody will be like telling you not to talk to somebody.

*Brenda Velasco:* Right, it doesn't work and you don't accomplish anything by that.

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

*Helen Brunello:* Do you want to know what I liked about it best, the people who were there were blue collar and white collar workers. They were mixed, they were friendly and the community was a beautiful place. My neighbors ended up being very good friends and I miss it terribly maybe because I don't know anybody here but....

*Brenda Velasco:* This is Colonia. In this area you don't always come out of your house either.

*Helen Brunello:* They used to have block parties.

*Brenda Velasco:* So you had a good time there.

*Helen Brunello:* I loved it.

*Brenda Velasco:* Are many of the older people, the original owners, still there?

*Helen Brunello:* Yes. I go out every Friday with my friend who lived next door to me. For forty years we've been friends. We still go out on Friday shopping and spending money.

*Brenda Velasco:* Terrific, as long as you have it.

*Helen Brunello:* I have a lot more since I live here.

*Brenda Velasco:* Because you and your daughter both built this home.

*Helen Brunello:* We built this home but I don't pay anything. She takes care of everything.

*Brenda Velasco:* That's one less worry you have.

*Helen Brunello:* That's it, right.

*Brenda Velasco:* Especially as you get older you don't have the mobility that you had.....

*Helen Brunello:* I don't know if I ever told you she raised two grandchildren we are very proud of. I have nine grandchildren but these two I'm especially proud of. One is the speech pathologist for Edison and the other one is the math teacher in J.P. Stevens. The one that is the speech pathologist took a test, I guess she had all AP courses, and she skipped a whole year of college.

*Brenda Velasco:* Terrific.

*Helen Brunello:* They are smart kids.

*Brenda Velasco:* They sure are and they're still in education just like their mother.

*Helen Brunello:* Yes, they have condos in Long Branch now.

*Brenda Velasco:* Beautiful area of New Jersey right now with the new boardwalk and everything. That's great.

*Helen Brunello:* Yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, so this was where your friends were in Iselin and you loved it there and you felt safe.

*Helen Brunello:* Right.

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

*Helen Brunello:* Do we start with the college coming in here?

*Brenda Velasco:* Yes, mention the name of the college and everything.

*Helen Brunello:* Berkeley College and I know that came sometime in the '70s early '80s. (1982)

*Brenda Velasco:* And that's located on Rahway Avenue pretty near Town Hall.

*Helen Brunello:* Right, right next door to it.

*Brenda Velasco:* And they're expanding again.

*Helen Brunello:* When I look at it I still keep seeing the supermarket.

*Brenda Velasco:* What supermarket are we talking about?

*Helen Brunello:* I'm not sure.

*Brenda Velasco:* I'm not sure what it was either but there was a supermarket over there and then they bought it out and today they bought more property and they're clearing it out and they're going to expand. Why was Berkley College so important?

*Helen Brunello:* The reason I say Berkley College is that it's a four year college and we're honored to have a college in our township. There are not too many colleges here. Middlesex College is by itself. I don't know how the town funds it but I know it's in Edison. (Middlesex is a County College)

*Brenda Velasco:* Yes, that's located in the old Raritan Arsenal and Berkley just came out here and perhaps because it was by the train station.

*Helen Brunello:* I was privileged to be part of that group that interviewed them. Just like you're doing to me that is what I did to them. And then when it opened up they took me on a tour of it. They were very nice.

*Brenda Velasco:* Why did they want to locate in Woodbridge?

*Helen Brunello:* Because it was a private community as you said. It was being built up all over. If you look around to all the areas there is no real ghetto in Woodbridge. This is middle class America here. If they were going to write anything about it this is the place to live.

*Brenda Velasco:* And I think we were an All American City (1963) under Walter Zirpolo.

*Helen Brunello:* When he got out of jail he called me on the phone and asked me to go his house so I could tell him about what's going on in politics: a very nice man.

*Brenda Velasco:* Any other construction? Because we had the college, which came in as a four year college, for a community that's just about.....

*Helen Brunello:* Now we're going to the clay pits.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, let's go to the clay pits.

*Helen Brunello:* We produced x amount of clay from there supplying many, many bricks. Some place around from the old books about Woodbridge Township you're find the amount that the clay pit put out.

*Brenda Velasco:* This was one of the best clay deposits from Carteret to Sayreville.

*Helen Brunello:* My ground was half clay where I lived in Iselin.

*Brenda Velasco:* You were not far from the clay pits, not with Woodbridge Center.

*Helen Brunello:* These are the dates; I'm going to give you some dates. One on the top, it says 10 Woodbridge Center Drive I think it was the old Tanzman Building, I'm not sure. That was put in there in 1976. Now the David T. Wilentz Building, 1988 and all the apartments were put there in 1988. Sam built both of those together.

*Brenda Velasco:* Now that's Sam Halpern we're talking about.

*Helen Brunello:* Yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* And **Atlantic Realty**.....

*Helen Brunello:* Is Sam.

*Brenda Velasco:* And that's located on Woodbridge Center Drive.

*Helen Brunello:* That wasn't here before. That brought us all those ratables and you have the Wick Building. I don't know when that one came but it came after Sam's building. Lou Cyktor, do you know Lou Cyktor?

*Brenda Velasco:* Right, he lives in Colonia.

*Helen Brunello:* Is he still alive?

*Brenda Velasco:* Yes.

*Helen Brunello:* Did he build that one with the concrete levy?

*Brenda Velasco:* He built the new house next to his old house.

*Helen Brunello:* I went to eight Christmas parties there and I went to George Spadora's wedding there.

*Brenda Velasco:* Oh, wow! And the reason you were invited because you were the vice-chair of the Democratic Party so you got a lot of invitations back then. Okay, but you saw that whole Woodbridge Center Drive.....

*Helen Brunello:* Yes, I saw all of it go up it was amazing and you know I like shops. When I finally got the money I was glad it was there.

*Brenda Velasco:* And then you spend it. Keep the economy going, that's good.

*Helen Brunello:* That's the way I do it.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, any accidents that you recall?

*Helen Brunello:* With those buildings?

*Brenda Velasco:* No, it doesn't have to be with those buildings any accidents that stand out in your mind that occurred while you were living in Iselin.

*Helen Brunello:* Only the death of Mike Justin who jumped off the Edison Bridge. (1990). He was an attorney for the town.

*Brenda Velasco:* Oh, the death of the township attorney.

*Helen Brunello:* You know he came the day before he jumped. He was looking for me; he was my attorney.

*Brenda Velasco:* What was his last name?

*Helen Brunello:* Mike Justin.

*Brenda Velasco:* Mike Justin.

*Helen Brunello:* To me that was a tragedy.

*Brenda Velasco:* Yes, that he was so full of despair that he took his.....

*Helen Brunello:* He was so young and handsome.

*Brenda Velasco:* And he was your attorney, too.

*Helen Brunello:* Yes, he was my attorney. When he entered politics, you should know anybody who signs "pay for by the treasurer" was not only vice-chairman everything had my name on it. If anything went on I got sued. I must have gotten sued fifteen times.

*Brenda Velasco:* You become a public figure.

*Helen Brunello:* And I never ran for anything.

*Brenda Velasco:* No, they would look at that name and it was there. That's one of the drawbacks.

*Helen Brunello:* Somebody has to do it and I thank you for all the time you've put into it. I know it's tiresome but like you say somebody has to do it. I could never be a candidate. I ran a great headquarters but I could never be a candidate.

*Brenda Velasco:* Well, the success of a candidate is behind the scenes more so.

*Helen Brunello:* I tell you it's an amazing thing to be one.

*Brenda Velasco:* You had good experiences but we're going to limit to the questions here. How about sporting events, anything going on there or riots or discrimination?

*Helen Brunello:* No, none of that. At least I never heard of anything. It was never in the paper or anything. I read two papers a day and I never saw anything.

*Brenda Velasco:* What were the papers?

*Helen Brunello:* *The News Tribune* and *The Star Ledger* and after a while they were printing stuff in the paper that wasn't true. I never bought another paper after that.

*Brenda Velasco:* Which paper was that?

*Helen Brunello:* *The Home News Tribune*. I said this stuff is not true that you're printing. They said so what, it makes news.

*Brenda Velasco:* And it sells papers.

*Helen Brunello:* It sells papers. I guess they were right.

*Brenda Velasco:* They weren't interested in facts.

*Helen Brunello:* They weren't.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, anything else with construction that you recall?

*Helen Brunello:* There's so much. All those condos on Rahway Avenue, Barron's Gate, they came in even though there were flooding problems there. You were close to the flood zone. That's Jimmy's present.

*Brenda Velasco:* We fought that and it went through. It was approved. We went through the courts to delay it and it went through. A lot of the stuff now.....

*Helen Brunello:* Now on Blair Road up further they built.....there was a bird sanctuary that was there, do you remember it on Blair Road?

*Brenda Velasco:* I know we have Pin Oak Forest and this was Ernie Oros who fought for that.

*Helen Brunello:* Ernie Oros was a friend of mine. Is he dead?

*Brenda Velasco:* No, he's still alive

*Helen Brunello:* If you see Ernie say hello to him for me. Thank you for telling me about all the people that.....

*Brenda Velasco:* I'm updating you aren't I?

*Helen Brunello:* I'm very glad.

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

*Helen Brunello:* Everything. I like going shopping close by. I like being able to walk up and down my street and not be afraid of anything. Compared to what I hear from other people we're a nice community. People may not say that but I'm saying it to you.

*Brenda Velasco:* With the recent fire we had in Avenel I went to some of the pickup centers, delivery centers, for clothes. Debbie Meehan from the *Colonia Corner* said: "Brenda we had clothes that could outfit all of New Jersey with what was donated".

*Helen Brunello:* Well the mayor called on the Reverse 911 and I told my friend, my daughter was a teacher and her friend just retired from Avenel Middle School so some of them were students of ours, she brought stuff in. I called her up there. I tell other people to do it. When he called, I told everybody to do it. I went to see what it was like and when I got there people had no shoes and that was the next day standing around. I didn't know what to do. They had nothing.

*Brenda Velasco:* And their documents.

*Helen Brunello:* A lot of people say they were not legally there.

*Brenda Velasco:* Well, anybody with a passport or your green papers everything was destroyed in the fire because you had to escape right away. Councilman Lance's office was down there helping with the documentation and the other government agencies. But that fire went fast.

*Helen Brunello:* Sam is trying to relocate them into apartments that he.....he didn't build them that was an old warehouse and he did the reconstruction of that. But my heart bled for them. Yes, I did get the phone call and I did try as much as I could.

*Brenda Velasco:* That was great that your daughter.....

*Helen Brunello:* Other people I told too that are neighbors.

*Brenda Velasco:* Mass contributions.

*Helen Brunello:* Well it's good.

*Brenda Velasco:* Yes, we're a community and this is what you said.

*Helen Brunello:* You know that section is not the greatest section in the world but I wouldn't be afraid to walk around there. The road, Sam built that really beautiful. Did you go ride around there?

*Brenda Velasco:* No.

*Helen Brunello:* Did you see the building?

*Brenda Velasco:* No, I knew of the buildings. I didn't go to see them. When there's a fire I as a civilian will stay out and let the.....

*Helen Brunello:* I went the next day after everything was over.

*Brenda Velasco:* The next day I was somewhere else outside the State of New Jersey.

*Helen Brunello:* Where did you go on your vacation?

*Brenda Velasco:* Disney cruise to Alaska.

*Helen Brunello:* Wonderful.

*Brenda Velasco:* Yes, it was 40 degrees.

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

*Helen Brunello:* Yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, you have Sherry who lives in this house, Sherry Wandras.

*Helen Brunello:* Kathleen Procorn in Sharon Gardens, Helen Fish in Iselin, Laura lives in Tinton Falls and my other one lives in Georgia.

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

*Helen Brunello:* Here's another incident. Joe Vitale grew up by my girls. We were good friends. Route 27 is so bad, the road, that I had to get a tire. I had been complaining for two years. They fixed Edison and they fixed Linden.

*Brenda Velasco:* Route 27 between St. Georges Avenue?

*Helen Brunello:* From St. Georges Avenue past the Country Club all the way up to the light.

*Brenda Velasco:* Up to Oak Tree Road/Green Street.

*Helen Brunello:* Yes. I called him, he sees my children. He says, how's your mother? Forget about my mother: my car.

*Brenda Velasco:* And you told him about it.

*Helen Brunello:* I told him three times. I know this has nothing to do with Woodbridge but.

*Brenda Velasco:* Because we're the crossroads and you've got so many state roads going through.....

*Helen Brunello:* But this he could fix.

*Brenda Velasco:* Well, we'll get to that. Okay, anything else?

*Helen Brunello:* I can't think of anything. Like I say, where I lived in Iselin, that was all new growth; that was all farmlands. Then they built those other houses on the same side as the library past my development developments kept on going up and up and up all the way past Hyde Avenue and then the new ones that came in for the senior citizens. Did you ever go in them?

*Brenda Velasco:* Yes.

*Helen Brunello:* They're beautiful.

*Brenda Velasco:* It's a nice layout and they have a community center. Very, very nice.

*Helen Brunello:* That's all I know like I say.

*Brenda Velasco:* I picked your brain.

*Helen Brunello:* Yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* So thank you.

*Helen Brunello:* It was very nice meeting you Brenda. I wish you luck.

*Brenda Velasco:* Thank you and it was nice meeting you and also listening to some of your stories about Iselin and Woodbridge Township.