

Oral History Interview
Joe Nigro
WH030

(written transcript and digital audio)

On February 27, 2009 at 9:30 A.M., Joe Nigro, who is 91 years old, was interviewed at the Woodbridge Main Library by Brenda Velasco.

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

My name is Joe Nigro. I was born on August 8, 1918. I was born in Elizabeth, New Jersey and entered the Army during World War II on July 21, 1941. I served 15 months in the Army. I was married on January 12, 1942.

2. How long have you lived in Woodbridge?

I moved to Woodbridge in July, 1946. I purchased a home in Fords on 23 South Lewis Street.

Brenda Velasco: You still live there?

Joe Nigro: I still live in the same house as of February, 2009, right now.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, so you're a long time resident?

Joe Nigro: Where I live in Fords, there was no Shore Crest, no Crestview, no Mount Laurel; there were no home there. It was all woods off Liberty Street, off of Ford Avenue. Where Ford Avenue is now, there were no homes there. It used to be a picnic ground by the Lady of Peace over there.

Brenda Velasco: And what was that.....

Joe Nigro: That was what they called the Shore Crest homes, the Colonial home and the Lafayette Estate homes.

Brenda Velasco: Right, they just weren't there.

Joe Nigro: They weren't there.

Brenda Velasco: So you were like living in a.....

Joe Nigro: It was beautiful. We were catching fish where Fords Junior High is now. There was a lake there, a manmade lake I think, and they fed the fish for fishing.

Brenda Velasco: Wow, what a great place because you came from Peterstown in Elizabeth.

Joe Nigro: Came from Peterstown.

Brenda Velasco: What a contrast.

Joe Nigro: My mother said to me, "why did you move to the farms". I didn't know what she meant when she said that, now I know.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, the contrast from Peterstown which was so congested with people sitting out on their stoops and you came and.....

Joe Nigro: And guess what, I have the same kind of a stoop. I still have it. Not even a stoop, it's really like a sundeck with the windows and you can sit out there. I have a beautiful home. It's an old home but a beautiful home.

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

Well I happen to come to Fords because in those days there was a lot of dancing going around: make believe ballrooms and orchestras. We traveled different places to find out where the dances were and we found out there were a lot of dances in the Perth Amboy area and Carteret

area and we decided we were going to hitchhike there and go to the dances. That's where I met my love, Gertrude.

Brenda Velasco: Where was Gertrude from?

Joe Nigro: Gertrude was from Perth Amboy. Her father was in the automobile business, a dealer. I fell in love with her the first time I saw her. We've been in love up until even right now while she's gone to heaven. I like the atmosphere in Fords because where I live it was very congested (Peterstown); and when I came out here it was like in dreamland and you know the neighbors were different and I loved it. That's how I wound up coming into this area.

Brenda Velasco: We're glad you did. How long were you married to Gertrude because I know she recently died.

Joe Nigro: I was married to Gertrude 67 years.

Brenda Velasco: Wow!

Joe Nigro: And we were going together, I met her 70 years; 70 years I met here. We were going together for 70 years as lovers.

Brenda Velasco: That's terrific.

4. What physical changes have occurred over the years in the area you lived?

-houses, streets, services, stores, houses of worship, schools, etc.

Oh, just like I told you now, the houses were becoming very old. The streets were in horrible shape. My street that I moved into was what I would call a gravel street or cinder street and they would come around every summer and spread it with oil so the dust didn't come up. We had no curbs and we had no sidewalks; we have that right now.

Brenda Velasco: No sidewalks?

Joe Nigro: We have sidewalks.

Brenda Velasco: Oh, you do have sidewalks.

Joe Nigro: Everybody has a sidewalk and everybody has curbs and everybody has driveways.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, and how many houses were on your block, do you remember?

Joe Nigro: The same amount that's there now. You mean, how many were there when I got there?

Brenda Velasco: Yes, on your block, South Lewis.

Joe Nigro: Five on one side and on the other side were six: eleven houses.

Brenda Velasco: Eleven houses on your block; so your street was built up?

Joe Nigro: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: But what about the other parts of Fords that you were telling me about?

Joe Nigro: There were no streets, they were all wooded areas.

Brenda Velasco: Alright.

Joe Nigro: All wooded and all the houses off Liberty Street were not there. All the houses on Ford Avenue, which was called the Lafayette Estates, Shore Crest and Colonia?, they weren't there: on both sides of Ford Avenue now. I mean Concannon Drive and all of those, there was nothing there. By School #25, there was nothing there. Do you know how many schools we had when I moved there?

Brenda Velasco: How many schools?

Joe Nigro: I'm trying to figure out. We had School #8 and School #10 in Keasbey, School #14 in Fords, Port Reading School....

Brenda Velasco: Did you have School #7 in Fords too?

Joe Nigro: #7 and #14, yes.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Joe Nigro: And I remember there were other towns. Where do you live now?

Brenda Velasco: Well, I live in Colonia.

Joe Nigro: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: But I just want to hear about you; I want to hear about you and Fords because Colonia was built up much later.

Joe Nigro: That's about what we had. We had no Menlo Park schools; we didn't have any.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, then, where did your children go to school?

Joe Nigro: I only had one son. He went to Our Lady of Peace School and from there he went to Woodbridge.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, Woodbridge Middle School?

Joe Nigro: Woodbridge Junior High, it was, at his time

Brenda Velasco: I'm sorry, right, because.....

Joe Nigro: At that time it was a junior high.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, Woodbridge Junior High because there was no Middle School or Junior High in Fords.

Joe Nigro: And at that time, I can tell you this which is important. The students from Port Reading and Menlo Park had to come into Fords Middle School, Fords Junior High, because there were no schools and when that took place they had five elementary schools and three junior highs, at that time. That was in the 1960s now.

Brenda Velasco: Right.

Joe Nigro: They built five elementary and three junior highs. A few years later, not too far, they built the Avenel Junior High, that all came out later.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, alright, so Woodbridge literally exploded after World War II? They exploded.

Joe Nigro: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: So you saw it before the explosion.

Joe Nigro: Yes, I saw that.

Brenda Velasco: Then that's the post-World War II housing explosion. What about the services? Did you have garbage pickup back then?

Joe Nigro: We had garbage pickup, yes.

Brenda Velasco: Alright, did you have mail delivery?

Joe Nigro: We had mail delivery.

Brenda Velasco: Alright, you mentioned that the main church for you was Our Lady of Peace, okay.

Joe Nigro: And in Fords there was a church called St. John's Byzantine, which is no longer there. It's there but somebody else took over. Then there was that church on the corner of Second and Ford Avenue, oh, boy.

Brenda Velasco: Was it a Lutheran church?

Joe Nigro: I know it so well. No, it's a Presbyterian; no, it's not Presbyterian. What's the one that's almost like the Catholic Church?

Brenda Velasco: Episcopalian?

Joe Nigro: It's on the corner, right across from Flynn's Funeral Parlor.

Brenda Velasco: I know the church you're talking about, I just can't....

Joe Nigro: That's a nice church; it's a school now and a church. When I went in Fords, where the Our Lady of Peace now is there was a mass from Hungary.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, there was a mass.....

Joe Nigro: Hungarian.

Brenda Velasco: It was Hungarian, okay.

Joe Nigro: And now that's gone; Our Lady of Peace is there.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, and what about the stores?

Joe Nigro: Do you want me to mention them all?

Brenda Velasco: Can you remember them all?

Joe Nigro: Sure.

Brenda Velasco: Go ahead, what did you have there?

Joe Nigro: Well, the first thing that happened in Fords was we had, what do you call these, lunch wagons on the corner of Crows Mill Road and New Brunswick Avenue.

Brenda Velasco: Right.

Joe Nigro: And across the street from there, the opposite corner, we had the Alamo Tavern and Dance Hall.

Brenda Velasco: Oh, well there's your dancing; you weren't too far from your dancing then.

Joe Nigro: On the opposite corner, this was the third corner, was George's Body Shop, for cars. On the corner of Lewis Street, South Lewis Street and New Brunswick Avenue, used to be sort of a little store. They used to have all kinds of, where you would go and buy clothes.

Brenda Velasco: A clothing store?

Joe Nigro: Yes, well yes, that didn't last too long.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Joe Nigro: And next door to that we had Herbert's Garage, a mechanic.

Brenda Velasco: Are there any stores there that were there.....

Joe Nigro: They're there but they're not in use. Next to that was Bart's Barbershop, which is now a video store. Then we had Fords Flower Shop and Berkowitz's Butcher and Grocery and we had Cislo's Liquor Store, Sam's Bar and Grill. I don't know if you remember that place?

Brenda Velasco: No, I don't.

Joe Nigro: Not that far off; do you want me to keep going?

Brenda Velasco: Alright, but you had quite a selection. You had a butcher shop, a barbershop....

Joe Nigro: Well, we had the pharmacy at that time.

Brenda Velasco: Alright.

Joe Nigro: We had Lund's Appliance Store with a gas pump on the sidewalk; they were selling gas. That's how they put the gas on the pump.

Brenda Velasco: Not any more, okay.

Joe Nigro: Then we had, what they called, Gussy's Confectionery Store. Then next to that was Westlake's Gas Station and Auto Body/Mechanic Shop.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, I think you covered quite a few. Did you have any movies there or anything?

Joe Nigro: We had the Fords Playhouse, they called it. Right now the Mayor is thinking about making that a.....

Brenda Velasco: Arts, performing arts...

Joe Nigro: Yes, you know about that?

Brenda Velasco: Yes, yes I do.

Joe Nigro: Yes, you were there that night.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, that would be great, that would be great, but you didn't need a car.

Joe Nigro: We had the funeral director, Mitruska; he's still there.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Joe Nigro: And next to him was Dr. Cooper. There's a little more but you don't want too many.

Brenda Velasco: Alright, so you had doctors, you had the funeral parlor, you had the church all along the.....

Joe Nigro: We had the confectionery stores.

Brenda Velasco: The confectionery, you had quite.....

Joe Nigro: Everything was right around us.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, you could walk.

Joe Nigro: In those days that's all you needed.

Brenda Velasco: But you could walk there.

Joe Nigro: We had the butchers, we had, yes.

Brenda Velasco: You could walk there. These were basically all mom and pop stores. Alright, did you have any hardware stores there too?

Joe Nigro: Yes, we had the Fords Hardware Store.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Joe Nigro: And then we had another hardware store called Blumbergs, across the street.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, you've got a good memory.

Joe Nigro: I can go on.

Brenda Velasco: Well you've covered.....

Joe Nigro: I have, I have. I was really very gifted with that, I was.

Brenda Velasco: You've got good recall.

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

Brenda Velasco: How about the public buildings in this area?

Joe Nigro: Such as what.

Brenda Velasco: Let's see, how about the post office. Where was that located?

Joe Nigro: The post office was on New Brunswick Avenue. Wait, I'm sorry, hold on a minute.

Brenda Velasco: Yes.

Joe Nigro: The post office was where the, this is a good one for you, the Fords Lady's.....

Brenda Velasco: Woman's club.

Joe Nigro: Woman's club, that little building.

Brenda Velasco: Yes.

Joe Nigro: And across from there was the firehouse on Corielle Street.

Brenda Velasco: Right.

Joe Nigro: I forgot about that. And what was the other question you asked me?

Brenda Velasco: The post office.

Joe Nigro: Now the post office moved on New Brunswick Avenue and now they're on Ford Avenue in Fords.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, I think they're still on New Brunswick Avenue, aren't they, the post office?

Joe Nigro: I'm talking about the library.

Brenda Velasco: You're talking about the library.

Joe Nigro: No, the women's club was the library, I'm backwards on that.

Brenda Velasco: Right, okay.

Joe Nigro: The Fords Post Office was on New Brunswick Avenue across from the senior building which was between.....

Brenda Velasco: Olsen Towers.

Joe Nigro: Across from there, yes.

Brenda Velasco: Yes,

Joe Nigro: That would be between Corielle and King George Road.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, yes.

Joe Nigro: Here's another good one you got to put down. We had Butler's Grocery Store and Butcher; that was an old one.

Brenda Velasco: And that was on New Brunswick Avenue.

Joe Nigro: Butler's was on New Brunswick Avenue right next to the post office, yes.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Joe Nigro: It was owned by a local guy and we had, you should put this one down too, the A&P.

Brenda Velasco: You had an A&P?

Joe Nigro: The A&P where the Ronice Building is, in there. (Location was across from Olsen Towers) We had it made.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, you did.

Joe Nigro: We had everything in the backyard.

Brenda Velasco: You had everything in the backyard.

Joe Nigro: We had everything you want.

Brenda Velasco: You could walk it.

Joe Nigro: With a baker; we had baking people.

Brenda Velasco: And where was that bakery?

Joe Nigro: That bakery was on New Brunswick Avenue. Let's see the name of it was, you'd remember the name too: Mooneys. (Fords Bakery was located across from Our Lady of Peace in Edison)

Brenda Velasco: So you had everything right on New Brunswick Avenue.

Joe Nigro: Oh, we had.....

Brenda Velasco: And you still had the woods around you.

Joe Nigro: Oh, yes, all the woods.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, okay, alright and the library you mentioned was.....

Joe Nigro: The library was on New Brunswick Avenue.

Brenda Velasco: Corielle and New Brunswick.

Joe Nigro: Between Corielle and King George Road.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Joe Nigro: The old library; you might find some of this stuff in that book they had.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, on Fords. Yes, that's what we'll do.

6. What did you do for recreation?

This was in Fords now.

Brenda Velasco: Yes.

Joe Nigro: In my days, when I was living in Elizabeth, our recreations were well planned, for instance, we didn't have basketball courts, we had what we called a peach basket nailed to a pole and later on the Administration decided we should have some place to play and it was Depression time, very severe, and all stores were closed so they took the largest stores and had us use them as recreation areas where you could do anything you wanted in there.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, this was in Elizabeth though.

Joe Nigro: In Elizabeth now.

Brenda Velasco: Aha, that was during the Depression, right.

Joe Nigro: That was very bad. During the Depression I was 9 or 10 years old and I went down Elizabeth Avenue in Elizabeth.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Joe Nigro: That bank, the Harmonia Bank.

Brenda Velasco: Yes.

Joe Nigro: A woman was pulling her hair out. The people wanted to get in the gates; they had all the gates closed. They came to get everything the night before. The money was in there and they wanted their money and they got it.

Brenda Velasco: That was a frightening period for a lot of people because we didn't have insured bank deposits.

Joe Nigro: Let me see now, here, during recreation, I was already a man so I couldn't give you that much anyhow.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, well, you liked your dancing.

Joe Nigro: Oh, I loved to dance.

Brenda Velasco: So when you got married did you still go to the Alamo?

Joe Nigro: Well, we went to the Alamo and we went to the, what's the name of that place in Perth Amboy? You know where the movies used to be in Perth Amboy?

Brenda Velasco: Oh, they had a couple of movie houses in Perth Amboy.

Joe Nigro: There was a club there, I forget what they called it, not the Elks; we used to go dancing there every Saturday and have \$2.00 lunches.

Brenda Velasco: \$2.00 for lunch.

Joe Nigro: \$2.00 for lunch.

Brenda Velasco: That was a bargain, now.

Joe Nigro: That was a lot of money then.

Brenda Velasco: Yes.

Joe Nigro: That was a lot of money.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, now.

Joe Nigro: What the heck was the name of that? It wasn't the Elks, it wasn't the Knights, it wasn't the Eagles; we went to all these places, I can't think of the name of that one.

Brenda Velasco: You sure did. Alright, with Our Lady of Peace then, did you go to their functions?

Joe Nigro: Yes, Our Lady of Peace used to have what they call comedy nights, which they still have now and have outside people coming in from the city. But in those days our own people created their own and two of them that I remember was Chief Egan and Henry, he was in charge of the post office, Hansen I think his name was. They got together different people and put up their own comedies for our people.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, so it was local.

Joe Nigro: It was local.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, yes, yes.

Joe Nigro: We used to go to dances everywhere. We went to the Hungarian Hall in Woodbridge, we went to the Hungarian Hall in Carteret; this was the big one, we went to the Raritan Ballroom in Perth Amboy.

Brenda Velasco: Wow!

Joe Nigro: That was the big one. Everybody met there.

Brenda Velasco: And where was that located?

Joe Nigro: Perth Amboy on New Brunswick Avenue above a store. We used to stand outside looking for change so we could go into the place; we didn't have no money to go in.

Brenda Velasco: Do you remember how much it cost?

Joe Nigro: 25 cents. We used to go to the movies, we went to the Perth Amboy one, the RKO Theatre, the Ditmus, the Majestic and one other one; that's it. (Strand, Crescent)

Brenda Velasco: Okay, and how about, for recreation, going back to the woods around here, were there picnic groves?

Joe Nigro: Yes, there were picnic groves. Our Lady of Peace owned the ground, I think, but they called it Pfeiffer's picnic grounds. Pfeiffer's used to run it, I think, and they paid rent to the church.

Brenda Velasco: Did you have Fords Park yet?

Joe Nigro: Yes, we had Fords Park and they used to have what they call, and the people were all upset about this... These kids would make their own scooters, they were motorized and they'd put all these bales of hay around the track, big bales of hay, and they were racing and they were all out of towners, out of town people. And the Fords people were upset about this: "why are you letting them use our park when we need that park?" They were paying for it, I guess.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Joe Nigro: And we remember going from Fords to Woodbridge to see the Woodbridge Bears play.

Brenda Velasco: Right, right, right. That was a semi-professional.....

Joe Nigro: Yes, that's right where the Berkeley School is now, that was right there in Woodbridge. I wish I was a writer, I swear, I often said this. My life alone-had a great life.

Brenda Velasco: Good.

Joe Nigro: But I can't write; I'm not a writer.

Brenda Velasco: But you can talk.

Joe Nigro: I'm a talker, I'm a big talker. I talk too much.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, that's why we got you here. Do you think we covered enough for recreation?

Joe Nigro: Well, recreation, I can tell what we did in Fords. In my time, we had the Little League, which you started; we didn't have them then.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, was your son able to.....

Joe Nigro: My son was a Little Leaguer.

Brenda Velasco: So that was started after World War II?

Joe Nigro: Yes, yes, and when we started the Little League there were such an enormous amount of kids that they stopped at certain ages; they couldn't take the others. So I complained about it and they said, what do you suggest? I said, well, I suggest putting this in. These were 4, 5 and 7 year old kids that they didn't want. They said, okay, you got somebody to help you, we'll help you run it. So they gave me a couple of baseball bats, a couple of baseballs, catcher masks, protective chest masks and bases and we had to go to a house across from the ball field asking the woman if we could put a box and then lock up the stuff in it. Then every other captain that would come in had a key for that and would use it. That's how we played at that time.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, what age group.....

Joe Nigro: We called it the Midget League.

Brenda Velasco: The Midget League, okay.

Joe Nigro: Yes, we called it the Midget League. Now they're calling it something else, I don't know what they're calling it now.

Brenda Velasco: Pee Wee League?

Joe Nigro: Something like that, yes. They changed it.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, so the Midget League that you helped start was for what age group?

Joe Nigro: That was between 5 and 8.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, do you remember the year?

Joe Nigro: I would say about '68 and the fellow in charge at that time was a very popular guy, Tommy Jago.

Brenda Velasco: Oh, right.

Joe Nigro: He was the president.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, great.

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

That was Depression time.

Brenda Velasco: Well, you moved in after World War II.

Joe Nigro: I moved in after World War II, right. Is that what this concerns then, this one here?

Brenda Velasco: Yes, what was the main....

Joe Nigro: Oh, I went ahead of this one. What do you mean by focal point?

Brenda Velasco: Where did everybody sort of congregate? New Brunswick Avenue it seems to be from what you're telling me. Where did you meet everybody?

Joe Nigro: I'm trying to think now. Well, we spent a lot of time at the annex, across from the church.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, Our Lady of Peace.

Joe Nigro: Yes, and then the cafeteria below the church.

Brenda Velasco: And that's where you had some of your dances and parties from the church.

Joe Nigro: Yes, some of them, yes. Not as much as other places but they tried to keep us occupied I guess. I'm trying to think of what else we can think about, where we gathered. Most of our gathering was mostly at, like on weekends when we'd go to places like the Moose Hall in Woodbridge and we went to so many places; we went around. The Alamo had dances on the weekends.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Joe Nigro: Well, this was in Hopelawn; there was what they called the Village Grove. That's where we spent a lot of time.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Joe Nigro: In Hopelawn.

Brenda Velasco: And that was on weekends?

Joe Nigro: Yes, and this is important.

Brenda Velasco: Yes.

Joe Nigro: We had a dump, where our garbage was dumped, in Fords/Keasbey. Do you know where Dalina's Tavern is?

Brenda Velasco: Yes.

Joe Nigro: Alright, when you cross that bridge on your left behind School #8 was a dump area where they had a big hole and they used to dump their garbage in there.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Joe Nigro: And now there are homes there; well the homes were there but no new homes there. Those homes that are there now are owned by Joe DeMarino, those old homes.

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

Brenda Velasco: When you lived in Fords, which you still do-you never moved out. What did you like about it?

Joe Nigro: I loved the area because I thought it was, like I said in the beginning, it was way different from where I lived and to me it was like a novelty, you know, to come into a town like this. I'll tell you, it was such a great town that's why you got what you have now: Fords. Fords is the only area in Woodbridge that's built up more than any other area.

Brenda Velasco: No, you are built up.

Joe Nigro: Let's face it, even Colonia is as big as Fords built up, you know what I mean.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, very built up.

Joe Nigro: Very. We have a Junior High there which you never had. We have School #25 which we never had. You know who took me out the other day to lunch? Dinner really. Miss McGreevey.

Brenda Velasco: Ah, Jack.

Joe Nigro: No, Sharon

Brenda Velasco: Oh, Sharon.

Joe Nigro: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Miss McGreevey, okay. She's a principle at one of our schools.

Joe Nigro: Yes, I've been visiting Jay there, one of our janitors and every time I'm there I meet her, you know. And this one time Jay had invited us over to his home for a social and she was there. I got acquainted with her and every time I came to the school she greeted me like she knew me all her life. I said to her, I'd like to go to lunch with you one day. She said, you're not taking me to lunch I'm taking you to dinner.

Brenda Velasco: Boy!

Joe Nigro: I said, when and she said, anytime you say.

Brenda Velasco: That was nice.

Joe Nigro: I'm always available.

Brenda Velasco: That was nice.

Joe Nigro: You know who else I took to lunch?

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Joe Nigro: Dennis and Anthony and Joe Joe.

Brenda Velasco: Oh, okay.

Joe Nigro: I took them to dinner at the Villa Borghese.

Brenda Velasco: That's a good place.

Joe Nigro: On New Brunswick Avenue.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, yes.

Joe Nigro: My Italian friends.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, that's a good place.

Joe Nigro: Your father knows them good: the Russo boys.

Brenda Velasco: Good place to go.

Joe Nigro: Okay, what have we got here now?

Brenda Velasco: Okay, so you liked your section in Fords.

Joe Nigro: Here it is right here.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, yes.

Joe Nigro: What I experienced in Woodbridge was that it was a well planned community and it seemed more family oriented, very clean, and very concerned about the citizens and the people that lived there. That's it.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

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

Not that I can remember anything special. I mean everything was special to me. Just the fact that they did the streets, they did the curbs, they did the sidewalks, they gave us sewers, you know, all of that.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, because of the infrastructure improvements then.

Joe Nigro: Very well.

Brenda Velasco: Because where you left, Peterstown, they had sidewalks, curbs and streets. So you took a chance coming here.

Joe Nigro: When you're in love you're blind.

Brenda Velasco: Hey.

Joe Nigro: You're blind when you're in love. You know that.

Brenda Velasco: That's right.

Joe Nigro: You were in love.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, yes, still am. Okay,

Joe Nigro: You're a pretty girl too.

Brenda Velasco: Thank you. You're trying to flirt right now just like you got with Sharon.

Joe Nigro: That's not a flirt.

Brenda Velasco: That's a compliment. Thank you, thank you.

Joe Nigro: No you are a pretty girl. I always admired you.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, so any accidents that you can think of?

Joe Nigro: As to what?

Brenda Velasco: In Fords, in Fords that you experienced?

Joe Nigro: Well we had an explosion in Heyden Chemical; very severe explosion.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, where was Heyden Chemical?

Joe Nigro: You know where Dunkin Donuts is?

Brenda Velasco: Yes, yes.

Joe Nigro: That street?

Brenda Velsaco: Yes.

Joe Nigro: Down that street.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, so King George Road.

Joe Nigro: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, was that Hatko Chemical?

Joe Nigro: It was Heyden. (Heyden was a subsidiary of Tenneco)

Brenda Velasco: Do you recall when this was Joe?

Joe Nigro: Let me see. Yes, somebody I know was killed there with that.

Brenda Velasco: Wow!

Joe Nigro: One of the higher windows that they cut knocked him and killed him: Dudic or Dudack boy. I'd say about '75 or '74, somewhere in that area; it might be close to that area.

(In 1958, John A. Dudik was killed at Heyden Chemical. In March of 1968, there was another accident at Heyden Chemical and John Seyler was killed).

Brenda Velasco: Okay, okay, I wasn't aware of that.

Joe Nigro: How could you get information like that if you wanted it?

Brenda Velasco: Oh, we could go through the papers.

Joe Nigro: Yes, you can do it that way.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, we can do that.

10. What do you like about Woodbridge today?

Brenda Velasco: Because you're still here. You still haven't left Lewis Street.

Joe Nigro: Well what I like right now is what the Mayor is doing. He's very involved in keeping people occupied and doing the best they can for the people and the Community Center.

Brenda Velasco: Do you go to the Community Center?

Joe Nigro: Off and on.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, good.

Joe Nigro: The only thing I don't like about the Community Center is I thought it should have been run by the town instead of the people that are doing it. Can we do that and make the money? There's a lot of money there.

Brenda Velasco: There's a lot of money. We pay management. That's their main goal is to manage it and provide the activities. We oversee them.

Joe Nigro: Do they pay the town?

Brenda Velasco: Yes they do.

Joe Nigro: What are the percentages?

Brenda Velasco: Off hand, I don't know. But we have income coming in.

Joe Nigro: Is it better for them to run it than the town?

Brenda Velasco: Yes, yes, they're experts. They're experts and they know how to do it. They've got Ys all over.

Joe Nigro: Well I was there a couple of times. I know, I know.

Brenda Velasco: USA Skates.

Joe Nigro: I went there for a couple of parties for kids.

Brenda Velasco: Yes.

Joe Nigro: They invited me, the family. If I was going to put skates on I wouldn't know what the hell to do.

Brenda Velasco: Roller skating or ice skating?

Joe Nigro: Roller skating and I saw these little kids that couldn't even skate. I said I'm going to wind up tripping one of them and kill them; I can't go on that.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, but you do go and that's good.

Joe Nigro: Right now where the Community Center is used to be an incinerator; did you know that?

Brenda Velasco: I knew there was a landfill there, okay.

Joe Nigro: That was an incinerator.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Joe Nigro: And the man used to fire that incinerator all day long. One of our garbage men backed into it and got burned to death.

Brenda Velasco: Wow!

Joe Nigro: He got in the truck, in the back, and the fellow that was driving it slipped on the gas pedal, backwards, and he knocked him into the fire.

Brenda Velasco: Oh, what a tragedy.

Joe Nigro: Did you hear about the one the other day?

Brenda Velasco: Yes, the wood chipper.

Joe Nigro: How the hell could that happen? How could that happen? What was that guy doing on the conveyor belt?

Brenda Velasco: It was unfortunate, that was unfortunate.

Joe Nigro: He's dead; he's got nothing there.

Brenda Velasco: No, not with a wood chipper.

Joe Nigro: My God! What a horrible thing to happen.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, yes.

Joe Nigro: He was an immigrant right?

Brenda Velasco: Yes, he was from Honduras and it probably could be a language barrier too. That was an awful, awful accident.

Joe Nigro: I was sick when I saw that. I was thinking to myself, how could this happen? One guy saw it.

Brenda Velasco: That was an awful, awful accident.

Joe Nigro: By a wood chipper.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, yes.

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

Yes, I have a son, daughter-in-law, a granddaughter that teaches special education in School #14, and I also have nieces, nephews and cousins surrounding the area.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Joe Nigro: That's about it.

Brenda Velasco: Your son and daughter-in-law still live in Woodbridge though.

Joe Nigro: No, they're in Old Bridge now.

Brenda Velasco: Oh, they're in Old Bridge.

Joe Nigro: They were living here but they just moved over. They went to school here, high school.

Brenda Velasco: So they're a product of Woodbridge.

Joe Nigro: Yes, very much.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, anything else?

Joe Nigro: He's 61 years old and Sherry is 34.

Brenda Velasco: Your granddaughter?

Joe Nigro: Yes, she at School #14.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Joe Nigro: Special ed.

Brenda Velasco: Does Sherry live in.....

Joe Nigro: No, now they moved to Spotswood.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, alright, but they're close to you.

Joe Nigro: My mother fell when I moved out of town. She said she was sick and said, "How can you do this?"

Brenda Velasco: You were her son.

Joe Nigro: I was her favorite son.

Brenda Velasco: Not only a son but the favorite son.

Joe Nigro: Oh, she used to embarrass me. My mother had nine children. I swear to God. When I was about 8, or 9, or 10 years old she said this is my son, the best son of all of them. You know why my mother loved me so much? I felt so sorry for her, the way she had to work and wash clothes by hand, no machines. And before I would go to school in the mornings, I would sweep the floor for her. You know with nine kids you had to sweep that floor.

Brenda Velasco: Of course, after eating.

Joe Nigro: I would go upstairs up in the attic where they made rooms for us later on and she had these mattresses with cotton in them, okay, and pockets, you follow me? They were mattresses filled with cotton balls.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Joe Nigro: And everyday you would have to put your hands in these pockets and fluff them around and go around the other way and fluff them around.

Brenda Velasco: Right, right, right.

Joe Nigro: And she would say: “ Joe, you got to go to school; it’s getting late”. I would lay there every damn night and that’s why she liked me.

Brenda Velasco: You helped her.

Joe Nigro: I used to shine shoes and I made more money than my father. My father worked, during the Depression I’m telling you, he worked in Singers. He worked two days for \$4.00 a day; \$8.00 a week. The next week was \$3.00 a day three days a week and I made \$40.00 or \$50.00 just shining shoes.

Brenda Velasco: How much did you make a week?

Joe Nigro: Between \$40.00 and \$50.00.

Brenda Velasco: Wow!

Joe Nigro: Because people felt sorry for me. My uncle had a barber shop in the Levy Brothers building; Levy’s had three or four floors.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, that was on Broad Street. (Elizabeth)

Joe Nigro: All offices. So he brought me in there. I shined shoes in his barber shop and when there was a lull, I would go to the lawyer’s office. They would put their shoes in the hallway and I would get on my knees and do their shoes and leave them over there and they would put the money in the shoe. They knew I was poor and they helped me a lot, you know.

Brenda Velasco: You made a lot.

Joe Nigro: I did.

Brenda Velasco: You made a lot; \$40.00 or \$50.00 during the Depression.

Joe Nigro: This is very important I want to tell you this. Now I was giving my mother every penny I made. When I got married, my mother gave me a bankbook with \$600.00 in it that I was giving her throughout the years.

Brenda Velasco: She saved it.

Joe Nigro: She saved it plus I got her a whole set of mohair covers for her living room which had worn out and I bought my father a coat and I bought my mother a coat with my money. I wanted to buy them. The first day my father wore the coat he went to a Newark wedding and they stole the coat. That’s why my mother liked me so much.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, you were very generous.

Joe Nigro: She liked everybody; she was good to everybody.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, yes, yes.

Joe Nigro: That’s about it girl.

Brenda Velasco: Alright, you did good. Good memory here for somebody who is 91 years old. I hope I have your gift of a memory.

Joe Nigro: I have a very good memory, I swear to God. I can tell you a story. I was 2 years old, this is important, and I used to say to my mother and the people, "I was at your wedding". They thought I was a nut and everybody would say, "Joe was at my mother's wedding". Well later on in life, way later, I would say, why did I keep saying that? Well, my father's brother got married and, you know, an occasion like that and it was a house on Fourth Avenue, one of these concrete house and my father's brother, and of course his wife my aunt, they were at that wedding. At 2 years old, I thought it was my mother's wedding, but it was my aunt and my uncle's wedding.

Brenda Velasco: Oh!

Joe Nigro: And when I told my mother that, she said, no wonder you've been saying that you were at my wedding. They were married, like my aunt and my uncle.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, yes, yes, good memory. Well, okay, I thank you very very much.

Joe Nigro: I thank you.

Brenda Velasco: For finding the time and I'm glad you were here.

Joe Nigro: I'm glad I'm with you.

Brenda Velasco: And another 91 years for you.

Joe Nigro: Oh, boy.

Brenda Velasco: Oh, boy is right.

Joe Nigro: Oh, boy, come on.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, thank you again.