

**Oral History Interview**  
**Juanita McDaniel Lewis**  
**WH050**

(written transcript and digital audio)

On June 20<sup>th</sup>, 2009, Juanita McDaniel Lewis was interviewed at the Independent Club of Colonia at 12:15 P.M. by Brenda Velasco.

*Brenda Velasco:* Juanita's grandfather, Thomas McDaniel, was instrumental in establishing the Independent Club of Colonia.

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

My name is Juanita McDaniel Lewis. I live in Colonia and my date of birth is 1949.

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

I originally moved to Colonia in 1958; I was nine years out.

*Brenda Velasco:* How long did you remain the first time?

*Juanita Lewis:* I remained until I was about eighteen years old.

*Brenda Velasco:* Then when did you come back?

*Juanita Lewis:* I came back at the tender age of twenty-one.

*Brenda Velasco:* You came back at twenty-one and do you live in the same house?

*Juanita Lewis:* Yes, I do.

*Brenda Velasco:* And that's?

*Juanita Lewis:* East Pine Street, 29 East Pine Street in Colonia.

*Brenda Velasco:* And that was the family home?

*Juanita Lewis:* Yes.

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

Well, what I can remember because of being so young, I remember my father saying he wanted a better life for the family. At that time, it was more about the children in the family.

*Brenda Velasco:* Your total family then, how many children did your mom have?

*Juanita Lewis:* Six all together.

*Brenda Velasco:* Six, so two were born in Colonia?

*Juanita Lewis:* Actually, one was born in Colonia.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, one was born in Colonia.

*Juanita Lewis:* And the five of us were born in Newark, Orange, different areas.

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

*Brenda Velasco:* Then while you were growing up you've seen some changes that occurred and then when you came back, when you were twenty-one, you even saw more changes occurring in Colonia.

*Juanita Lewis:* Yes, but I would say more when I was younger; I can remember really well.

*Brenda Velasco:* When we look at East Pine Street, that's where you grew up, where you're living now, how many houses were on the street back then?

*Juanita Lewis:* I would say about five, just on the side that we were living on.

*Brenda Velasco:* And how many houses are there now?

*Juanita Lewis:* On our street, I'm thinking, maybe about ten. There are no houses across the street from us and some behind us, maybe a few, maybe two.

*Brenda Velasco:* So it was a nice area to grow up in then?

*Juanita Lewis:* Oh, yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* Did you have paved streets back then?

*Juanita Lewis:* No.

*Brenda Velasco:* Did you have well water?

*Juanita Lewis:* We had well water.

*Brenda Velasco:* And septic tanks back then or?

*Juanita Lewis:* I'm trying to remember at the time.

*Brenda Velasco:* Well you were only nine years old, you didn't care.

*Juanita Lewis:* Right, as long as I had water.

*Brenda Velasco:* Right. How were the services? Did you have garbage pickup?

*Juanita Lewis:* You know, I don't remember having any garbage pickup but we did have garbage pickup. Then we had the cesspools that used to smell a lot. Once in a while we had a friend that would fall into it when they rode their bike and rode around the corner if they weren't covered.

*Brenda Velasco:* How about the stores?

*Juanita Lewis:* Well, I remember we had a little candy store called **Pete's**; I would call it **Pete's**. It was like a little, what I remember, like a shack to me.

*Brenda Velasco:* Where was this located?

*Juanita Lewis:* This was on Inman Avenue near where the **Exxon Station** is now if I remember correctly.

*Brenda Velasco:* Was Inman Avenue paved at the time you moved here?

*Juanita Lewis:* I don't remember it being paved at the time.

*Brenda Velasco:* Were there any other stores around?

*Juanita Lewis:* We had **Drug Fair** and I think the **A&P**, I don't know when it moved but I know it came late.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, there was an **A&P** and that's where **ACE** is right now. How about houses of worship?

*Juanita Lewis:* I used to go to the First Baptist Church in Colonia, it might be another name now, but that was the church I went to at the time. (East Walnut)

*Brenda Velasco:* Where was that located?

*Juanita Lewis:* That was on, just behind where **ACE** is now; I can't remember the street.

*Brenda Velasco:* There's still a church there. Okay, and, what schools did you go to?

*Juanita Lewis:* I went to School #20, not far from New Dover Road; I hope I have the number right.

*Brenda Velasco:* Off of Hoffman Boulevard, Claremont School, in that area?

*Juanita Lewis:* Yes, yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* Where did you go for middle school?

*Juanita Lewis:* The middle school, I went to Colonia Middle School.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, and then for high school?

*Juanita Lewis:* High school I went to Woodbridge High.

*Brenda Velasco:* Woodbridge High School. Was that where it is today?

*Juanita Lewis:* Yes, it is.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, and what year did you graduate?

*Juanita Lewis:* '67.

*Brenda Velasco:* So you grew up during a very tumultuous period of time whether it was Vietnam, Civil Rights, or whatever.

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

*Brenda Velasco:* Did Colonia have a post office at that time?

*Juanita Lewis:* I don't remember it having a post office.

*Brenda Velasco:* How about the library?

*Juanita Lewis:* I don't remember the library being there.

*Brenda Velasco:* I think it came about maybe in the early '60s; the Henry Inman Library. (September 12, 1966)

*Juanita Lewis:* Maybe I did remember, it's kind of hard to say. I don't remember, it must have been there, I just didn't use it a lot.

*Brenda Velasco:* How about parks?

*Juanita Lewis:* The only park I remember, actually I don't remember a park. We used to go where the school is now, School #27, and we used to play in that field but I don't remember actually having a park to go to. (Pennsylvania Avenue School was built in 1964)

*Brenda Velasco:* It was School #27 there at that time though, okay.

*Juanita Lewis:* We were there before it was built playing on the tree stumps playing king of the mountain.

*Brenda Velasco:* That was fun.

*Juanita Lewis:* Yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, how about the firehouse?

*Juanita Lewis:* The firehouse, I think it's been here a long time but of course it wasn't as nice as it is now but I don't remember when they built it.

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

Well, I remember as a teenager each house had a party every weekend or something; they took their turns having a house party. That was my recreation. Going to the empty lot and playing king of the mountain and playing volleyball with, you know, each other. But as far as going out to other recreations, I can't remember any other recreations outside of what we made for ourselves.

*Brenda Velasco:* And you had a lot of empty lots at that time too.

*Juanita Lewis:* Well, also you know what we did for recreation, we picked blueberries and huckleberries and my grandmother made blueberry dubee (cobbler) we called it and that's what we did. They had a lot of blueberry patches in town and huckleberries. And getting bug bites.

*Brenda Velasco:* Oh yes, that's if you wore shorts.

*Juanita Lewis:* Yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* Especially during the summer.

*Juanita Lewis:* For recreation, also, taking walks to Potter's Crossing which my girlfriend and I would do.

*Brenda Velasco:* Which is now the Inman Grove (Shopping Plaza)?

*Juanita Lewis:* Of North Edison.

*Brenda Velasco:* North Edison.

*Juanita Lewis:* We made our own fun.

*Brenda Velasco:* Did you have a bike?

*Juanita Lewis:* Yes, I did.

*Brenda Velasco:* Where did you ride your bike then?

*Juanita Lewis:* I road my bike around the area, I didn't go far, around Colonia a few blocks away. I didn't go far with my bike at all.

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

*Brenda Velasco:* Was it the church or the school or the family?

*Juanita Lewis:* I'd say family really.

*Brenda Velasco:* You've got a lot of children in your family too.

*Juanita Lewis:* Yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* You also had your grandfather in this area.

*Juanita Lewis:* Yes, he lived next door. He was one of the first black families in Colonia.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay and this is Thomas McDaniel.

*Juanita Lewis:* Thomas McDaniel and my grandmother.

*Brenda Velasco:* So Thomas was one of the first.....

*Juanita Lewis:* And my grandmother, black families in Colonia.

*Brenda Velasco:* Where did they move from?

*Juanita Lewis:* I think it was Linden or Roselle; Chandler Avenue, I think, Roselle it was.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, so he had a house next to you.

*Juanita Lewis:* Yes, he built it the house.

*Brenda Velasco:* He built his own house. He built your house too?

*Juanita Lewis:* No, my uncle, William Phillip, built the house we're living in and one on this side of the bridge on the other side of the Parkway.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay so your Uncle Jack (Billups) built your house?

*Juanita Lewis:* Yes, right.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, and then he also built a house on this side of the Parkway where the west streets are.

*Juanita Lewis:* Willow Street.

*Brenda Velasco:* And did Uncle Jack live in the area too?

*Juanita Lewis:* Yes, I think he was one of the members of the Independent Club. He lived in the house that I live in currently and he lived in a second house he built until he ended up being taken away and the daughter sold it.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, so your grandfather and uncle were all involved with the Independent Club of Colonia at that time.

*Juanita Lewis:* Yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* Do you remember going here?

*Juanita Lewis:* Yes, I do.

*Brenda Velasco:* What are some of the memories you have of coming here?

*Juanita Lewis:* Well, I remember we gave a party, a waistline party. We charged by the waistline, I remember that.

*Brenda Velasco:* And what did you do at the party besides having your waist measured?

*Juanita Lewis:* Oh, dance and have a good time, not to only the oldie but goodies records but.....

*Brenda Velasco:* How many kids were involved, young people, because you were young then?

*Juanita Lewis:* I don't remember how many. I just know it was a lot of us and I don't remember how many kids.

*Brenda Velasco:* It was crowded though.

*Juanita Lewis:* Too crowded, yes, but it was nice though. Because it was not only this town but other towns would come to the party.

*Brenda Velasco:* From the other towns the youth came did you mean from Rahway, from Woodbridge.....

*Juanita Lewis:* I would say Rahway.

*Brenda Velasco:* Do you remember any other events that occurred?

*Juanita Lewis:* Well, I know they had cookouts and barbeques and stuff like that. They would have parties outside and I vaguely remember coming in and seeing like older people dancing and I'd see people, all together, having a good time. But specifically, I can't remember any really specific event outside of the latter.

*Brenda Velasco:* When you had a barbeque, what kind of food did you have?

*Juanita Lewis:* Well, I'm guessing the normal, hamburgers and hotdogs.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay.

*Juanita Lewis:* Ribs, chicken and soda. I'm sure there might have been beer but as a youngster I really can't say.

*Brenda Velasco:* You were under age and you had salads and.....

*Juanita Lewis:* Yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* And people just having a good time and socializing.

*Juanita Lewis:* Yes. I must add another event. It happened here years later. I had my wedding reception here.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, and what year did you get married in?

*Juanita Lewis:* Oh, boy, I'm trying to think. It was like '71, no '70, over thirty-five years ago.

#### **8. What did you like about living in Colonia?**

I just like that it was quiet and you were close enough to activities like if you wanted to go out of town and then come back to quiet. I liked that.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, so you could go to Rahway, you could go to.....

*Juanita Lewis:* I liked to go out to other places like Perth Amboy or Plainfield but I could always come back to a quiet area and that's the way I felt as an adult also.

*Brenda Velasco:* And you came back.

*Juanita Lewis:* Oh, yes, I came back. You appreciate it as you get older.

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

Well, as far as discrimination, on a personal level, I remember being in high school, if I remember, when you used to do dancing, square dancing or fox trot, some of the boys would say they didn't want to dance with Hershey bar. So when it came to dancing my hands they would move their hands away from me. I think we were going to get ready to perform for Wagner, but that's the discrimination part of it. As far as accidents, the most accident I remember is the one where a boy got killed on the Parkway. (1972/1973)

*Brenda Velasco:* How old were you when this happened?

*Juanita Lewis:* I can't remember my age when they had that accident.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay and what was the name of the person?

*Juanita Lewis:* Bernard Jackson.

*Brenda Velasco:* So he was a young man then?

*Juanita Lewis:* Yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* And he was crossing the Parkway?

*Juanita Lewis:* Right as a lot of people tried to do once they put the Parkway in.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, because the Parkway divided this neighborhood.

*Juanita Lewis:* Right it was easier for them to shoot across the Parkway if they could as opposed to going over the bridge.

*Brenda Velasco:* Was there a fence there or a barrier at all?

*Juanita Lewis:* No.

*Brenda Velasco:* There were no barriers?

*Juanita Lewis:* No, you could walk through someone's yard and get on or into the Parkway.

*Brenda Velasco:* Well unfortunately he tried and he was killed.

*Juanita Lewis:* Right. As far as construction, they paved the roads.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, that's plus. We take it for granted now.

*Juanita Lewis:* They built houses on our street, not our street, behind our street, they built houses.

*Brenda Velasco:* So you've seen Colonia expand.

*Juanita Lewis:* Right and I guess the buildings and stores and even the pharmacy that we have now. Colonia Pharmacy I think it's called or Health Pharmacy.

*Brenda Velasco:* Yes, the Nature Store.

*Juanita Lewis:* The Nature Store, right.

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

I appreciate the quietness compared to other areas, you know.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, so you lived in Rahway for a little while.

*Juanita Lewis:* No, I didn't live in Rahway. I lived in Linden; that's really where I lived at most times, Linden, and then I moved back to Colonia.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay.

*Juanita Lewis:* And moved up, definitely moved up, when I moved back to Colonia.

*Brenda Velasco:* And that's where your parents originated, right, or your grandfather originated; Roselle and Colonia.

*Juanita Lewis:* Yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* Roselle and Linden.

*Juanita Lewis:* Roselle.

*Brenda Velasco:* Do you belong to any of the organizations besides the Independent Club of Colonia?

*Juanita Lewis:* No, I don't.

*Brenda Velasco:* Do you join any of the activities, like if there's a farmer's market or anything like that?

*Juanita Lewis:* No.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, so you just stay in Colonia then?

*Juanita Lewis:* Yes, right now.

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

Outside of myself, no.

*Brenda Velasco:* So, your children live outside of.....

*Juanita Lewis:* I have one daughter and she lives in Rahway and my granddaughter and my son-in-law.

*Brenda Velasco:* Which isn't too far from Colonia?

*Juanita Lewis:* Right, that's close enough.

*Brenda Velasco:* Alright, well I thank you very much Juanita. Can you think of anything else that we may have missed?

*Juanita Lewis:* No, not really.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, if you do, we'll just jump in when I interview Beverly, your sister. Thank you very much.

*Juanita Lewis:* You're welcome.

.....

After the formal interview, Juanita recalled another tragedy that hit the Jackson family. Before Bernard Jackson was killed, the Jackson family's home was destroyed by fire; they lived on Arthur Avenue. (1960)

She also remembered a horse path near her house parallel to the Parkway. Pet horses went down this path. Unfortunately, her dog Zero also traversed this path. He was stomped by a horse not far from her home on East Pine Street along this horse path.

Juanita also recalled that she sang in a group of five girls when she attended Colonia Junior High School (CMS) in the early 1960s. The group was called the Victorians and they sang at the talent show for the junior high students during the day and performed at an evening show for students, parents, teachers and anyone who wanted to attend. The Victorians sang *Strange I Know* by the Marvelettes and *Ballin the Jack*. The girls asked the metal/wood shop to make the group a big "V" out of metal with a pin attached. They wore the pin on their clothing when they performed as well as during school.