

Oral History Interview

Joe Urso

WH022

(written transcript and digital audio)

On December 2, 2008, at 11:00 A.M., Joe Urso was interviewed at the Woodbridge Main Library by Brenda Velasco

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

My name is Joseph V. Urso.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, and what was your date of birth?

Joe Urso: January 13, 1927. I'm 81 years old.....

Brenda Velasco: With a sharp mind.

Joe Urso: And will be 82 very soon now.

2. How long have you lived in Woodbridge?

I moved to Colonia from Newark in 1936.

Brenda Velasco: So you've lived here quite a long time, 1936.

Joe Urso: I have been associated with the Municipality of Woodbridge since 1936.

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

My father and uncle both had lived on a farm in Palermo, Sicily and my uncle encouraged my father to do the same thing now and this way, because of the bad times, we were in a Depression, we could grow some of our own vegetables and help the life of the family. Luckily, he chose this particular property in Colonia.

Brenda Velasco: Where was this location in Colonia that you lived?

Joe Urso: It's now located on North Penn Avenue and Inman Avenue. This property, right now, is occupied by the firehouse using the front as a parking lot and, on the side, three or four homes that are built on the property.

Brenda Velasco: So when your father first moved, do you recall, you were not that old I know that, but you recall how much.....

Joe Urso: 9 years old.

Brenda Velasco: 9 years old. Do you recall how much money he spent for the land?

Joe Urso: To rent?

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Joe Urso: No more than \$20.00 because his wages were \$20.00 a week.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, so the rent was covered by his wages and you had a big piece of property then for a farm?

Joe Urso: Yes, we did. We did.

Brenda Velasco: And, as you said, the Colonia Fire District 12 is now located there; no longer your house. But you still live in Colonia?

Joe Urso: No, I live, right now, in Edison.

Brenda Velasco: Ah, okay.

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

Well Colonia was, as close as you can describe it, as a farm area. It was very desolate. I mean, there was no such thing as your neighbor. You had to walk a distance to the next house. Across the street from us was the Iorio farm, which was a truck farm, and probably the only one in Woodbridge Township. All the neighbors around them had also little farms. That was a necessity of life for everybody to have a farm or a big garden. I loved going to the Iorio farm because it was across the street and there was always activities there.

Brenda Velasco: What were some of the activities at the Iorio farm?

Joe Urso: Well, in the springtime, they would be planting in the hot beds and it seems like a simple job but when you're getting one little plant, and you're putting it into the ground and you're doing a farm, it's not like doing what you would do around the house today.

Brenda Velasco: That was labor intensive; back breaking work.

Joe Urso: Always back breaking and, of course, throughout the year we would go to the yard and help hoe and cut the weeds down and they had a car that they used for a truck and it was a thrill to pile into the car and get a ride of the hill. You know things of that nature. So there was always an activity. Then in the fall of the year, because they were Italians, they made tomato paste and I would sit there and help them cut the tomatoes and things of that nature. I always marveled to go in their house because hanging on their kitchen ceiling was dried out peppers and things of that nature which, you know, you fry with the eggs and stuff like that and it was a thrill just to be with these people because, first of all, they were very nice people, and there was always something to do, always.

Brenda Velasco: Now, where their farm was, what is now?

Joe Urso: It's a couple of hundred homes there. I know the gentleman who built the houses, Don Arino.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, Don Aronow?

Joe Urso: Do you want me to tell you about him?

Brenda Velasco: Sure.

Joe Urso: Well, Don Arino, I worked for him for a span of two different years. A very successful builder in central New Jersey and he was so fed up with construction that he moved to Florida and built motor boats which are called Cigarette, one of the most famous of all boats made and unfortunately, not unfortunately, he became a champion race car driver and boats. I remember him coming to New York and being interviewed on the local station and I said, gee, I know that guy, and unfortunately he was assassinated. I believe he was assassinated because the United States Government said that if you take money from anybody you have to report it and when the boat cost such a large sum of money I suppose the drug dealers of that area, who were refused a boat, assassinated him. That's my belief.

Brenda Velasco: Okay and I know you've become a very important builder in Woodbridge Township. Did he have any influence on you? You worked for him too, you said, right?

Joe Urso: No, I was a contractor for him.

Brenda Velasco: Oh, okay.

Joe Urso: And we associated because he was a young man, like me, at the time and he was friendly, I mean, what else can I say.

Brenda Velasco: Alright, what were some of the other changes? Now we know that the firehouse, Colonia Firehouse, is right where your property is. Did you have any garbage pickup?

Joe Urso: Nothing.

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

Brenda Velasco: Did you have libraries?

Joe Urso: No, at that time, in Colonia, we had no public facilities at all. No firehouse, no library, no hospitals or first aid squads, nothing, really nothing at all. No stores or transportation. We couldn't go anywhere. If you wanted to go some place, you walked.

Brenda Velasco: Alright, made you healthy though. Look at how long you've lived.

Joe Urso: There is one little thing, this is the Inman Avenue of Colonia. On the New Dover Road side there was a library that was built. I don't remember the year but I would imagine that it was constructed under the WPA program, which would be in the.....

Brenda Velasco: 1930s.

Joe Urso: In the '30s, yes.

Brenda Velasco: Yea, as the Depression and that's when you moved to Colonia. Were there any parks or schools here?

Joe Urso: No, ironically enough, up the street from us was the St. Gertrude's Cemetery. All my relatives that came would marvel at this beautiful park; and I said no, it's not a park, it's a cemetery. Ironically enough, that was the only place you could drive or ride a bicycle because the streets were paved. All the streets in Colonia were stone, terracotta or any kind of hard material that was lying around.

Brenda Velasco: We were really the out section of Woodbridge at that time.

Joe Urso: That's correct.

Brenda Velasco: Was there a post office here?

Joe Urso: Nope, nothing, nothing, absolutely nothing.

Brenda Velasco: Because I know our zip code in Colonia is the main office's one in Rahway.

Joe Urso: That's correct.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, Rahway was still.....

Joe Urso: Yes, I was, I think, Box 44. That's the only number I remember because I used to write home: Box 44.

Brenda Velasco: Alright, and were there any schools here?

Joe Urso: The only school that we had was a grammar school located on the other side of Colonia on the New Dover Road side not far from the railroad tracks. (Fairview Avenue)

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Joe Urso: And it went only up to 6th grade.

Brenda Velasco: Well you moved here when you were 9 years old, so that's the school you went to.

Joe Urso: I started in 4th grade.

Brenda Velasco: You started in 4th grade. And then where did you go to middle school?

Joe Urso: Well, no, there is a story on this. From September to December I went to the Colonia school and my mother entered me in the school in Woodbridge called St. James and so I went to St. James in 1937, in January, and graduated, of course, in June of 1941. The thing that I have to say is that I got a free ride on the school buses and no one ever said a word.

Brenda Velasco: Times were different back then.

Joe Urso: Things were different then.

Brenda Velasco: And I know St. James, next year, is celebrating their 150th anniversary in the township. So that was the closest Catholic church for you then too?

Joe Urso: No, the closest Catholic church, to me, was in Rahway, St. Mary's. Almost 2½ miles away and I walked it every Sunday. Once in awhile somebody would pick me up on a bicycle and give me a ride to St. George Avenue or somebody would give me a car ride to St. George Avenue or something. Otherwise, it was always walking, rain or snow.

Brenda Velasco: It didn't hurt you, Joe Urso.

Joe Urso: No.

Brenda Velasco: Didn't hurt you. Now, where would the bus pick you up to take you to St. James School?

Joe Urso: Right on Inman Avenue, right in front of the house.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, so you did have that type of transportation back then.

Joe Urso: Well, at that time, there was only one school bus. The school bus started at the borderline of Clark, located on Lake Avenue, and it traveled the perimeter of Colonia which is Dukes Road, Inman Avenue, Wood Avenue, New Dover Road and Chain O Hill Road up to St. George Avenue and to School #11. That process, by the way, was repeated for the high school. We had split sessions in those days so they had a morning high school and then they had the afternoon high school and the bus took the exact same route, except this time, it went to the Barron Avenue School in Woodbridge which is now a lower school.

Brenda Velasco: That's Woodbridge Middle School now.

Joe Urso: Middle School.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, but your high school, with the split sessions that you attended, was on Barron Avenue. It's not the current Woodbridge High School.

Joe Urso: No.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, when you moved to Colonia, was there any airports around in Colonia that you heard?

Joe Urso: Yes, less than a mile away was an airport located on Lake Avenue and the border of Clark and was one of our happy times because whenever we had a chance we would go walk the back streets, less than a mile away, and watch the airplanes take off and so forth. But I have to tell you of an incident, two incidents, that happened right here on Florence Avenue less than a block and a half away from my house when two different airplanes crashed, at different times, and ironically enough, I marvel at it, that they both were right off of Florence Avenue. The one was on Cavour Street about hundred feet from Florence Avenue and the other one was on Florence Avenue about less than hundred feet from Cavour and both planes were on the edge of the street, like the sidewalk area. I guess they tried to land in the street and missed it. Both the pilots were toasted beyond repair, just like you have burnt toast.

Brenda Velasco: How long was this airport in operation for?

Joe Urso: I don't know. I don't know.

Brenda Velasco: You moved there in 1936. When did it close?

Joe Urso: I don't know. I don't know but all the time that I lived in Colonia, on this side of Colonia, the airport was there.

Brenda Velasco: Okay and when did you move to the other side of Colonia?

Joe Urso: In 1950, I moved to North Hill Road, I built a house there for myself and after there for a short time I moved to Garden Avenue in Woodbridge, next to my mother-in-law, because she said the property was available and she wanted us to live next to her and we did. It was a very perfect time because she took care of the children.

Brenda Velasco: Oh, I am very familiar with that. You lucked out. You lucked out then.

Joe Urso: I lucked out.

Brenda Velasco: You had, almost, a built in babysitter. This was even better because she lived in the other house.

Joe Urso: My grandmother lived with them.

Brenda Velasco: Those were good times.

Joe Urso: A happy time, yes.

Brenda Velasco: So you lived in a couple of places in Colonia.

Joe Urso: Yes, I did.

Brenda Velasco: Colonia, and then North Hill Road in Colonia.

Joe Urso: Right.

Brenda Velasco: And then you went to Garden Avenue, you said, in Woodbridge. So you've seen a sampling. Now was your wife from Woodbridge?

Joe Urso: She's a native born in Woodbridge and she did the same thing, that's where I met her, in the high school. I was discharged from the Army and I went to Dr. Lozo, the principal, and I said, look, I have nothing to do, can I take a couple of subjects. Sure, anything you want, he said. Soldiers get the right of way and, of course, I was in a class with all girls. This one class and when it came for prom time this young girl came up to me and said, would you go to the prom with me, and I said, sure, why not, I got nothing else to do. We've been together since.

Brenda Velasco: So this was like a high school sweetheart? How long were you in the service?

Joe Urso: I rather not talk about that. I was in the boy scouts, not the service.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, we'll go on. When you were in high school, we mentioned that you attended the high school on Barron Avenue. Were you involved in sports at all?

Joe Urso: Sports?

Brenda Velasco: Yes, sports.

Joe Urso: Yes, I played on the football team and I had the privilege of being on the team that, in 1943, had two future, all pro, professional football players in Tucker Thompson and Lou Creekmore. Tucker Thompson was the Cleveland Browns and Lou Creekmore was with the Detroit Lions and the following year, Artie Peterson played on the team and he became a star catcher for Rutgers and then went to be a catcher for the Pittsburgh Pirates. I had the unusual distinction of seeing the last night game in Brooklyn and, ironically enough, the team that they played was the Pittsburgh Pirates. I sat in the press box, which is located right above home plate, but I couldn't communicate with the catcher, Artie Peterson.

Brenda Velasco: Too bad, but you saw that last time. Was the field in Brooklyn Ebbetts Field?

Joe Urso: Yea, Ebbetts Field.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, okay. You've had some interesting experiences then?

Joe Urso: Oh, more than I can ever tell you.

Brenda Velasco: Well, that's why we're recording you right now. Is there anything else we should mention about public buildings?

Joe Urso: Well, you know, I would like to go back to Colonia, the early days. I didn't realize it until now that Colonia had these farms. On Lake Avenue was the Brezanski farm, on Inman Avenue, I already mentioned the Iorio farm, but up the street where School #11 or #7, what is it?

Brenda Velasco: There's a School #21.

Joe Urso: School #21, okay, was the Fagan farm and then on New Dover Road was the Denblecker farm and Woodbridge also had two other farms. One the Cooper Dairy right near the railroad tracks in Iselin and, believe it or not, across the street from the Woodbridge Center, was another dairy.

Brenda Velasco: Was it Maple.....

Joe Urso: Something like that.

Brenda Velasco: I think it was Maple Leaf. Maple Leaf?

Joe Urso: It sounds correct, Maple Tree Farm, or something like that.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Joe Urso: But.

Brenda Velasco: This was very rural then?

Joe Urso: Okay, in the summer of 1939 and 1940, I worked on the Fagan farm and it was a thrill at that time because it was the only time that you could ride on the wagon and steer the horses to the barn and it was an enjoyable time.

Brenda Velasco: Now, what is there now, where the Fagan farm used to be?

Joe Urso: Its School #21 and many homes. The other thing that I'd like to point out, from where we lived in Colonia, ironically enough, almost all the families around us were of Italian ancestry. They were not Sicilians like we were but they were all Italians and that's how we communicated, except for the young people, they talked English. It was an interesting time.

Brenda Velasco: So you also spoke Italian as well?

Joe Urso: Oh, I grew up with Italian, yes. I'm sorry to say, I don't speak Italian today: only, Me Jane, You Tarzan.

Brenda Velasco: But you've returned to Sicily? You've gone to Sicily?

Joe Urso: I've been and my aunt said to me, how should I talk to you? I said there's only one way, you've got to talk Sicilian or I can't understand you. See Mussolini changed the system that people had to learn Italian. They couldn't learn the dialect language. You spoke the dialect language in your family, but everything was Italian. That's another story.

Brenda Velasco: You're full of stories today.

6. What did you do for recreation?

Well, recreation was at a very minimum considering that this was the bad times and we had to work on our garden. My father had some pigs and he had a goat and a lot of vegetables; we were very lucky that the whole front yard was full of apple trees. We would pick them and store them in the cellar and, you know, my mother would make apple pies, which I still love and make them myself. To compensate for the fact that it was the Depression time, my father also grew chickens in one of our bedrooms. He would send to Sears and request certain types of chickens and they would be delivered by the United States post office in a big box with holes on top and we would grow these chickens and one of the diets that I grew up with was chicken. We would eat it three or four times a week, whenever my mother needed some extra food, and she would try to make it different each time. I love chicken, today, still.

Brenda Velasco: She was a good cook, she was Sicilian.

Joe Urso: She was a good cook.

Brenda Velasco: In other words, you didn't have a supermarket nearby, she was everything. I imagine the farm kept you pretty busy. Did you have a bike at all?

Joe Urso: My father, later on, was able to purchase a bike for me. The reason why my father had extra money is because he was in the contracting business and he would do repairs and that's all you could do in those days was repairs and the people would pay him, you know, a small fee but none the less, it was big. To show you how money was at that time, if my aunt, who would visit us from New York, would give me 25 cents, which she did, on repeat times, I would walk to Rahway, go to the movies for 10 cents and buy a Tompkins ice cream, that was directly across the street; double dip, for 5 cents. If I really wanted to splurge, I would go next door from the

movies, to the bakery and I would pay 15 cents for a pineapple cheese pie, which was my very favorite. That's how little money was in those days.

Brenda Velasco: So, the movies were 10 cents?

Joe Urso: 10 cents, 15 cents if you were an adult.

Brenda Velasco: Not any more.

Joe Urso: No, when they played **Gone with the Wind**, which was adult prices only, I had to sneak in because I couldn't spend the extra nickel.

Brenda Velasco: And this was in Rahway that you saw it?

Joe Urso: Rahway, yes. Yes, yes, yes.

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

Well, I'll tell you what, I had written down here, existing, and that's exactly about the size of it. You communicated with your neighbors, and that was part of life. You shared the moments with them and there was really, the games that the children would play would be in the field, you know, over the tall grass and what not. There was no playing area unless you played in the street, which we never thought of playing in the street, because it was all stone and what not. Things were much different. It was, whatever you could do at that time, is what you did. That was it and visiting people was number one because it was the simplest of all. We couldn't spend money. We couldn't buy ice cream. There was no ice cream to be bought.

Brenda Velasco: Okay and where did you go principally for shopping? Was it Woodbridge Main Street? Was it Rahway, Perth Amboy, Elizabeth, if you lived in Colonia?

Joe Urso: The only place that we went shopping was Rahway. Naturally, my father had a car and he would drive us to the town. There was a variety of stores and never did we go to Elizabeth, which was the upgrade shopping, because it cost too much money. Now, just to show you how fugal we were, I mentioned that we had chickens. When you bought chicken feed in those days, the bags were with a design on it, different colors and what not, and my mother would always tell my father, you know, make sure you get yellow this time or a different color, so she could make some kind of clothes that we would use. Getting back to clothes, if I played in the playground, which I did, and fell, I would make a hole in my pants, and my mother would just sew it up, so all my pants had patches on them and that didn't bother me one inch, I mean, I had pants. When I went to St. James the most unusual thing was that we had to wear a tie all the time and by wearing the tie all the time, except in the dead of summer, you know, which would be a few weeks in June, we were excused but I got used to wearing a tie. It was one of my hallmarks in my lifetime because I was complimented many times, in my business world, that as a builder, I'd still wear a tie even though the work was a little bit messier. Except in the summertime, it was too hot.

Brenda Velasco: And you're wearing a tie today.

Joe Urso: Well, only because of you.

Brenda Velasco: Oh!

Joe Urso: I'm a little more relaxed now.

Brenda Velasco: Then I'm very honored. Very honored.

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

What I liked about it was the fact that I had no barriers. I went anyplace I wanted. Mom, I'm going to go see the Damianos; mom, I'm going to see the Belladinos. That's it, I would just do

it. There was no traffic on the road, there was nothing hard. It was just a pleasant way of just going around. Later on, a store did show up on the corner of East Avenue and Inman Avenue. I don't remember the year. Then later on it burned down and I can tell you all the kids went there looking for coins and I found a few myself. But when it burnt down, I don't know either. It was a nice thing to have a store because one of my weaknesses is ice cream and popsicles were the big rage.

Brenda Velasco: And they had Brown Cows and the orange popsicles. That goes back a way.

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

Brenda Velasco: One of the big things that we've seen with Woodbridge is the change that has come about from when you were 9 years old through the '60s and the '70s and you were a builder, so relate on what you did in Woodbridge and some of the other construction that went on such as Woodbridge Center. I'm sure you witnessed that.

Joe Urso: Well, besides building individual homes all over the town, which I'm very proud of because I sold to more relatives and I think they're the best. I had five different relatives buy houses from me, brothers and sisters, and I worked very hard to please them in every which way considering that the first house that we built was under \$12,000.00. The rules and regulations at that time were so simple and easy. Everybody was love and kisses, and let's work together to help things out. The people were all happy because they were able to buy a house that was very inexpensive and they were able to finance the home. But over the years, as time went on, I did build a couple of apartment houses for myself, small units, an office building, which is on Main Street. I was so proud that I was able to buy that. I bought that from Eddie Copper, the lawyer, and his sister was Miss Copper, who actually was Miss Goodstein, the English teacher that I had in high school. I also built, next to Miss Vanslik, also an English teacher, and I was very happy about that for the simple reason that when you went to school the teacher was so high and so important and, you know, here, in my adult life, I'm associating with them. It's a wonderful feeling and, of course, I did build, what I thought at the time, would have been a wonderful Home Center on Rahway Avenue which I didn't realize it could have been the pioneers of today's Home Center but I was undercapitalized and I had to close up in disgrace because I didn't have any more money to run that particular building, you know, and the business that I was wanting, which was lumber and hardware and so forth. Later on it became the Woodbridge Library and later on it became a catering hall and it still is a catering hall, which I do not run.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, you're talking about the new Arianna's then, on Rahway Avenue and before that it was the Cameo so you had built something of home center there. Now, in what year was your first house built?

Joe Urso: Well, you have to understand something. My father was in construction all his life; all his life while he was in the United States. The first house that I ever got involved with was on Conduit Avenue.....

Brenda Velasco: In Colonia right?

Joe Urso: In Colonia, as a kid, and we did the pick and shovel, we cleaned up the wood, there was only used lumber, there was no new lumber and we did everything in the house that was humanly possible except plumbing and electric, things that the professional people would have to do. Ironically enough, I stopped there just about a couple of weeks ago, and said hello to the person that lives there. After we built that house, things were getting much better, my father was getting more work as a contractor and so we built another house almost diagonally across the

street, on Conduit, and to my amazement it was knocked down and two homes were built on it. My father had a passion for doing something nice and he built front stairs that was built circular and it was a lot of work to do that but he wanted that privilege of doing it. So I got to be in construction at a very tender age and been doing it ever since.

Brenda Velasco: Was it when you were in high school that you got involved with construction for your father?

Joe Urso: You know, 12 years old. Young, young.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, right.

Joe Urso: I don't remember the age. I was a young person: very young. Considering that, you know, I went into the Army in 1945, so it had to be, you know, in the end of the 1930s, the beginning of 1940 because we could not buy any material. When my father bought a plumbing fixture or something in plumbing, for example, the man would say, listen you come next week, I'll have one for you. It was all on rations and it took a long time to build a house in those days because you had no material. As I already said, all the lumber was used. My brother and I were champion nail pullers. That was our job, coming home from school and pulling out nails.

Brenda Velasco: I know my house was built in the '50s and you could see that the lumber is still standing and it's doing a good job. Alright, any significant happenings in Woodbridge that you recall?

Joe Urso: Yes, before the war, one of our neighbors, Don DiSisto, who was a sailor, was killed on the ship. I say, when the ship left the Philadelphia port, it was bombed off the Jersey shores. The ship went back to Philadelphia and he was designated as dying in Philadelphia. But I never bought that for the simple reason that the Germans did have the subs off the Jersey shores and the United States never acknowledged it. Although, as time goes on now, stories do surface that the Jersey shores did have German subs. This information was never verified, acknowledged, or anything. But I say this as my interpretation and not to be factual, because he deserves recognition to be, really, the first person to die in the military before the war.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, so this was before 1941 then?

Joe Urso: Before December of 1941. You know, I don't know the date or nothing.

Brenda Velasco: Yea, yea, that's interesting.

Joe Urso: And I have asked a few people to look it up and they say they can't find the information. I say, well, I'm not capable of doing it so.

Brenda Velasco: Alright, he was from Colonia?

Joe Urso: Right.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Joe Urso: He was one of our neighbors.

Brenda Velasco: Yea, yea, okay. And, we do know, through history, opening up of records, Germans were off the shore and there's even a rumor that some German bodies were washed up on the shore in Atlantic Highlands. Atlantic Highlands was one of those areas there.

Joe Urso: I have a famous story, if you shut it off I'll tell you.

Brenda Velasco: Tell me later. Tell me later. Okay, anything else about significant happenings in Woodbridge?

Joe Urso: Well, as a young person, one of our neighbors, Joe Belladino, he was shot to death by a hunting accident and we had another tragedy in the area. A young girl, on East Avenue, drowned in a cesspool. That was the only deaths we had as I was growing up in the area and all of them were tragic, you know, they weren't normal.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, that was East Street or East Avenue?

Joe Urso: East Avenue. Off Inman Avenue, is that East Avenue?

Brenda Velasco: East Street.

Joe Urso: East Street, okay.

Brenda Velasco: Alright, you know, for some people they may not know what a cesspool is.

Joe Urso: Okay, the cesspool is an excavation that is done in the backyard of a home to discharge the sewage that is used in that particular home. A cesspool is usually in the size of about 6 feet or 5 feet wide by 3 feet or 4 feet wide. No set dimensions and, that's what happened, they used wood on top of it, an easy way to cover it, but wood disintegrates as time goes on and people forget that there is such a thing as a cesspool.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, we didn't have sewers in Colonia at one time.

Joe Urso: Oh, no sewers, nothing.

Brenda Velasco: Because I know when I moved in in the '60s we were still on well water and we had a cesspool (septic tank) in the back.

Joe Urso: Sure.

Brenda Velasco: It took a long time and this was in the 1960s, not the 19th century. Okay, anything else that you want to mention, sports events or anything.

Joe Urso: Well, to show you the times of being in a poor State, in the late 1930s the WPA sent a group of men for weeks walking along Inman Avenue and trying to create a sidewalk so that the people could walk on the sidewalk area rather on the street. But they did such a poor job just leveling off the dirt and it was not really a sidewalk, just dirt leveled off. Nobody used it, we all used the streets. That was the only way. The other thing that was very unique, in our times, on the continuation of Inman Avenue there was a section in Edison called Potter's (Potter's Crossing now Inman Aveue in Edison). Naturally the people from Potter's would drink a little bit more aggressively at times and they would go up that street at a fast pace and, luckily, we never had an accident or anything but they were known. As time went on, and all these people of our area got a little older, they formed a baseball team and they went to Potter's to play them. I don't remember who won, I wasn't there, and then the second year the boys from Potter's came down to our area to play. Where they played, I don't remember, but it had to be near the firehouse someplace and, you know, knocking down the weeds.

Brenda Velasco: So, you had no organized youth recreation leagues like we have today in Woodbridge? You played on your own. You improvised.

Joe Urso: Well, as I was growing a little older, there was an organization called the Colonia Civic Club, that was trying to be formed and one of the things that they wanted to do was to unite the both Colonias. Now, what separated the Colonias was the woods and where the Cocarro's live on that street, its Cleveland Avenue or whatever, you could walk through the woods but you couldn't drive through the woods. Finally today, of course, the street is there and so forth. The other thing that the Colonia Civic Improvement Club was trying to do was settle out the fire company. My father encouraged me to join the organization and become secretary of the club. I went to one meeting, I was probably around 16 years old and I heard these adults argue among themselves about this and that and the other thing and I said, I can't be part of something that people argue so stupidly. So therefore, I didn't join or continue going back. But their heart was in the right place because we needed fire protection and we needed to open up the area. The other thing, at that time, which was a recreational situation, on New Dover Road was two lakes. Today, one lake exists and the other one disappeared, dried up, and has been developed. We used to go fishing there.

Brenda Velasco: This was Freeman's Pond?

Joe Urso: Huh.

Brenda Velasco: Is this Freeman's Pond?

Joe Urso: Freeman's, no.

Brenda Velasco: Where was it located, the two lakes?

Joe Urso: Where Bobby Jacks used to live.

Brenda Velasco: Yep, okay.

Joe Urso: That's Freeman's Pond?

Brenda Velasco: Yea, one side is Freeman's Pond.

Joe Urso: The reason why I question it is because on the corner of New Dover Road where they play golf, the Colonia Golf Club, what's the name of that street? Colonia Boulevard.

Brenda Velasco: Yes.

Joe Urso: Okay, there was a pond there too.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Joe Urso: Okay.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Joe Urso: And I don't know if that was Freeman's Pond or whatever. One of our neighbors worked for that man, strictly as a gardener. It was a beautiful home and so forth.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, so you went fishing then. You had fishing in those two little lakes?

Joe Urso: Yea, I'd catch little fish and everything else. My relatives got more of thrill out of it than I did because they came from New York City where there's no water, of course, the ocean, but no water, and they would love to go fishing with no permit, no nothing, just fish.

Brenda Velasco: Quite different than what it is today.

Joe Urso: Yea.

Brenda Velasco: Quite different. Okay, you said you no longer live in Woodbridge.

Joe Urso: No, but you see, I never left Woodbridge, my office is on Main Street and my daytime activity is in Woodbridge all the time. I associate with everything in Woodbridge. I am a Woodbridge person. I never said I was an Edison person. I'm always a Woodbridge person.

Brenda Velasco: I'm glad to hear that, because we've got a wealth of information from you today about Colonia, how it was way back when.

10. What do you like about Woodbridge today?

Inadvertently, the interviewer neglected to ask Question #10, but Joe Urso's opinion can be found at the end of Question #9 and Question #11.

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

I have an aunt who lives in Woodbridge, yes. She's 95 years old.

Brenda Velasco: You've got good genes.

Joe Urso: Well, I don't know. I don't know. I hope so.

Brenda Velasco: Well, you're going to be almost 82, right?

Joe Urso: Almost, in January.

Brenda Velasco: That's very good, very good.

Joe Urso: That's only a month away, right.

Brenda Velasco: That's right. If we could get through Christmas, it's only a month away. Is there anything else that you wanted to add to the interview?

Joe Urso: Well.

Brenda Velasco: Anything that we didn't pull out.

Joe Urso: Well the one thing that I just cannot believe, that I witnessed a community that was almost farmland to develop the way it has. It's like when you talk about Rip Van Winkle, when, you know, wake up after so many years and you see what you see, you say, I don't believe it. Just to give you an idea of how I don't believe it sometimes, there was a home that was for sale on Main Street that would be on the corner, now, of Woodbridge Center Drive and Main Street, and it was an old house. I said, I can't see going way out there to buy that old house as part of my business and today, what a different world. It's now part of the Hess property. They bought it, but the development of this town, and I have to thank the governing body, for controlling the methods of using the land and the properties the way they did, even though, at times, I was very angry and disturbed that they were against me; the proof of the pudding is what has happened. I love the town. I participate, as much as I can, in the activities of the town and I'm proud of it.

Brenda Velasco: Well, I thank you for your contribution and sharing your personal story because most people don't realize. The future generations have no concept of what Colonia was like in the 1930s and 1940s and you witnessed it all. So, I thank you very much and I've enjoyed it tremendously.