

**Oral History Interview**  
**Jane Zielinski Alencewicz**  
**WH001**  
(written transcript and digital audio)

On November 14, 2008, Jane Zielinski Alencewicz was interviewed at the Henry Inman Library by Brenda Velasco. Jane was originally interviewed on May 7, 2008 at the Evergreen Center but because of technical difficulties she had to be interviewed a second time.

At Evergreen, Jane Alencewicz was interviewed by Brenda Velasco and students Julia Chavarry (WMS) and Michelle Rudowsky (CMS). In the audience were Vincent Soccodatto (supervisor), Glen Lottman (G&T Program) as well as The G&T students: Anika Alam, Nazar Bedi, Samantha Mocciaro, Mallory Nathan. Dan D'Arcy, local historian of Colonia, was also present. Supplemental information from the first interview will be indicated with italics.

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

My full name is Jane Zielinski Alencewicz. I was born on November 18, 1924 in Jersey City.

*Brenda Velasco:* And how old are you now then?

*Jane Alencewicz:* I'll be 84 years old on Tuesday.

*Brenda Velasco:* Oh, happy birthday. Wow, this is really close right, November 18<sup>th</sup> and where do you currently live?

*Jane Alencewicz:* I currently live on Gaywood Avenue.

*Brenda Velasco:* Where did you live when you first moved to Woodbridge?

*Jane Alencewicz:* We came and lived on 157 Carson Drive, when Lynn Oaks Estates was built as a development. We happened to be the third and last family that moved in. When we decided to buy this house we looked at the map we were on New Dover Road and they were building it this way and my first thought was, if I take a house down here it'll give us more time to save money and I did an I put down half on the house.

*Brenda Velasco:* How much did the house cost, by the way?

*Jane Alencewicz:* It was \$15,000.00 and I put down \$7,500.00 and our mortgage was \$42.00.

*Brenda Velasco:* Mortgage a month?

*Jane Alencewicz:* A month. It was \$42.00 only because we put down half.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, well, not any more can you do this.

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

Well, since 1958; we moved in, November 2, 1958.

*Brenda Velasco:* Alright, so that's about 50 years.

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

*I had 3 little children. We lived in a small little apartment (Jersey City) when we decided to move here on Carson Drive. They were building homes off New Dover Road on Carson Drive.*

*I had two sisters here. We would come on weekends and holidays and we had wonderful times because they had big lawns and the fresh air was wonderful. To get out of the city was wonderful. Then the price of the house was what we could afford. We just made a few*

adjustments as far as my husband's work. He was willing to travel to Kearney, New Jersey but it was fine with him.

*Brenda Velasco:* Was the Parkway built by that time?

*Jane Alencewicz:* No.

*Brenda Velasco:* No Parkway?

*Jane Alencewicz:* No, not till later.

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

*There were not many people, cars or stores. We were excited to see cars when we moved here. (Vehicular traffic was rare on Carson). I was a lady of leisure-did not work.*

I hate to say this but it's beginning to look like a city. It's so congested now. If somebody had several lots as their property, some have sold them and it's gotten smaller and smaller and it's getting a little bit too tight.

*Brenda Velasco:* Is there anything else that you might want to add? When you first moved in were there a lot of people or cars here?

*Jane Alencewicz:* By the time we moved in there were quite a few developments. Shore Crest was being built at the same time, Lynn Oaks was built and then down here off Jordan Road, I don't know the name of that development behind them, and everybody has to have a car to get here or get out of here. So traffic started to build up. But it wasn't that bad.

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

There was no post office. I don't think there were any. We had to go to Woodbridge for everything, to Town Hall, and I really don't remember any.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay and where was the library at this time?

*Jane Alencewicz:* Let's see, the library. You know I don't know if I even used the library. It was probably the one in Woodbridge on St. George Avenue.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, was that one built by that time or wasn't there a small library?

*Jane Alencewicz:* Oh yea, on New Dover Road and whatever that street is; that small library. That's true I went there a few times.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, New Dover and Chain O Hills.

*Jane Alencewicz:* And you can add that that building is still there but it's the home of the Colonia Little League Baseball (Merrill Park Baseball League).

*Brenda Velasco:* How about some of the stores on Inman Avenue?

*Jane Alencewicz:* There was just Benny's, Vacarros and Colonia Drugs, it was where the post office is.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, so we did have a drug store, Colonia Drugs, with Jerry Rosa.

*Jane Alencewicz:* Right and it was where the post office is.

*Brenda Velasco:* Where the post office is (actually near the post office).

*Jane Alencewicz:* But you know what came around that time, a little bit later, a 5&10. It was by that fellow, Rushna, from St. John's and it was from Vacarros all the way to where the bank is. It was a big store. Do you remember that?

*Brenda Velasco:* Yes, I do because I came in 1967 and I remember that there was a 5&10.

*Jane Alencewicz:* Yea, but I don't know the man's name.

*Brenda Velasco:* The strip by Vacarros and that was handy. It had a lot of little things there for us especially if you didn't have a car. Was St. John's here?

*Jane Alencewicz:* Still, no, we went to St. Cecelia's. Well St. John's is now only 50 years old or something like that.

*Brenda Velasco:* You're right. It's their 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

*Jane Alencewicz:* Because my two daughters went to St. Cecelia's to school; the two older ones. Actually Stephen did too, and then when he was going to the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade St. John's was built and my Frances went in the 1<sup>st</sup> grade, then it was the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade and Stephen was in the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. So they were one of the first kids getting out. Stephen was in the first graduating class.

*Brenda Velasco:* So you supported St. John's all the way. You kept them busy with your seven children.

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

*The kids ran around-few houses. When the creek froze, they went ice skating. Eli Farm-Farmer Bill-allowed the children to play with animals. (corner of Edgewood and Clark-Graseck farm)*

*Men had card games every Tuesday on Eli Road.*

*There were parades: I liked the St. Patrick's Day Parade.*

Well, daily, the kids just played around in the backyard and I was lucky that my mother-in-law had a bungalow down the shore. So we would go for the weekends down the shore and our vacation time and it was free.

*Brenda Velasco:* That was the best. Where did the kids go ice skating?

*Jane Alencewicz:* You know this water that comes here?

*Brenda Velasco:* Right, Pumpkin Patch Creek.

*Jane Alencewicz:* It came down also from Edison down across, what the heck's that street behind us, Maria DeStefano lives there.

*Brenda Velasco:* Off of Clark in through there?

*Jane Alencewicz:* Yes, before you get to Wood.

*Brenda Velasco:* And off Clark Place, okay.

*Jane Alencewicz:* And it would come down there and into our property and then underneath Clark Place again and down here.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay.

*Jane Alencewicz:* And when it froze, I mean it wasn't deep. It was nice and wide and you didn't have any trees growing there so the kids had room to ice skate.

*Brenda Velasco:* They had a good time.

*Jane Alencewicz:* And how and they knew it! They used to laugh. Do you remember when, I don't know like what year it was, on television about 10:00 P.M. they would say, it's 10 P.M., do you know where your children are and Nicora would say, my mother knows where I am; they're sitting on the couch. (Channel 5 News at 10 P.M.)

*Brenda Velasco:* And did you kids take piano lessons or anything?

*Jane Alencewicz:* Yes, Midge Custode's daughter was taking lessons. Oh, that's a nice story.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, so Midge Custode's daughter was taking lessons.

*Jane Alencewicz:* Yes, and they used to play with her.

*Brenda Velasco:* And then that's how your two.....

*Jane Alencewicz:* Yea, then they wanted to play piano and I was looking in the newspaper that came, the weekly throw free paper whatever it was then, I think it's the same thing, what is that paper that we get?

*Brenda Velasco:* **Atom Tabloid?**

*Jane Alencewicz:* Yea, the **Atom Tabloid**.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay.

*Jane Alencewicz:* And I was looking and looking and I didn't see anything and I did say a prayer a couple of times and I dreamt about a piano, an upright piano, and the name on it. Now I don't remember the name but that week the paper came and there was a piano for sale right on, what the heck's the street, I don't remember the street, but it wasn't too far from us, oh, the development that's by School #21.

*Brenda Velasco:* Oak Ridge Heights.

*Jane Alencewicz:* Yea, Oak Ridge, and it was over there so I went and a guy opened the door and I said I see you have a piano for sale and I had two of the kids with me. I said, how much is it? I said my two daughters want to learn to play the piano but I said I can't spend too much. So he says, well come and look at it. I said I don't know anything about pianos and it was standing against the wall, say like that right in the corner, and I walked in and I went, ah, and he said to me, are you alright, and I said, you won't believe that I had a dream last night, there was a piano, and it was the same name that that piano was. So he said you can have it for \$25.00.

*Brenda Velasco:* Wow!

*Jane Alencewicz:* And when I sold it I got \$51.00.

*Brenda Velasco:* A bargain.

*Jane Alencewicz:* But I couldn't believe it. I can't remember the name of it now because I'm not into music or anything.

*Brenda Velasco:* Right, right.

*Jane Alencewicz:* Oh, that was funny. We laughed so hard.

*Brenda Velasco:* So where did they get the lessons from then?

*Jane Alencewicz:* I forgot her name, Mrs. (Lottie Minor), she was a black lady from Metuchen. It was a short name but I can't remember her name.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, alright.

*Jane Alencewicz:* And she would come to the house. Yea, she came to the house. And she'd go to Midge's house first and her daughter had her lesson and then she would come to our house. I should have some pictures some place because it was in my dining room, that piano, and we just had no room for it. When we had dinner on Sundays we had to use the dining room and Christmas time, because the kids would decorate it and stuff.

*Brenda Velasco:* A little tight.

*Jane Alencewicz:* Yea, yea.

*Brenda Velasco:* But they enjoyed it.

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

*St. John's Church.* I was an original member. During construction, I would walk through the building; the first time I got in trouble but the other times it was okay.

*We would meet there and there would be 300 ladies at a rosary meeting.*

*Good thing between the Township and the Church.*

*They (her children) got along with the teachers because I told them "they have to listen to authority".*

*St. John's, for us, because none of my children went to public school so I had no recreation with them.*

*Brenda Velasco:* And what were some of the activities there because they went to St. John's?

*Jane Alencewicz:* Just to school, nothing, they had nothing after school and I said I don't know what they did in public schools. They had enough to do home. They had jobs to do at home. Listen, when you're that little and you walk home from St. John's you dropped your book bag and you laid down on the floor and rested.

*Brenda Velasco:* They had quite a walk.

*Jane Alencewicz:* Yea. Not until Michael was old enough for Little League and baseball and he played baseball and football little league.

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

*I liked this area because it was nice, quiet and had trees and grass. It was good compared to the dirty city.*

It was very nice. People were nice. We never had any fights and everybody kept their lawns in good order. It was a pleasure to drive through and we lived on Carson Drive and it went right through the whole development and it was just wonderful.

*Brenda Velasco:* So it was nicely maintained?

*Jane Alencewicz:* Very well, yes, very well.

*Brenda Velasco:* And it was better than Jersey City because that's where you said you came from.

*Jane Alencewicz:* And how!

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

Oh, I know what we had, not construction, but they used to call Colonia skunk hollow. We had skunks and the kids would try to kill them right on Carson Drive, other kids - not only mine.

*Brenda Velasco:* Oh my and that odor! That's why it was called skunk hollow.

*Jane Alencewicz:* Yea, they did that a lot of times. That was their recreation.

*Brenda Velasco:* And how about the construction of St. John's?

*Jane Alencewicz:* Well it didn't affect me any at all. When it was finished, you know, the kids just went to school there. They signed up and they walked; and when it rained I drove them. That's all.

*I first learned to drive at 21 years. Not too many women drove when I moved to Colonia. I didn't know where they lived because they didn't drive. I checked my mileage one day and I had driven 100 miles driving back and forth between Avenel and Colonia.*

*On my 75<sup>th</sup> birthday I went up in a balloon; this was something I always wanted to do.*

*Fifteen people came to see me off after sharing cake and wine.*

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

To tell you the truth I don't know because I'm not active in anything.

*Brenda Velasco:* Well you're still active in church.

*Jane Alencewicz:* Yea, but that's all.

*Brenda Velasco:* And I just saw that beautiful afghan you crocheted which is magnificent.

*Jane Alencewicz:* Oh, I do that all the time. That's so second hand, so a part of me, that I don't even think that it's a job or anything.

*Brenda Velasco:* Because I know you used to be involved with the bazaar and the fairs. We'll have to take a picture of that.

*Jane Alencewicz:* You know what I did in Woodbridge, with Mrs. Cihak, when she was librarian here and then in Woodbridge she knew I crocheted and knitted and she used to ask me from time to time and they had my stuff on display in the display counter. Then she'd call me, we'd take it out and put something else in. But they, I don't know who, I guess she decided, to have like a cooking experiment in the Iselin Library and she asked me if I would do a show on Polish cooking and I did.

*Brenda Velasco:* Oh, okay. How did that go?

*Jane Alencewicz:* Fabulous. I made three different things that are very Polish. I did them home and drove them down there and I brought the ingredients and what I brought were three dishes. They had a stove there in the kitchen, so she put the stove on, this was an evening, it was a Tuesday or a Thursday evening, she put the stove on low and we put the pans in there so they'd get warmed up and then I went through the paces, just like they do it on TV. It was such a success that they wanted to do it again but I said I don't have that much time and, you know, small things. I made pierogi but they called it lazy pierogi. That's from my mother, she came from Poland. It's a little bit different but they're very good. And I made deviled eggs. So I made those at home. You hard boil an egg and then you cut it in half and you scoop out the yellow and then you put it back into the white part. She told me like how much and I kept the bills and then they gave me my money back, what I spent. Now what was the third one, there was the eggs, the pierogi and I don't remember the third thing I made and they had a big sign like this made of cardboard. It said Polish cooking. They didn't have the date on it because I remember looking for it one day and I found it but it didn't have a date, so I said ah the heck with it. But what also happened that night, it was in the summertime, vacation time, I was putting the stuff in my station wagon and, low and behold, we had a storm. It poured and lightening and everything, so I waited until it stopped and I drove over and everything was fine. And the people came because it was in the **Atom Tabloid** that that was going to happen that night. So the place was full.

*Brenda Velasco:* And this was at the Iselin Library?

*Jane Alencewicz:* Yes. Did you know Jean Cihak?

*Brenda Velasco:* I'm sure I did. Because she was at the Henry Inman Library for a while, wasn't she?

*Jane Alencewicz:* Oh, yea she was here and then she went up there. First of all she was a teacher in St. John's. Yea, she was originally a teacher. She had my Frances. She didn't have any of my other kids. I don't know what grade she had her in. Then she got the job here and then she went over to Iselin.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, and then she moved down the shore, I think, when she retired.

*Jane Alencewicz:* Oh, I don't know because I wasn't that friendly with her but she liked to have the display, I think, because it changed and they always had something.

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

Yea, just the one I live with.

*Brenda Velasco:* That's Patty.

*Jane Alencewicz:* Yea, and then Frances is in Woodbridge. That's all, nobody else. They're all scattered.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, alright, okay. Well I thank you very very much for the second interview.

*Jane Alencewicz:* You're lucky that I remember all this stuff.

*Brenda Velasco:* I know. I know. I know. Look at your age. You're going to be 84 in a few more days, November 18<sup>th</sup>.

*Jane Alencewicz:* That's why I got that blanket. My kids are coming Sunday. We're going to have my birthday Sunday and this kid was a fresh little kid when he was in Little League.

*Brenda Velasco:* He was young. He was young.

*Jane Alencewicz:* Oh, yea. But one thing happened with him too, he was very fresh and I would smack him occasionally and then one day I said, I'm going to tell your father. So one of the mothers that lived by then said to me, don't tell his father, his father is very strict. She said, he'll kill the kid if he knew that you have to hit him. I said okay. So time went on and then one day we were at the game and we were watching it and I said hey John hit a home run, hit a home run. I'll bake you a cake, just like that and he wasn't hitting so good and then smack, over the fence.

*Brenda Velasco:* Good incentive.

*Jane Alencewicz:* You're not kidding. So, you know, I baked him a cake but, God is good, things work out. You know the little cake pans that you have, like an 8 inch or 9 inch round pan, just at that time in either the **Woman's Day** or the Lady's, the other magazine that they used to sell in the A&P, they had a recipe where you just make the cake and then what you did in the circle, you had to measure it from a point this way, like a piece of pie and you cut that out and then you covered it with chocolate icing, light chocolate, as light as you could, and then you took licorice, the stringy thing, and where the cut was you went like this. Then you made a cupcake, a white cupcake with icing and you put it in there and it was like a baseball glove.

*Brenda Velasco:* Oh, that was clever.

*Jane Alencewicz:* I didn't think of it, it was in the magazine. See it all was at the same time, it was like a week or two after that happened. So then when I baked the cake I brought it to the game. I said to him, don't cut it. Take it home to your mother and then all the kids said, you're going to bake me a cake. I said, you got to hit a home run.

*Brenda Velasco:* You started something. Well I thank you very much.

*Jane Alencewicz:* Oh, you're welcome.

*Brenda Velasco:* It was very enjoyable and that cake must have been good. And happy birthday.

*Jane Alencewicz:* Oh, thank you.