

Oral History Interview
Joan Smalley Bonalsky
WH040

(written transcript and digital audio)

On May 7, 2009, Joan Smalley Bonalsky was interviewed at the Woodbridge Community Center on Main Street in Woodbridge by Brenda Velasco at 10:00 A.M. Participating in the interview are six students from the Gifted and Talented Program: Dennis Reilly (Colonia Middle School), Stefanie Shapiro (Woodbridge Middle School), Cassandra Chas (Fords Middle School), Geoffrey Glinn (Colonia Middle School) and Alex Boros (Fords Middle School), and Daniel Korab (Fords Middle School). Also present was Nancy Paugh, Gifted and Talented supervisor

Brenda Velasco: We're going to lead off with Mr. Reilly who will be asking the first question and next to him is Stephanie and she will be recording the response and then we'll be doing round robin. But in the meantime, I am going to place this mike right in front of Joan Bonalsky and Mrs. Bonalsky how do you want us to address you?

Joan Bonalsky: You can call me Mrs. B.

Brenda Velasco: Mrs. B okay, that'll solve a lot of problems with the writing as well.

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

Dennis Reilly: Mrs. B, what is your full name.

Joan Bonalsky: My full name is Joan Marie Bonalsky. My maiden name was Smalley.

Dennis Reilly: What section of Woodbridge did you live in?

Joan Bonalsky: Fords.

Dennis Reilly: And what's your date of birth?

Joan Bonalsky: March 29, 1930.

2. How long have you lived in Woodbridge?

Stefanie Shapiro: How long have you lived in Woodbridge Mrs. B?

Joan Bonalsky: For 75 years.

Brenda Velasco: And while that's a long time you have seen tremendous changes that have occurred.

Joan Bonalsky: Oh, yes I have.

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

Kassandra Chas: Mrs. B, why did you or your family move to Woodbridge?

Joan Bonalsky: My mother and father moved to Fords from Edison in 1934. The reason they moved was they had the opportunity to rent a larger apartment and be closer to my father's family that resides in Fords.

Brenda Velasco: Your father's family lived here in Fords.

Joan Bonalsky: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Where did they live in Fords?

Joan Bonalsky: On Paul Street.

Brenda Velasco: Do you know why they located in Fords?

Joan Bonalsky: I really don't know. They were both immigrants. My grandfather came from Austria and my grandmother came from Czechoslovakia. They married after they were living in the United States. In those days you had to be sponsored, if you were an immigrant you had to be sponsored. My grandmother came over as a maid for an affluent family, the Gross family, in Edison. My grandfather was a laborer. He worked digging clay in the clay pits that now is Raritan Center. These were huge, huge areas of clay pits and my grandfather worked as a laborer. They met when they worked in the United States and they married and they settled on Paul Street.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, and just as a sidebar from Sayreville approximately to Carteret was a whole area of clay pits and if you recall the emblem on the Woodbridge Seal, you have a picture of a kiln on it. We'll have to check that out later and see if we could find that Seal of Woodbridge. It has a kiln because this is what was the main industry of Woodbridge for such a long time. The only intact kiln right now in eastern Jersey is located in Woodbridge off Pennval Road, which is Woodbridge Proper. So Stefanie, that's your town. It's off Woodbridge Avenue, I believe. It's hidden but we're trying to get it on the Historic Registry.

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

Geoffrey Glinn: What physical changes have occurred over the years in the area you lived, like houses, streets, services, stores, house of worship, schools, etc.

Joan Bonalsky: Well, as far as the houses and streets are concerned Fords has really built up a lot since I was raised here; new housing developments and new streets.

Brenda Velasco: Where were the new houses built?

Joan Bonalsky: Well, after World War II, a lot of veterans were coming back from the service and they needed housing. So let's see, there was a development off Liberty Street and there was a development in back of where the senior citizen building is now.

Brenda Velasco: In back of Olsen Towers.

Joan Bonalsky: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: This is right on New Brunswick Avenue.

Joan Bonalsky: Right.

Brenda Velasco: Alright, so a development was put in there too then.

Joan Bonalsky: And, of course, Lafayette Estates, where your school is, that was a big picnic grove at one time.

Brenda Velasco: Oh, so there were picnics there?

Joan Bonalsky: Oh yes, Varady Grove. Oh, and of course, Menlo Park Terrace that was all new developments.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, this is where Kassandra lives right?

Kassandra Chas: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Alright. So how many houses were on your block?

Joan Bonalsky: Well, I was raised on New Brunswick Avenue and I can tell you a lot about that.

Brenda Velasco: Well then that's the next part of Geoffrey's question, the streets.

Joan Bonalsky: You want to know information about New Brunswick Avenue?

Brenda Velasco: Oh, yes.

Joan Bonalsky: Okay, well when I was growing up, now I'm sure a lot of you have seen sitcoms from the '50s and times like that where it was Main Street USA, well that's what New Brunswick Avenue was. We had everything there. We had doctors, dentists and we had an **A&P** food store.

Brenda Velasco: Where was that located?

Joan Bonalsky: Where the real estate office is now on the corner of Corielle Street and New Brunswick Avenue. So we really had just about everything. We had pharmacies, we had a tailor shop, and we had a movie theatre.

Brenda Velasco: Fords had a movie theatre?

Joan Bonalsky: Yes, we did.

Brenda Velasco: Where was that located?

Joan Bonalsky: That was located in the building, you know, where Olsen Towers is?

Brenda Velasco: Okay, the senior complex.

Joan Bonalsky: Well it was just up.....

Brenda Velasco: To the right of it if you going towards Perth Amboy?

Joan Bonalsky: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Joan Bonalsky: And let's see, we had a movie theatre, we had hardware stores, we had a bakery, we had a barbershop, we had a small, I guess you would call it a department store or a mercantile.

Brenda Velasco: What would a mercantile store sell Mrs. B?

Joan Bonalsky: Oh, it was almost like 5&10 sundries. They had just about everything. They had clothing and sewing supplies. Just about anything you needed you'd find there.

Brenda Velasco: Alright, so you didn't have any major chains in there except the **A&P**.

Joan Bonalsky: That was the only major chain we had. These were all basically mom and pop stores. That's why I referred to the, you know, Main Street USA.

Brenda Velasco: You didn't have to leave.

Joan Bonalsky: No, we didn't have to leave and that's what made for such a close knit community. We were altogether. Everyone knew everybody else.

Brenda Velasco: Geoffrey you want to follow up, we just discussed stores and services. What was the next area?

Geoffrey Glinn: Houses of worship.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, houses of worship.

Joan Bonalsky: They had basically stayed the same. We have Our Lady of Peace Church, we have the Lutheran Church, there's a Slavish Presbyterian Church and there was St. John's which was an affiliate of St. Peter's in Perth Amboy.

Brenda Velasco: Alright, so you had Catholic as well as Protestant churches then.

Joan Bonalsky: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Alright, but there was no Jewish synagogue there?

Joan Bonalsky: No they didn't have a synagogue?

Brenda Velasco: Not in Fords, okay. Are most of these churches there today?

Joan Bonalsky: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, so that stayed the same but the mom and pop stores and the **A&P**.....

Joan Bonalsky: They disappeared and I think one of the reasons was people became more mobile. The discount stores and the malls and everything, you know, like that came about and the smaller stores just couldn't compete.

Brenda Velasco: Then by the end of the '60s, '71, we had Woodbridge Center by that time.

Joan Bonalsky: Exactly and then, of course, times were a little more affluent. You know people had the opportunity to trip, you know, everyone had cars and price wise and everything the small businesses couldn't really compete with the larger chains.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, let's go back to your birth year alright, 1930, do you recall or does anybody recall what was happening in 1930?

Stefanie Shapiro: The Depression.

Brenda Velasco: The Depression. Stefanie, you got it. So with the Depression people didn't have the money. Did you have a car?

Joan Bonalsky: Yes, my dad did. He started out on a motorcycle and then graduated to a car.

Geoffrey Glinn: Did you have like the Model T Ford car?

Joan Bonalsky: To tell you the truth it probably was because it was either a Ford or a Chevy. Those were the popular cars in those days.

Stefanie Shapiro: Are some of the same brands of cars still made today from back then?

Joan Bonalsky: Yes, there are still Fords and Chevys and you have the American made cars but they're having a lot of difficulty right now.

Stefanie Shapiro: Were there any made back then that aren't here today?

Joan Bonalsky: I really couldn't answer that honey, I don't know.

Stefanie Shapiro: Okay.

Brenda Velasco: How about the motorcycle that your father had? That's what I'm interested in.

Joan Bonalsky: Well my dad was quite a man. He was a semi-pro baseball player.

Brenda Velasco: Wow!

Joan Bonalsky: That's really how, before I was born, he supported them: my mother and his family. He traveled, he belonged to industrial leagues and he also knew Babe Ruth.

Dennis Reilly: Like personally?

Joan Bonalsky: No, I think just through the course of playing ball and everything.

Dennis Reilly: Oh.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, let's go back to the term "industrial leagues" in baseball or fast pitch softball because I don't know what the particular industrial leagues play. What do you mean by an industrial league?

Joan Bonalsky: Well, there were a lot of factories located in the area and this was a form of recreation for the men. They would get together and form baseball teams and compete and earn very little bit money at the time.

Daniel Korab: Did any of your relatives like have to go away for the Second World War?

Joan Bonalsky: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, we're going to get to that later and that question was asked by Daniel and he hasn't had a chance to ask yet so I wanted to identify you Daniel, okay. Alright, and the last part that Geoffrey had asked was

Geoffrey Glinn: About schools.

Brenda Velasco: Schools. Okay, Mrs. B.

Joan Bonalsky: Okay, we had Ford School No. 7, that's where I attended, and most of the children in my section of town attended that school. Then there was No. 14 School which was located on Ford Avenue.

Alex Boros: Wait where, ah, school, oh, it's still there. (School 14)

Joan Bonalsky: It's still there.

Brenda Velasco: Alex, did you go to that school?

Alex Boros: No, I went to MPT (inaudible)

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Mrs. Paugh: Is that there where there are office buildings?

Joan Bonalsky: Yes, it is.

Alex Boros: That's on King Georges?

Joan Bonalsky: Well that's what I was going to mention when you were introduced, the Boros family has also been in Fords for quite a number of years I believe.

Alex Boros: Yes, I think my family's been living in the house I currently have right now for like seventy years or something like that.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, and what grades did you attend in each school?

Joan Bonalsky: In #7 School I attended first grade through eighth grade. Then I attended high school in Woodbridge Proper....

Stefanie Shapiro: Woodbridge High?

Joan Bonalsky: Yes, but, Woodbridge High then was on Barron Avenue.

Stefanie Shapiro: Was it the middle school?

Joan Bonalsky: It became a middle school after I attended high school when it was still a high school.

Stefanie Shapiro: So you attended the high school which was where the middle school is today?

Joan Bonalsky: Exactly.

Brenda Velasco: Right, that's your school right now Stefanie. That was the high school.

Joan Bonalsky: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: But let's go back because you said you attended grades one through eight.

Joan Bonalsky: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Alright, what grade is she missing there guys?

Kassandra Chas: Ninth.

Brenda Velasco: No, no.

Geoffrey Glinn: Kindergarten.

Brenda Velasco: Geoffrey, kindergarten, you're right.

Kassandra Chas: Oh, yes.

Joan Bonalsky: Yes, good.

Brenda Velasco: Did you go to kindergarten?

Joan Bonalsky: We didn't have kindergarten back then.

Brenda Velasco: That wasn't mandatory in New Jersey back then. So that would have been about 1935.

Joan Bonalsky: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, not mandatory. Okay, Alex from Fords, Alex Boros you're on.

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

Alex Boros: What public buildings were there like post offices, libraries, parks, firehouse, etc?

Joan Bonalsky: Well, we had a post office but the location is different than it is now. The firehouse, that's remained the same. Okay, what else.

Brenda Velasco: And that's on King Georges Road?

Joan Bonalsky: Well the firehouse, when I was growing up, was on Corielle Street.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Dennis Reilly: How about like hospitals?

Joan Bonalsky: No hospitals. In fact, I brought along a book that was just published about Fords. It's got some good pictures in it if you want to look at it of the old firehouse and different things like that and the churches.

Brenda Velasco: Okay and we mentioned the schools before. How about a library?

Joan Bonalsky: Well, we did have a library and it was the Fords Women's Club that actually started the library.

Brenda Velasco: In other words this wasn't the township.

Joan Bonalsky: No.

Brenda Velasco: It was a private library started by the women of Fords.

Joan Bonalsky: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, Alex, you have some other parts to your question there?

Alex Boros: Were there like any parks that you guys would go hang out at back then?

Joan Bonalsky: Yes, Fords Park was there. It was not like it is now but the property was there.

Stefanie Shapiro: Did they still have like swings and everything at Fords Park?

Joan Bonalsky: Not too much, no, it was just a park where you could go and walk and things like that. There was a pond, a little pond, where we used to play by.

Stefanie Shapiro: So it's not like the parks today? It's like there was a lot of grass and benches where you could sit?

Joan Bonalsky: Right, it was very rural and now the parks have the baseball fields and a lot of equipment.

(Alex/Daniel): I have a question; you know that section of road on Crows Mill Road where it turns into 287 off the ramp? Like I remember my dad was telling me stories that there would be ponds and stuff where he would go fishing with his friends.

Joan Bonalsky: Oh, yes.

(Alex/Daniel): Was that a park or was that just the forest area?

Joan Bonalsky: No, that was just an area that, you know, was just naturally there and as kids we took advantage of all these different ponds. In the winter they'd freeze over and we'd ice skate and fish

Brenda Velasco: Okay and that gets us to our Daniel.

6. What did you do for recreation?

Daniel Korab: What did you do for recreation?

Joan Bonalsky: Oh, we did a lot of things. We were never bored. Let's see I wrote some of the things down. Well, we used to play a lot of games with friends and ride bikes when I was, you know, younger. Then when I was in my teens well we went ice

skating and we had picnics. As I said, Varady's Grove was where your middle school is located now. We used to have a Fife and Drum Corp. Now can anybody image what that was like? Well, we would march in parades and we would play fifes, like the revolutionary people did, and drums and we had little make shift uniforms and there was a gentleman by the name of Rupee Allen who was our mentor. He was the one that got us together, taught us how to play the instruments and we used to have minstrel shows. That was like a talent show where we'd sing and dance and put on skits.

Brenda Velasco: And where was that held?

Joan Bonalsky: We used to have rehearsals over at No. 14 School in the gym and a gentleman named Richard Krause, and I think he was in the local government. I don't know if he was a committeeman. I know he was very active and Jack Egan, who was the police chief at the time, they used to help us and teach us. We used to have hayrides. We had our movie theatre. (Police Chief Egan: 1954-1961)

(?): About the movie theatre, wasn't there news that they were like going to rebuild that somewhere nearby like in the same place it was before?

Joan Bonalsky: Yes, they're talking about turning it into some sort of a theatre of fine arts and performances.

Stefanie Shapiro: What types of movies were played at the theatre? Like was it still the time of black and white talkies or was it silent films?

Joan Bonalsky: No they were talkies and there were action movies, a lot of Cowboy and Indian movies.

Stefanie Shapiro: Was it in color?

Joan Bonalsky: No, black and white.

Brenda Velasco: Do you remember how much it cost?

Joan Bonalsky: I think a nickel or something like that.

Stefanie Shapiro: Wow!

Brenda Velasco: Think of what you have to pay Stefanie because you asked this question.

Joan Bonalsky: And we had double features and cartoons and newsreels.

Stefanie Shapiro: Now was a nickel expensive for back then?

Joan Bonalsky: Yes, it was. That was part of our treat or allowance. We would get allowances of either a nickel or a dime a week. That was our spend money. I have to tell you something funny, in those days we really, it was before pesticides, so in the summer we would have loads of Japanese beetles and the movie theatre offered if the children would bring in a glass jar of Japanese beetles we could get into the movie for free.

Geoffrey Glinn: Wow!

Joan Bonalsky: That was the big thing.

Brenda Velasco: This was a whole afternoon at the movies.

Joan Bonalsky: Oh, sure.

Brenda Velasco: You had double features and cartoons and newsreels.

Joan Bonalsky: Yes, and it was a good experience for our parents to kind of get rid of us for a little while and they knew where we were.

(?): Also it was good for like gardening and everything to get rid of those beetles.

Joan Bonalsky: Sure, because we didn't use pesticides in those days, everything was natural.

Brenda Velasco: Okay Daniel, were there any other.....

Daniel Korab: No that was the only part.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, so that was the only part so that was recreation. You had a lot of things going.

Joan Bonalsky: Oh, yes.

Brenda Velasco: What were some of the games that you played with your friends?

Joan Bonalsky: Hopscotch, jacks, and improvised baseball games.

Brenda Velasco: There was no Woodbridge Youth recreation?

Joan Bonalsky: No, we made our own fun.

Brenda Velasco: Where were the parades that you marched in with that fife and drums?

Joan Bonalsky: Oh, some of them were in Woodbridge Proper on Main Street and some of them were in Fords when our local fire company would have some sort of an occasion.

It was all very localized.

Stefanie Shapiro: Who sponsored the parades and stuff because like today the parades have like meanings?

Joan Bonalsky: It was just all community activated. It was just all volunteer; just togetherness.

Dennis Reilly: You said that you used to play in the parades. What type of instruments did you know how to play?

Joan Bonalsky: I played the fife and, I'll tell you something, I never really mastered it. So Mr. Allen used to tell me, well you just march and wiggle your fingers like you're playing the instrument and that's what I used to do.

Alex Boros: Is it similar to like playing a flute.

Joan Bonalsky: A flute you play in front, a fife you play to the side. The pictures you see of the Revolutionary War with the drummer and the fife, that's what I used to play.

Alex Boros: Question, you know how like Main Street is all industrialized with the stores and everything, were those all houses when you were a kid?

Joan Bonalsky: Yes, there were houses along New Brunswick Avenue as well as stores. There were apartments over the stores.

Kassandra Chas: Looking at the book that you showed and listening to what you've been saying you mentioned baseball a lot. Was baseball like the number one sport and game you guys played?

Joan Bonalsky: No, it wasn't really number one.

Stefanie Shapiro: What was the number one that you played, do you remember?

Joan Bonalsky: There was no prime one, they were all.....

Brenda Velasco: When you got older, and you were in high school, what became the prime sport in Woodbridge?

Joan Bonalsky: Football.

Brenda Velasco: Okay and that was at Woodbridge High School?

Joan Bonalsky: Yes.

Stefanie Shapiro: Do you remember who the mayor was at that time?

Joan Bonalsky: No I don't. I can remember one mayor, Mr. Greiner, Augie Greiner, but I don't know what his time frame was. (1934-1951)

Dennis Reilly: By the time you got in high school, you said football was the important sport. Did they have a recreational league then or still no?

Joan Bonalsky: No.

Brenda Velasco: That would be just the high school.

Joan Bonalsky: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: We only had one high school back then.

Joan Bonalsky: Yes, Little League and Pop Warner, those things came in much later.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, back to you Daniel for the second round of questioning. Oh, Dennis, okay Question #7.

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

Dennis Reilly: What was the focal point of your community at that time?

Joan Bonalsky: I had difficulty with that. I'm having difficulty with that one.

Brenda Velasco: What dominated, you know, what was the center of your life? Was it your family, the church, school etc.

Stefanie Shapiro: The place where you felt like most you got situated to?

Joan Bonalsky: Just about all that was mentioned.

(?): They all had a meaningful amount? There was really no one important thing?

Joan Bonalsky: No, families were important and church was important.

Dennis Reilly: What church did you used to go to?

Joan Bonalsky: I attended church in Perth Amboy. My parents were married in that church, I was baptized in that church and I am still a member of that church.

(?): Are you Catholic or?

Joan Bonalsky: Protestant, I'm a Methodist.

Brenda Velasco: Did a lot of the events or parties center around family?

Joan Bonalsky: Yes, family and friends.

Brenda Velasco: Can you give us an example? Sunday afternoons, how were they spent?

Joan Bonalsky: Dinner with your family.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, that's an important event. These kids know.....

Joan Bonalsky: Yes, even after I was married and had children I still went back to my parents on Sunday afternoons for dinner.

(?): Your parents didn't move even after all that time?

Joan Bonalsky: No, they still stayed in the original apartment until much later.

Stefanie Shapiro: How have the services at your church changed? Like is there more music in them or do they talk about more modern things?

Joan Bonalsky: Well I'll tell you, my church is located in Perth Amboy. Perth Amboy is a changing town and now my church is a multi-cultural church. We have a Spanish service incorporated with our English service.

Dennis Reilly: Do you know where your old house still is? Is it still standing?

Joan Bonalsky: Sure. Well I was raised in an apartment right on New Brunswick Avenue so I was right in the heart of everything.

Brenda Velasco: You saw everything. Did they have parades in the township?

Joan Bonalsky: Oh, yes. Oh, the firemen had parades and the first aid squad would have parades.

Stefanie Shapiro: Do they have parades for just random reasons just as to be together?

Joan Bonalsky: No, it was usually for a reason like it was opening day of something or a holiday.

Brenda Velasco: Did you have parades for Veterans Day?

Joan Bonalsky: Yes, we did.

Brenda Velasco: And that would be in November.

Joan Bonalsky: Yes, mostly Veterans Day we more or less honored the dead at the cemeteries.

Kassandra Chas: How has the clothes that you've worn changed? Like I know that the styles are different but like was there like different fabrics or something or was the colors different?

Brenda Velasco: Different materials.

Joan Bonalsky: Yes, we didn't have too much of the synthetics fabrics that we have now. A lot of things didn't change. I used to wear blue jeans and flannel shirts and loafers.

Stefanie Shapiro: Now wasn't there like, not necessarily a rule but just an understanding that girls had to wear skirts and all that or was that just to like church and everything?

Joan Bonalsky: Well we had rules as far as what we wore to school and to church but those rules were usually instituted by our parents.

Stefanie Shapiro: So you didn't have like a dress code or anything?

Joan Bonalsky: No.

Brenda Velasco: What did you wear to school?

Joan Bonalsky: Skirts and blouses mainly, not too many dresses. We didn't wear jeans or slacks. That wasn't school policy that was the parent's policy.

Brenda Velasco: Good question Stefanie. Should we go to Question #8 then? Do you feel we covered it all? Then if there isn't anything else then, Stefanie, you're on for Question #8.

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

Stefanie Shapiro: What did you like about living in your section of Woodbridge?

Joan Bonalsky: Well, I liked the closeness of the community. Everyone was friendly and you knew your neighbor.

Stefanie Shapiro: Did everybody like if they found something out about somebody or like if the kid did something wrong, would like it go around town? Was it kind of like chitter chatter? Like you would just talk like, oh I heard so and so did this?

Joan Bonalsky: Not too much because to tell you the truth we were such a close knit community that you watched what you did because you knew if you did something wrong it would get back to your father right away and you'd be in big trouble.

Stefanie Shapiro: What was the punishments like back then? Was it different from what it is today?

Joan Bonalsky: Not too much. You were grounded.

Daniel Korab: If there was like a family tragedy or an accident, would everyone in your neighborhood like help out and get involved?

Joan Bonalsky: Definitely. That was the closeness of the community.

Dennis Reilly: Do you know any of your friends that you knew back then today?

Joan Bonalsky: Yes, there are a few of my classmates that are still residing in Fords.

Brenda Velasco: So a lot of people didn't move out?

Joan Bonalsky: No, there are still a lot of the old established families still here.

Brenda Velasco: And I think we mentioned that Alex's last name Boros, that's a family name in Fords.

Joan Bonalsky: Yes.

Stefanie Shapiro: Was there like a lot of electronics back then to be grounded from.

Joan Bonalsky: No, really. We didn't get a telephone until I was in my teens. Of course, there was no television and we had radio mostly, but as far as electronics, no.

Stefanie Shapiro: When did you get a television or do you still not have a television?

Joan Bonalsky: I guess in the late '40s, early '50s.

Brenda Velasco: When you got your telephone, the first telephone in the house, was it a party line?

Joan Bonalsky: Yes it was a party line.

Stefanie Shapiro: What's a party line?

Joan Bonalsky: Two people shared the same telephone line.

Alex Boros: So it was like a house phone?

Daniel Korab: So the one person has the line, has their own line or something?

Joan Bonalsky: Well, I really don't remember.

Brenda Velasco: It's hard to explain it to you but if the call was coming to your house it would ring in your house but the other person had use of the same line so if they were on the phone it wouldn't ring in Mrs. B's house.

Joan Bonalsky: Exactly.

Brenda Velasco: And if you wanted to make a call Mrs. B., you.....

Joan Bonalsky: Picked up the receiver and if someone was on, you just hung up.

Brenda Velasco: You supposedly hung up.

Joan Bonalsky: Oh, yes.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, okay, and sometimes you heard some ring ding because the other party was listening to the conversation.

Joan Bonalsky: Well you know most of the time we would know who was on our party line so we'd just say, "hey I'm talking hang up". There really weren't any problems. This was the way it was. You just adapted to it.

Stephanie Shapiro: Was it simpler back then?

Joan Bonalsky: Yes.

Stefanie Shapiro: If you could chose to go back to how you were, like with the simpler life and everything, would you go back or would you stay in the present?

Joan Bonalsky: No, I'm content with the present. I'm happy with my memories but there's a lot of new good stuff going on.

Dennis Reilly: Did you have like a local newspaper to tell you what's happening in the community?

Joan Bonalsky: Yes, there was a newspaper published in Perth Amboy.

Stefanie Shapiro: Do you remember what it was called?

Joan Bonalsky: That's what I'm just trying to think.

Dennis Reilly: Was there a Star Ledger back then?

Joan Bonalsky: I'm not sure about that.

Brenda Velasco: There may have been but Perth Amboy was.....

Joan Bonalsky: Yes, **Perth Amboy Evening News.**

Brenda Velasco: **Perth Amboy News and the Home News Tribune** is like a descendant of that newspaper. It's had so many spinoffs and names and so on. Now it's located in East Brunswick reflecting the population shift. After it left Perth Amboy, it came to Woodbridge and then it went to East Brunswick. But, that was the big newspaper in this area.

Joan Bonalsky: Yes, it was.

Brenda Velasco: Kassandra, you're next to ask the question, right?

Kassandra Chas: Yes, Number 9.

Brenda Velasco: This may be a long question so Geoffrey.....

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

Kassandra Chas: Did you experience any significant happenings in Woodbridge such as construction, accidents, sports events, riots, discrimination, etc.?

Joan Bonalsky: Well construction, of course, housing construction, Woodbridge Center, just everything boomed. It's hard to point out.....

Brenda Velasco: Now when did that boom occur?

Joan Bonalsky: I would say it started really in the '50s.

Alex Boros: Like when all the veterans started coming home from the war?

Joan Bonalsky: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: You got it, Alex.

Joan Bonalsky: Very good.

Brenda Velasco: We'll get to World War II, that post-World War II boom.

Joan Bonalsky: Yes, everything just expanded. There was more everything, housing.

Daniel Korab: About important events, what was the reaction of everyone during the Cuban Missile Crisis? (1962)

Stefanie Shapiro: Could you just explain what the Cuban Missile Crisis is?

Daniel Korab: It was when the Soviet Union was bringing over missiles to Cuba which they could have nuked the United States if they wanted to.

Stefanie Shapiro: Okay, thank you.

Joan Bonalsky: We were very apprehensive. That was, you know, with the A bomb and everything. In school we used to.....

Daniel Korab: Have bomb drills and stuff?

Joan Bonalsky: Yes, under your desk. Now when you think of it was kind of ridiculous but at that time that's all we had.

Brenda Velasco: You felt you were doing something.

Joan Bonalsky: Exactly.

Stefanie Shapiro: How did you feel during the Woodbridge train crash like when, the big train crash, when you heard about that? Like were you surprised, were you shocked, did you know anybody who died from the crash?

Joan Bonalsky: No, I didn't know anyone that was involved. And the strange thing about the Woodbridge train wreck, I was in the hospital at the time. I was in St. Peter's Hospital in New Brunswick awaiting.....

Stefanie Shapiro: That's where I was born.

Joan Bonalsky: Oh, really.

Stephanie Shapiro: Yes.

Joan Bonalsky: I was going to have surgery the next day and suddenly the hospital was just all alerted because they didn't know how many victims they would get or anything like that. Then, of course, that was a horrible tragedy. After I came home and recuperated I visited the site. But I didn't know anyone that was involved.

Daniel Korab: During your lifetime who was your favorite president?

Joan Bonalsky: Oh, goodness. I'd have to say I admired John Fitzgerald Kennedy. I liked President Truman. I think he was a real down to earth president, saw things as they really were and was honest.

Stefanie Shapiro: You don't have to answer this question if you don't feel comfortable, but first of all was there the whole Republican/Democrat rivalry back then and if there was, which one were you? Like you don't have to answer the second part if you don't feel comfortable.

Joan Bonalsky: Well I'll be totally honest with you, I really wasn't that actively involved in politics at the time. I was newly married and raising a family so, you know, I was very aware of things that were going on but I wasn't politically active for it.

Geoffrey Glinn: Was there segregated events? Was your school was always integrated?

Joan Bonalsky: I'm not sure I understand.

Geoffrey Glinn: Like were the schools that you went to always integrated?

Stefanie Shapiro: What does segregated mean?

(?): Separated.

(?): Like blacks from whites.

(?): Yes.

Stefanie Shapiro: Oh, or girls from boys?

Joan Bonalsky: Oh, no. We were all together.

Alex Boros: Did Woodbridge like have problems with the segregation or discrimination during the 1990 pictures or whatever it was?

Joan Bonalsky: No.

(?): No.

Daniel Korab: I have one question, in the beginning you said that some family members went away to fight in World War II.

Joan Bonalsky: Yes.

(?): Did any of them die?

Joan Bonalsky: No, thank God, we didn't lose anyone.

Daniel Korab: Did they win any like awards or anything?

(*Joan Bonalsky?*): Like medals?

(*Daniel Korab?*): Yes.

Joan Bonalsky: No big special ones like the Purple Heart or anything. They got their ribbons for the theatres that they.....

Stefanie Shapiro: Now what is a Purple Heart?

(?): That's when you're injured and you go back home.

Joan Bonalsky: Yes, wounded in the line of duty.

Stefanie Shapiro: So that's a big honor to have?

Joan Bonalsky: Yes.

Daniel Korab: Did any of your relatives serve in the Navy or were they involved in fighting in Europe?

Joan Bonalsky: My husband was in the Navy. He enlisted in the Navy when he was seventeen years old. Now when you stop and think seventeen years old and he served in the Pacific during some action.

(*Daniel Korab?*): Was he stationed at the time of Pearl Harbor?

Joan Bonalsky: No, he joined the Navy after. He actually was only a junior in high school but he knew that he would be eighteen soon. He didn't want to serve in the Army,

he wanted to serve in the Navy, so he enlisted and I had two of my uncles serve in the European Theatre and went through some very, very difficult battles. Another uncle was in the Air Force and another uncle served, I don't remember what his title was but he was stationed in Greenland. It was almost like they watched the movements of the planes and the shipping.

Brenda Velasco: And the ships because the North Atlantic was a big shipping venue for our troops to get their supplies to Europe or to get their supplies to the United States.

Joan Bonalsky: Exactly.

(?): So everything had to go through Britain and then the United States?

Brenda Velasco: Yes, because of the German submarines.

(?): And then they had tugboats.

Brenda Velasco: The U boats. But in the North Atlantic there were a lot of American Merchant Marines who were torpedoed as well. This was another area where you don't hear too much about.

Joan Bonalsky: And, of course, it was kind of boring up there to a certain extent. He used to write me many long letters describing, you know, the scenery and things like that. It was interesting.

Brenda Velasco: No e-mail back then either.

Joan Bonalsky: No.

Brenda Velasco: So the letters took a while to reach you.

Joan Bonalsky: Yes.

Stefanie Shapiro: I have another question. But like, once again, if you don't feel comfortable answering it because it's kind of like with all the political views and everything, how did you feel when the Japanese people were, not exactly rounded up....

(?): They were put into camps.

Stefanie Shapiro: Well, not necessarily the camps like to the extent of what was happening in Germany but like they were grouped together so they couldn't really send messages to the Japanese and all that, how did you feel about that? Did you feel despair?

Brenda Velasco: Let's just clear that, Japanese American.

Stefanie Shapiro: Japanese Americans, right.

Brenda Velasco: Japanese Americans.

Joan Bonalsky: That were interred?

Brenda Velasco: Interred on the Pacific Coast.

Joan Bonalsky: I feel that that was a terrible injustice.

Alex Boros: What was the uproar from Pearl Harbor in Woodbridge?

Joan Bonalsky: Everyone was shocked and everyone was angry. Everyone united and was so supportive of the war effort. We used to save tin cans. We'd save tires and of course there was rationing. The home front did their bit, as much as we possibly could to support them. Did I answer.....

Alex Boros: Yes.

Joan Bonalsky: Good.

Daniel Korab: Do you agree with Truman's decision to end the war with the atomic bombs?

Joan Bonalsky: Yes, it saved a lot. Unfortunately a lot of Japanese people were killed but it saved a lot of American lives.

Daniel Korab: So the invasion was to kill Americans?

Joan Bonalsky: Exactly.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, you know we skipped over an era that you grew up in, the Depression, but you were just a little tyke at that time. I don't know if you know anything about the Depression.

Joan Bonalsky: Well, I was four when we moved to Fords and everything and like five, six, seven, I can remember a lot of things. We didn't have very much because, you know, salaries were very, very low. I guess in today's terms you would basically say we were poor but the thing was we didn't know we were poor. We were happy because everyone was under the same circumstances.

Stefanie Shapiro: Do you feel that necessarily rich and poor can also be measured by happiness with your family and your life? Like if you're happy with your life but you don't really have a lot of money like do you still think you're rich in that way and not necessarily in money?

Joan Bonalsky: Oh, definitely, you're rich in spirit and you're in love. You're rich in friendship. I can remember when, I told you the clay pits and the woods down at Raritan Center, my father and my uncles were sportsmen and they would go down there and they would shoot rabbits and pheasant and they would bring that home and we would make a meal from the game.

Daniel Korab: How well do you think FDR handled the whole Depression at the time?

Joan Bonalsky: I think he did very, very well. It's not like the government today now that we're going through these bad times and the government is handing out money hand over fist. President Roosevelt went to the core of the people. He established the WPA which was like a Public Works department. He put people to work on the street.

Daniel Korab: And he had been using the old program.....

Joan Bonalsky: Exactly, and then he had another interesting program it was called the CCC. Young men would join this unit, or whatever, and they would go all over the country. They would work in the national parks, they would work in construction sites, and they would make a little money and send the money home to their families. It was also a growth experience for these young people to really get out and see things.

Brenda Velasco: Let me go back (CCC). That'll be eighteen to twenty-four year old young men because that's the age that's most volatile to write if they were unemployed. So they were taken off the streets and whenever you go up into New York State or Pennsylvania to some of their camps, if you see the trees planted in a straight line, it's Civilian Conservation Corp (CCC).

Joan Bonalsky: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Trees don't grow in a straight line, that's it. It's unnatural but this is what kept them off the streets, not rioting; and it saved families that were living back here with a little bit of income.

Stefanie Shapiro: With the Depression, did your family get affected by it? Like did you have so many stocks in the market that you just.....

Joan Bonalsky: There was no such thing as, you know, people at that time being in the stock market or any of the present day economies that was....

Stefanie Shapiro: So would you compare your experience in the great Depression to today because you really didn't have it that bad?

Joan Bonalsky: No, I would compare it to cutting back on things. Society today is a very affluent society. It's a very "I want it now". In those days, if you wanted something, you

would plan for it, you would save for it, there was no such thing as credit cards or your weekly paycheck. A certain amount of money was put away for savings. It was just a different lifestyle.

Alex Boros: Question, was there like welfare or rich people in Woodbridge? Like, did they have the welfare program or was there like the really, really rich people with big mansions and stuff like that?

Joan Bonalsky: No, we really didn't have a welfare program per say. People helped other people.

Brenda Velasco: You also had the churches helping and internal organizations helping.

Joan Bonalsky: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: There is so much government coming in as volunteer agencies.

Stefanie we're going to have to go on because your bus is going to be coming shortly.

Stefanie Shapiro: Okay.

Brenda Velasco: Geoffrey, we're back to you. Question #10, right?

10. What do you like about Woodbridge today?

Geoffrey Glinn: What do you like about Woodbridge today?

Joan Bonalsky: Well I like Woodbridge very much. I feel it's a very, very good township to live in. We have our municipal government which is a very good government. Still neighborhoods have changed but yet they haven't changed. You're still friendly with your neighbors. You still kind of help out with different things. It's a nice place to live.

Kassandra ChaS: Do you think our economic system was better back then or it's better now?

Joan Bonalsky: That's very difficult and it's really something to think about because you're comparing like the Depression era with these big boom times that we've been going through now. I really would have to think about that a little bit.

Brenda Velasco: Let's come back to that question, that's a great question.

Joan Bonalsky: It is.

Brenda Velasco: But let's go back to "What do you like about Woodbridge today", finish up. Anything else you want to add to that with Geoffrey?

Joan Bonalsky: No, I just feel that it's a very, very nice place to live. We have good facilities.

Brenda Velasco: Name a facility that you use all the time?

Joan Bonalsky: One of them is this building right here, this Y, Community Center. It offers so much to both the young people and us oldsters and I think it's really a great thing, it really is.

Brenda Velasco: Alex, you've got Question #11.

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

Alex Boros: Well, I know you've already answered part of this question but do you still have family member living in Woodbridge?

Joan Bonalsky: Yes, I have two cousins and my son actually still lives in Woodbridge with me but he works in Maryland.

Alex Boros: Wow, that's a large commute.

Joan Bonalsky: Well, he lives there during the week.

Alex Boros: Oh.

Joan Bonalsky: He comes home for weekends. He works for NASA.

Alex Boros: Oh!

Joan Bonalsky: Yes, isn't that interesting. He's an electrical engineer.

Alex Boros: Do you have any more children besides your son?

Joan Bonalsky: Yes, I have a daughter and I have three granddaughters.

Brenda Velasco: Do they live nearby?

Joan Bonalsky: They live in Howell.

Brenda Velasco: Alright, so it's still in New Jersey

Joan Bonalsky: Oh, yes.

Alex Boros: From which of the children are your grandchildren from, your son or your daughter?

Stefanie Shapiro: Or both.

Joan Bonalsky: My daughter. My son is a bachelor.

Brenda Velasco: Now, we are going to have Daniel sum up the last question.

12. Are there any other stories or events that you would like to discuss?

Daniel Korab: Are there any other stories or events that you'd like to discuss.

Joan Bonalsky: Well I think we've covered a lot and if I really sat down I probably could tell you many, many more stories.

Brenda Velasco: Stefanie, you had a question before. Did you want to conclude with your question then?

Stefanie Shapiro: I don't really remember but I have another question.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Stefanie Shapiro: Were there any stories that went around that were like any fairy tales that are different from now like that your mom used to tell you before you went to bed and all that? Because sometimes now they are like the rituals were the parents read you a story and tuck you in.

Joan Bonalsky: No.

Stefanie Shapiro: Like was there any ritual that your family did before you went to bed during the week.

Joan Bonalsky: Oh, well, we always kissed goodnight. My mother would read to me a lot but not necessarily at bedtime it was just all the time. I think that's why I became an avid reader. I had rituals with my own children. Different songs we would sing and different rituals that we would have before I would put them to down.

Daniel Korab: Now in the '60s, how did you feel about Vietnam? Like should we have gone there or should we have.....

Joan Bonalsky: Well.....

Daniel Korab: Like do you feel the U.S. should go around and act like a policeman of the world protecting other countries?

Stefanie Shapiro: That's an interesting analogy.

Joan Bonalsky: Yes it is. No I don't feel that we should be the policeman of the world. I think we have a lot of problems in this country that we have to tend to and the world is really a violent place. There are all these wars going on and things like that. We just can't get involved in everything.

Stefanie Shapiro: As much as we'd like to help out, we can't help everybody.

Joan Bonalsky: Exactly. I think it would be better if we could help out more on a humanitarian basis like our Doctors without Borders, our relief supplies.

(?): Like Red Cross.

Joan Bonalsky: Exactly.

Stefanie Shapiro: So do you think, about the policeman of the world, do you think that the saying, you can't help everybody everywhere but you can help someone somewhere. Do you think that saying really applies to how you feel about what the US should do with the people of the world?

Joan Bonalsky: Boy, you are really... I can see your future. You're going to be in politics, that's for sure.

Brenda Velasco: Or a very good reporter.

Joan Bonalsky: And very, very good because it is good to be informed as to what is going on in the world. But some of these questions, quite frankly, are a little too deep for me.

Brenda Velasco: And we have to conclude the interview now because your bus is here to take you. So I want to thank Mrs. Joan Marie Smalley Bonalsky, Mrs. B, and I want to thank Dennis Reilly (Colonia Middle School), Stefanie Shapiro (Woodbridge Middle School), Cassandra Chas (Fords Middle School), Geoffrey Glinn (Colonia Middle School), Alex Boros (Fords Middle School) and Daniel Korab (Fords Middle School).

Alex Boros: Can I ask one more question?

Brenda Velasco: What? Go.

Alex Boros: What's your favorite book?

Joan Bonalsky: Favorite book, oh I have many of them. **To Kill a Mockingbird** is one, (inaudible), and the Bible. I think the bible is my very favorite.

Stefanie Shapiro: What's your favorite part of Woodbridge?

Joan Bonalsky: My hometown, Fords.

Brenda Velasco: And she is a Fords girl all the way, loyal to the end. Okay, thank you very much. It's about 11:10 A.M. The interview went on. We had some good questions but thank you all very much.

Joan Bonalsky: And thank you boys and girls. You're really a good bunch of people. Good questions and I think you're all very, very aware and good luck to all of you.

Brenda Velasco: And this is our future.

Joan Bonalsky: Yes, and it's bright. It's a bright future when we have students like you.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, thank you.

Joan Bonalsky: And thank you.

.....

After the formal interview concluded, Mrs. B reminisced on why she was such an avid reader. Ferbels, a store on New Brunswick Avenue, had a soda fountain and sold magazines. Since Mrs. B was always in the store reading magazines, the proprietor offered her a job when she was 13 or 14 years old. She worked behind the soda fountain; and if a stranger came in the store, she was told to say that she was the daughter.