

Oral History Interview
Julie Ficso Rosmos and Barbara Rosmos Estok
WH076

(written transcript and digital audio)

On Thursday, March 18, 2010, Julie Ficso Rosmos and Barbara Rosmos Estok were interviewed at the Henry Inman Library by Brenda Velasco at 2:30 P.M.

Brenda Velasco: I have the good fortune of interviewing two lovely people from the section of Keasbey. No longer do they live there but this is a section of our township that has slowly, slowly disappeared into our spaghetti network of road systems. To my left is Julie Rosmos. Her maiden name is Ficso (Fisco) and to my very far right is her daughter, Barbara Rosmos Estok. So we're going to start off with the first question.

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

Brenda Velasco: Both of you identify your name and your birth year and what section you came from, where you lived, and you can also say where you live now too. Okay, Julie you're on.

Julie Rosmos: I was born on November 4, 1913.

Brenda Velasco: And you were born Julie Ficso but that was reversed and it's really Ficso.

Julie Rosmos: Fecsu.

Brenda Velasco: Fecsu, okay. My pronunciation of Hungarian is poor. And where were you born? Were you born in Keasbey?

Julie Rosmos: Yes we were all, seven kids, all born in Keasbey.

Brenda Velasco: Okay and I just want to get your daughter on tape now, too. Barbara, give me your full name.

Barbara Estok: It's Julia Barbara Estok; maiden name Rosmos. I was born in Keasbey on May 15, 1944.

Brenda Velasco: So World War II was going on when you were born.

Barbara Estok: Yes, during the war.

Brenda Velasco: Julie, where do you live now?

Julie Rosmos: Iselin.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, but we're really going to focus on Keasbey today.

2. How long have you lived in Woodbridge-Keasbey and Iselin?

Julie Rosmos: Ninety-six years. That's a long time?

Brenda Velasco: I agree with you and you're still sharp. Okay and Barbara.

Barbara Estok: I lived in Woodbridge Township for sixty-five years.

Brenda Velasco: So all your life too.

Barbara Estok: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, we're going to let Julie answer Question #3.

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

Julie Rosmos: Well, they came from Hungary and that's the only place I knew.

Brenda Velasco: Were there other Hungarians here, too?

Julie Rosmos: I beg your pardon.

Brenda Velasco: Were there other Hungarians here too?

Julie Rosmos: Oh yes, there were quite a few Hungarians already. They all came from the other side.

Brenda Velasco: Were they from the same village?

Julie Rosmos: Maybe not from the same village but, you know, from the Hungarian place, whatever. There were so many different names.

Brenda Velasco: What did they do when they came here?

Julie Rosmos: They got a job right away in the brick yard.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, they worked in the brick yards?

Julie Rosmos: Yes, most all of them.

Brenda Velasco: Where were the brick yards?

Julie Rosmos: We were up the hill and they were down below by the water.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, by the Raritan River.

Julie Rosmos: The picture shows it.

Brenda Velasco: I know we've got some great pictures here that you brought and I can see in these pictures the kilns....

Julie Rosmos: You can even point out my house; it's the tallest.

Brenda Velasco: The tallest and you lived on Dow Avenue. Do you happen to remember the address?

Julie Rosmos: 15.

Brenda Velasco: Wow! Number 15, okay, then what year did your dad come over from Hungary.

Barbara Estok: 1905.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, 1905, and then.....

Julie Rosmos: You have it marked down I guess.

Brenda Velasco: Barbara's sharp.

Julie Rosmos: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: She won't let me forget anything. When did your grandmother, Barbara, and your mother, Julie when did she come over?

Barbara Estok: I believe it was close to that same period of time. I know that my grandfather came first.....

Julie Rosmos: Your grandfather came first and then he wrote a letter to grandma if she wanted to get married and come to America.

Brenda Velasco: Okay and she came. They were married in America then.

Barbara Estok: Yes.

Julie Rosmos: Yes.

Barbara Estok: What church?

Julie Rosmos: St. John's, I think, in Perth Amboy.

Brenda Velasco: Was that a Hungarian Church?

Barbara Estok: Yes.

Julie Rosmos: But you know what, she was Protestant when she came but then when she married she followed Grand pop.

Barbara Estok: That was Byzantine Greek Catholic.

Julie Rosmos: Oh, did she become a holy woman after that: every holiday to church! She walked from Keasbey to Perth Amboy.

Brenda Velasco: So you had to walk it then.

Barbara Estok: Yes.

Julie Rosmos: We didn't have no car.

Brenda Velasco: Did your mother work, too?

Julie Rosmos: She worked in the cigar factory and she had to quit because tobacco was no good for her.

Brenda Velasco: She knew it even back then.

Julie Rosmos: Then she started to have all the kids.

Brenda Velasco: And you said there were seven children?

Julie Rosmos: I beg your pardon.

Brenda Velasco: How many children?

Julie Rosmos: Seven, six boys and one girl.

Brenda Velasco: And you're it.

Barbara Estok: Yes. There were other children that died, miscarriages, so we don't even know how many pregnancies she probably had.

Julie Rosmos: Don't put that in there, the boys are very dominating.

Brenda Velasco: We know that; that's nothing new. But you were the only girl.

Julie Rosmos: Yes, and the one that's sick now, that's paralyzed, oh he was, what do you call it when a man is so abusive? Wait a minute.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, we're going to look at some of the physical features.

Julie Rosmos: No, I don't want you to put that on.

Brenda Velasco: No.

Julie Rosmos: Dominating, you know.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, that's nothing new though, Julie. Did all your brothers work?

Julie Rosmos: Yes and then they went into the service; four of them. They're all gone now. The only one that is living is the one that's paralyzed.

Brenda Velasco: And you're very good you're walking because I made you come to Colonia for this interview. You didn't walk from Iselin but you walked in the library.

Julie Rosmos: I don't know if that should be put in there. The brickyard burnt coal. A train used to come and when they were cleaning the brickyard furnace they had coke. They dumped it there and we all went down to take the big bags of coke. Even I went but I liked that better than housework, you know, to pick up all that coke and we used to bring it in our woodstove.

Brenda Velasco: It was a source of fuel for you.

Julie Rosmos: Yes, we didn't have no heat, we didn't have no electric, just a kerosene lamp. We were really poor.

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: How about the houses, were there a lot of houses back then in Keasbey?

Julie Rosmos: The amount we started to live in and I think about three taverns.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Julie Rosmos: Then they had a baseball field.

Brenda Velasco: Wow! How many families do you think lived there?

Julie Rosmos: About thirteen, there were about thirteen houses. There must have been because some of the homes were four family. They only allowed you three rooms. We didn't even have a toilet in the house. There were all outhouses.

Brenda Velasco: Wow! So you had about three rooms to an apartment?

Julie Rosmos: Yes, no bathroom.

Barbara Estok: That was the original house that they lived in. They lived originally in a small house in back of the house that is in the picture and I think the man that owned the large house was the landlord of the smaller house in back of it. Apparently he went into debt and I think my grandmother made a deal with him to purchase the large house and that's how they purchased the big house.

Brenda Velasco: Okay so that's how you got that house on Dow Avenue.

Barbara Estok: Because the road went all the way around so there was a road in the front and a road in the back and some houses faced the back road. It was like a block with houses facing each direction as that road went around. So they started out in the small house.

Brenda Velasco: And they were smart enough.....

Barbara Estok: Grandma was smart enough to see that this guy was in trouble and bought the big house from him.

Brenda Velasco: Which was necessary with seven children.

Barbara Estok: Right.

Brenda Velasco: Okay so you had no electricity then in the house in the beginning.

Julie Rosmos: Kerosene lamp.

Brenda Velasco: Kerosene lamp, okay.

Julie Rosmos: And then finally everybody started to get the electric.

Brenda Velasco: So you think in the 1920s then because you were born in 1913 so by the time you were eight you had electricity?

Julie Rosmos: I beg your pardon.

Brenda Velasco: By the time you were eight years old, you might have had electricity after World War I?

Julie Rosmos: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Barbara Estok: They had electricity in school, right?

Julie Rosmos: Yes, the school had it and we had a big school.

Brenda Velasco: What school did you go to?

Julie Rosmos: What was the name of the school?

Barbara Estok: Keasbey School #8.

Julie Rosmos: Keasbey School. But there were so many kids from Fords, from all over.

Brenda Velasco: Probably from Hopelawn too then.

Julie Rosmos: Yes, and did we have a rough principal. She let you have it with the ruler.

Brenda Velasco: Do you remember.....

Julie Rosmos: Miss Whitney Burke. Do you know what? Some of the boys were really tough and they wouldn't take her abuse but then later on they started sending her letters. She had a farm in Metuchen.

Barbara Estok: Yes, like by Amboy Avenue and Route #1.

Julie Rosmos: And they praised her that if it wasn't for her teaching they wouldn't have become what they did. They were so happy.

Brenda Velasco: So the discipline paid off.

Julie Rosmos: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Very good.

Barbara Estok: And they say that she used to take them during the summer to work there on her farm, it was a small farm. The kids used to help her with the farm and they say that she has on her gravestone that she dedicated her life to the children of Keasbey. I don't know where her gravestone is but that's what they say is carved on it.

Brenda Velasco: It sounds good, doesn't it? Well your mother still remembers the name and you're ninety-six years old so she left quite an impression. Okay, so you had Smith Street back then, you had Dow Avenue back then, were there any other streets in that part of Keasbey? You were by the Raritan River, the brickyards.

Julie Rosmos: Not that, when you went around from Dow Avenue when you went around the corner like that, that's where the baseball field was. In fact, they used to come from New York to play ball there.

Barbara Estok: That's going up Smith Street towards Perth Amboy.

Julie Rosmos: And there were a lot of homes there too going up. Mildred lived in that old house, remember?

Barbara Estok: Right, there were homes all along Smith Street and there were some side streets. I don't remember the name of all of them but remember where Eggre's lived?

Julie Rosmos: Yes.

Barbara Estok: That was a side street. Do you know what that street was called?

Julie Rosmos: No, Eggre lived on Dow Avenue.

Barbara Estok: Eggres.

Julie Rosmos: Eggres? In front of **Montedise's Store** there were a lot of homes there.

Barbara Estok: And streets but they're all gone.

Brenda Velasco: They're all gone now.

Julie Rosmos: They're all gone.

Barbara Estok: They're all gone. They were gone as soon as the bridges started to be built.

Julie Rosmos: The *Edison Bridge* was the first bridge I think was built there.

Barbara Estok: That Bridge took some homes.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, as we expanded with the roads and the bridges we took the homes and the streets.

Julie Rosmos: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: It disappeared. What about services, like from the township, when you lived in Keasbey, did you have garbage pickup?

Julie Rosmos: No garbage pickup everything down the clay banks, remember?

Barbara Estok: Yes.

Julie Rosmos: Down the clay banks. No garbage collection. We had a lot of rats there too.

Brenda Velasco: Did you have a post office?

Julie Rosmos: Yes, a little wooden one down by **Ceramic's** and.....

Barbara Estok: Right that was Crows Mill Road and the postmaster was a Mr. Silcox or Shillcox.

Julie Rosmos: And then Rolox took over later on.

Barbara Estok: Then it went to Bayview Road and there was a postmistress and that was Mrs. Novak. Then it moved again to Smith Street near the current firehouse and we lost track of who the..... Who were the postmaster's and postmistress's then when it moved up by the firehouse, do you remember?

Julie Rosmos: By the firehouse it was Novak.

Barbara Estok: It was still Novak there?

Julie Rosmos: But then now they moved it again down.....

Barbara Estok: Now it's moved again on Smith Street and that's closer to the Parkway and the Edison Bridge.

Brenda Velasco: You had the traveling post office.

Barbara Estok: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: How about stores.

Julie Rosmos: **Monty's.**

Barbara Estok: Oh wow, we had a lot.

Brenda Velasco: Where was **Monty's**?

Barbara Estok: Before it was **Montedises** it was **Demeter's** and **Demeter's** was Pete Dalina's aunt. So that was **Demeter's** changed to **Montedises Meat Market**, there was James Butler.

Brenda Velasco: You had a **James Butler Store** there?

Julie Rosmos: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Because they're found throughout other parts of the township too.

Julie Rosmos: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, what kind of store was that Barbara?

Barbara Estok: I think my aunt said a grocery.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Barbara Estok: Do you remember **James Butler Store**?

Julie Rosmos: That one I don't remember.

Barbara Estok: Yes, she said there was **James Butler.**

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Barbara Estok: There was **Oros**; that was a grocery. There was a **Ludash**; that was a grocery. There was **Keysos**.....

Julie Rosmos: Wait a minute, **Oros** went after **Demeter.** After **Demeter** gave it up **Oros** moved in on Dow Avenue.

Barbara Estok: Oh that was **Demeter's** store?

Julie Rosmos: It was **Demeter's** first and then they sold it, and then **Oros** bought it.

Barbara Estok: Then there was **Ivan's.**

Brenda Velasco: And these were all owned by Hungarian Americans?

Julie Rosmos: That was up the hill already.

Barbara Estok: That was up the heights. There was a **Bernie Google Candy Store.**

Julie Rosmos: And the **Fee Store.**

Barbara Estok: There was **Fees.**

Julie Rosmos: That was across the street from the school.

Barbara Estok: Did **Bernie Google** become **Fees**?

Julie Rosmos: It could have been. You know Julie was getting all mixed up with her googie; I never heard of that.

Barbara Estok: She said **Bernie Google**. There was a **Varady's**.

Julie Rosmos: **Varady** was down by **Ceramic's**.

Barbara Estok: Yes, down Crows Mill Road and that was a general store. They sold groceries and lunch and they also had clothes, boots, overalls....

Brenda Velasco: Wow! They had everything then.

Barbara Estok: Yes.

Julie Rosmos: And then they had the two factories, **Ceramic's** and **Carborundum**.

Barbara Estok: Then they had **Toth's Grocery Store**.

Brenda Velasco: And that was a grocery store?

Barbara Estok: Where was **Toth's**?

Julie Rosmos: Up the hill.

Barbara Estok: Up the hill.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Julie Rosmos: They used to call our street -I don't know whether it was fun that- they called it Keasbey Loop and up the hill Keasbey Heights.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, so you had the two factories also.

Julie Rosmos: Yes, **Ceramic's** and **Carborundum**. That was down where the old post office was; the wooden one.

Barbara Estok: Down Crows Mill Road. On the river too, both of them were close to the river.

Julie Rosmos: Yes.

Barbara Estok: And a lot of the houses that were built were built actually by these factories.

Brenda Velasco: It was like a company town.

Barbara Estok: Company town, yes. So **Natco**, the brick company, they built a lot of the houses. Then the other companies built.....

Brenda Velasco: **Carborundum**.

Barbara Estok: **Carborundum**, yes.

Brenda Velasco: You wouldn't remember, Julie, how much the rent was?

Julie Rosmos: Ten dollars. I think they had to pay the factory, **Natco**. Yes, ten dollars a month.

Brenda Velasco: A month for these tiny little apartments.

Julie Rosmos: And our tax, I think for a year, was, I think, oh so cheap. I don't think it was even a hundred dollars.

Brenda Velasco: Not any more. So you had quite a selection of stores, one that sold clothes, one that sold candy, **Bernie Google**.....

Julie Rosmos: And another thing, they did have a bus running on a Saturday they finally got a little bus. They had a farmer's market in Perth Amboy on Smith Street. That's where mom went every Saturday to buy a chicken, a live chicken, and.....

Brenda Velasco: And then she took it on the bus.

Barbara Estok: Right, in a shopping bag.

Brenda Velasco: How about houses of worship, churches?

Julie Rosmos: St. Michael's.

Barbara Estok: No, in Keasbey.

Brenda Velasco: St. Michael's was in Perth Amboy.

Barbara Estok: She means in Keasbey how many churches.

Julie Rosmos: There was no church in Keasbey.

Barbara Estok: Just that little one where the Romans lived.

Julie Rosmos: The Protestant one, yes.

Brenda Velasco: And the school was.....

Julie Rosmos: A big school. We had a lot of kids going to that school.

Barbara Estok: K through 8.

Brenda Velasco: K through 8 in Keasbey.

Barbara Estok: Then when they built all of the developments along Ford Avenue, that was the Fords Lafayette Estates, all of those children were transported to the Keasbey School.

Brenda Velasco: Wow! So you had Keasbey residents and you had Fords residents as well and that was one of the big thriving schools then.

Barbara Estok: Right.

Julie Rosmos: Big school.

Barbara Estok: And then when Iselin started to build all of their developments they transported the Menlo Park Terrace; all parts of Iselin.

Brenda Velasco: Wow!

Barbara Estok: All of those developments all of seventh and eighth graders that they brought to Keasbey school.

Julie Rosmos: They said it was so many hundred.

Barbara Estok: Yes, it was large.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, but that was one of the schools that they closed.

Barbara Estok: They tore it down.

Julie Rosmos: And they had such a beautiful auditorium there, I'll never forget it. They used to give it out (available for public use). We went dancing there but we weren't allowed to drink, no alcohol in there. The firehouse was right next door and that's where we had to go.

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

Brenda Velasco: Okay, we mentioned about the post office and that was the moving post office in Keasbey.

Julie Rosmos: Yes, right.

Brenda Velasco: How about the library, did you have a library in at all in Keasbey?

Julie Rosmos: I don't think so. We didn't have no library.

Barbara Estok: No, we walked up to Fords which is now the Women's Club. Yes, we used to walk up there to the library.

Brenda Velasco: Any parks in Keasbey?

Julie Rosmos: Yes, up the hill.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, and how about the firehouse?

Julie Rosmos: The firehouse was right near the school but they tore it down and built another firehouse.

Brenda Velasco: Was it in the same location?

Barbara Estok: Yes, it was the same location.

Julie Rosmos: Yes.

Barbara Estok: That was like a community center, the firehouse. They had the first TV. Everybody went there to watch TV before any of the houses had TV. They hosted a lot of the different holiday events.

Brenda Velasco: Okay and we mentioned the school. So where did you go to high school then?

Julie Rosmos: I didn't go to high school because it was during the Depression time. They took us all out of school. We had to go to school twice a week until we were sixteen and I went away to do housework because it was during the Depression and they needed the money.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, well with seven children.

Julie Rosmos: I think Shef is the only one that went to high school.

Barbara Estok: I think Bertsy did too.

Brenda Velasco: So two of your brothers were able to go to high school. Were they younger than you?

Julie Rosmos: I was the second born.

Barbara Estok: They were all younger.

Brenda Velasco: They were younger and that's the way it worked out. It was the same in my family, my mother's family.

6. What did you do for recreation?

Julie Rosmos: Recreation, doing housework.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, did you have a bike or anything?

Julie Rosmos: Well on Saturday nights, my mother was very, very religious, and she wouldn't let me go out. I think I was about eighteen already and I loved to dance and they had the **Raritan Ballroom** in Perth Amboy way back and I said to my mother, Mom I'm going for confessions. As soon as I mentioned confession to her, she said okay you can go. From there I headed to the **Raritan Ballroom**.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, now we know the truth Barbara.

Julie Rosmos: So I made my enjoyment and you know what, I used to walk home and I wasn't afraid. Ten o'clock at night walking home. A couple of time Fritz picked me up because he was going with Aunt Bertha.

Barbara Estok: That was her brother.

Julie Rosmos: They went dancing there, too, and they picked me up.

Brenda Velasco: And they kept quiet about your confession.

Julie Rosmos: Yes, I had to climb in through the window.

Brenda Velasco: How about picnics and things like that?

Julie Rosmos: They had Pfeiffer's Boulevard and they always had a picnic there and we used to go there.

Brenda Velasco: What was the location?

Julie Rosmos: Pfeiffer Boulevard, I think that was in the Hopelawn section. They had picnics; in Varady's Farm too they had it.

Barbara Estok: Varady's Grove, it was called, but I think that went up into Fords.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, that was in Fords.

Julie Rosmos: And a lot of men, when they came home from work, they were so tired already. After supper they had benches all on the avenue lined up and they were playing cards. So you know they had their entertainment.

Barbara Estok: They had along the river bonfires during the holidays. They would light, on both sides, the South Amboy/Sayreville side and along the Keasbey side, to celebrate whatever the occasion or the holiday was. Of course, the warm weather they were swimming, fishing, crabbing, and boating all along the Raritan River.

Brenda Velasco: So there was a lot you could do right there.

Barbara Estok: Oh, yes.

Julie Rosmos: They went crabbing.

Barbara Estok: They built a big boat club which was the **Keasbey Boat Club**.

Brenda Velasco: Where was that located?

Barbara Estok: That was in between the two bridges, the Edison Bridge and the Parkway Bridge. Right in between there, they had build this boat club and actually my father helped with some of that construction because he was a boating, fishing, crabbing person. So the whole summer was spent along the river. In the winter, there was ice skating on the ponds.

Julie Rosmos: They had little ponds and they were ice skating.

Barbara Estok: Yes, the clay pits.

Julie Rosmos: It was beautiful to live there because we had such a nice breeze there from the water.

Barbara Estok: So there was sledding on the clay pit hills. We would build buggies and have buggy races down through those clay pit hills. The boys would muskrat trap along the river marsh and the brooks. They would go catch muskrats. They'd get small game hunting in the woods in the back. Mom said they also had a trolley car. Was there a trolley car on Smith Street?

Julie Rosmos: That part I don't remember but I know there were trolley tracks.

Barbara Estok: I guess it went from maybe Fords to Perth Amboy on Smith Street. Then after that buses ran pretty regular.

Brenda Velasco: And the buses would always take you to Perth Amboy, not to Woodbridge Proper.

Barbara Estok: Right, Perth Amboy.

Brenda Velasco: You were geared towards Perth Amboy.

Barbara Estok: You'd do the shopping and the movies. There was the movie house that we used to go to in Fords. When we were kids we used to walk up there.

Julie Rosmos: It really was, as I come to think of it, even though we didn't have electric and everything, it was such a nice street because all the people stuck together, everyone of them. When a woman had a baby you didn't have to eat for a whole month because they made fried chicken and all kind of food for that woman who had the baby. They had them at home; they didn't even go to the hospital. They'd get up afterward and started doing their work. You know it really was something.

Brenda Velasco: Where were the doctors located, in Perth Amboy?

Julie Rosmos: They were almost near Perth Amboy and we did have a good doctor. Dr. Gadek, I liked him, I liked him so much.

Barbara Estok: They had baseball fields up in Keasbey Heights.

Julie Rosmos: She already wrote that I think.

Brenda Velasco: Well we'll write it for this.

Barbara Estok: All the major factories had a team.

Brenda Velasco: They were the Industrial Leagues, right.

Barbara Estok: I think **Natco** had the Keasbey Tigers they were called.

Brenda Velasco: Did your dad or your uncles.....

Barbara Estok: My uncles played, yes. They had a weightlifting club, up the Heights, and it produced a Mr. America.

Julie Rosmos: I think you had his name down there.

Barbara Estok: Yes, Steve Stanko.

Julie Rosmos: He died already.

Barbara Estok: They had a dance hall.

Brenda Velasco: Where was that located Barbara?

Barbara Estok: That was called *Robinson Hall* and that was on Smith Street right across from Dow Avenue.

Brenda Velasco: So that was close by.

Barbara Estok: Yes, right at the end of Dow Avenue. It kind of came to a T the intersection and there was this *Robinson Hall*. Do you remember the dance hall that was there?

Julie Rosmos: The dance hall in Keasbey?

Barbara Estok: Yes.

Julie Rosmos: That was the night club. They used to come from New York and have plays.

Barbara Estok: Bands would come, Big Bands.

Julie Rosmos: You know, most of the people are all dead and you know a lot of people lived to be close to a hundred living in Keasbey even though we had the smoke coming from this way and that way.

Brenda Velasco: That's amazing isn't it?

Julie Rosmos: Inhaling that smoke.

Brenda Velasco: Because health wise.....

Julie Rosmos: How about Mrs. Sheppard? She was ninety-eight, she's already dead too.

Barbara Estok: Florida Grove Road, they say, went all the way down to the river and all along it was a park and that's why they called it Florida Grove.

Brenda Velasco: That how it got the name.

Barbara Estok: And it was a picnic grove and excursion boats would come and dock along there and people would picnic and go through the park. Carnivals came to town.

Brenda Velasco: Who sponsored the carnivals?

Barbara Estok: I don't know. You paid to get in.

Julie Rosmos: I don't think so, you just walked and you paid for whatever you went to see. I don't remember paying.

Barbara Estok: Who brought the carnivals there?

Julie Rosmos: I think the firemen told them to come. I'm not sure.

Brenda Velasco: Where did they hold them?

Barbara Estok: That was up in the ball field that was the Heights region, up on the top of the hill towards Perth Amboy. That was every summer. Two carnivals would come.

Brenda Velasco: Wow!

Barbara Estok: And they had block parties and dances up the Heights during the summer.

Julie Rosmos: Yes, a lot of block parties. So you know we had our entertainment.

Brenda Velasco: You sure did! You didn't need a TV at all.

Barbara Estok: No, in most of the families somebody played a musical instrument. They would get together and play and sing. There was always a really large May Day festival.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, because we don't have May Day: communism.

Julie Rosmos: There were quite a bit of fights too. The mothers with their kids because the kids got into a fight and then the mothers got into a fight with the parents and before you know it the kids were talking and parents weren't talking.

Brenda Velasco: That's always the way. You got to stay out of those arguments.

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

Brenda Velasco: What was the main center?

Barbara Estok: Probably the school, the firehouse, the riverfront and the industry, the factories.

Brenda Velasco: Because so many people who lived there worked there.

Julie Rosmos: And you know what remember when you weren't allowed to sell liquor.

Barbara Estok: Prohibition, oh yes.

Brenda Velasco: Oh yes, what happened?

Barbara Estok: They came up the river.

Julie Rosmos: They'd come during the night.

Barbara Estok: And they were bootlegging.

Julie Rosmos: And a lot of men went to work for them.

Barbara Estok: One of them, she's part of the family like a second cousin or whatever, her marriage name was Helen Masalga and originally she was a Shishka, so her family came out with that original family Shishka name and he would always say to my grandfather you're not a Fecsu you're a Shishka and they would have this thing going back and forth with them. So her brother asked to borrow the family car and he said he had a date. Apparently he took it down to the river to move some of this liquor and she said the car came back with bullet holes all over the whole side.

Brenda Velasco: Wow!

Barbara Estok: And my grandmother actually had a still in the basement.

Julie Rosmos: I still got mine.

Brenda Velasco: You still have your still?

Julie Rosmos: It goes like this.

Brenda Velasco: That's the piping.

Julie Rosmos: I got to shine it up.

Brenda Velasco: You took it with you to Iselin?

Julie Rosmos: What.

Brenda Velasco: It's in Iselin?

Julie Rosmos: It's in good condition.

Barbara Estok: You have it in Iselin? You have it at the Iselin house? Where is it now?

Julie Rosmos: In the shanty.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Barbara Estok: I guess that's evidence.

Brenda Velasco: It's okay now but you don't use it.

Barbara Estok: So grandmother used to make bootleg whiskey.

Brenda Velasco: And my grandmother did too.

Barbara Estok: And like apparently her first five hundred dollars she donated to build St. Michael's Church in Perth Amboy. So then I guess that made it alright. Because back then, you know, five hundred dollars was a lot of money.

Brenda Velasco: It sure was.

Julie Rosmos: And you know what they did?

Brenda Velasco: What?

Julie Rosmos: All the old rags they used to cut up the elderly ladies all them rag rugs how hard they worked.

Barbara Estok: They made rag rugs in our backyard. We had a loom.

Julie Rosmos: And they used to give them to their friends, you know, whoever needed a rug.

Barbara Estok: Every Monday morning they would come to make the rugs?

Julie Rosmos: Yes, down the street there Mrs. Motorisky and all of them ladies.

Barbara Estok: Yes, so they'd be in our backyard all making these rugs, singing songs and telling stories.

Brenda Velasco: Then giving these rugs to whoever needed it.

Barbara Estok: Some of them sold the rugs down at the market.

Julie Rosmos: Yes, they were nice rugs but I think they were dangerous because, you know, you could fall on them.

Brenda Velasco: Oh yes, well they skid.

Barbara Estok: So I used to help my grandmother cut the rags, sew them together and make them into balls.

Julie Rosmos: But sitting there and cutting them with the scissors all day long that's what grandmom used to do.

Brenda Velasco: But it got the community together.

Barbara Estok: Oh, yes.

Brenda Velasco: And that was one way the women got together because they were so busy with children all the time and cooking and preparing food.

Barbara Estok: Everybody also had a backyard vegetable garden and chickens and geese. I think when mom was young you had pigs?

Julie Rosmos: Oh they had pigs and chickens.

Barbara Estok: Cows.

Julie Rosmos: Every week they'd kill the pigs.

Barbara Estok: You had a cow?

Julie Rosmos: No, Mrs. Swigel had cows.

Barbara Estok: She had cows.

Julie Rosmos: And they used to sell milk, too.

Brenda Velasco: So this was like, you were a city but you also did a lot of producing you own food; very sustainable.

Barbara Estok: My mother said during the Depression your family did not go on welfare, right?

Julie Rosmos: My family, no never. My mother was a saver, oh she really was a saver. Most of the people were on welfare but we never had to go because my mother was pretty good. People borrowed money from her and didn't want to pay it back later on but she taught me how to save. You know I learned a lot from her. I used to get annoyed because you know how hard I had to work on them boys. I think she, maybe I better not say it she might come back at me.

Brenda Velasco: Look, six boys and one sister that was rough.

Julie Rosmos: I was Cinderella.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, you were a poor Cinderella.

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

Julie Rosmos: That's what I liked that people were so friendly and we helped one another.

Brenda Velasco: Did you learn Hungarian?

Julie Rosmos: I beg your pardon.

Brenda Velasco: Did you speak the language Hungarian?

Julie Rosmos: I spoke very good Hungarian and I wrote very good Hungarian but now I forgot how to write because my husband was Slavish.

Brenda Velasco: Where did you meet your husband then?

Julie Rosmos: Where did I meet him?

Brenda Velasco: Yes, was he from Keasbey?

Julie Rosmos: No, wait a minute, he lived in Perth Amboy.

Brenda Velasco: Oh, he came from the big city.

Julie Rosmos: Well, I can talk about him now. He lived in Perth Amboy but he was going with a girl. But then he called me up one day and he said I have to go look for a job in Bound Brook, because he was a butcher too, and he said you want to take a ride with me and he said I'm not looking for steady company I just want to be friends. I thought he was going to bring Joe Kunish over, you *know* Tony's godfather.

Barbara Estok: Right, somehow they met through a blind date. You were supposed to be somebody else's date.

Julie Rosmos: Yes, I had another date.

Barbara Estok: No, didn't you go on a double date with him?

Julie Rosmos: Yes with Rose Keyso, that was his girlfriend. We went to Woodbridge.

Barbara Estok: Who was your boyfriend?

Julie Rosmos: I didn't have no boyfriend.

Barbara Estok: No, who was your date at that time.

Julie Rosmos: He gave me a ride from Keasbey to Perth Amboy. I forgot his name already.

Brenda Velasco: He's immaterial, after your mother met your father that was it.

Julie Rosmos: Yes, and I'm not asking you for steady company and before you know it he brought himself around.

Brenda Velasco: You caught his eye.

Julie Rosmos: He didn't bring the guy around.

Brenda Velasco: No, he was after you, no other guy. He wasn't going to share you.

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

Julie Rosmos: Yes, Mike the firebug. Nearly every week there was a fire there and we had to sleep with our clothes on. We never knew when a house was burning and then they finally found out who did it.

Brenda Velasco: Wow, so there was a firebug.

Julie Rosmos: Yes, but not just that, half of the time he was drunk and then when they found out and he's gone too, already.

Barbara Estok: He jumped off the bridge and committed suicide.

Julie Rosmos: And he bet the guys when he was in the beer garden one glass of beer that he's going to make it when he jumped but he never made it.

Brenda Velasco: Oh my gosh!

Julie Rosmos: And every week for a while there we had to sleep with our clothes on.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, it was an intentionally lit fire. When was this when you were growing up then?

Julie Rosmos: Yes, we were little kids yet.

Brenda Velasco: Alright, the 1920s or even before then.

Julie Rosmos: And being that we had the outhouse outside too, grandmom wouldn't let us go out in the outhouse during the night. She had a pail for every one of us underneath the bed. It was sad.

Brenda Velasco: And then he committed suicide.

Barbara Estok: Right.

Brenda Velasco: Do you remember his name?

Julie Rosmos: Do I remember the name?

Barbara Estok: Yes, I have the name.

Brenda Velasco: What is the name, Barbara?

Julie Rosmos: I think his name was there but I hope he has no relation living.

Brenda Velasco: He shouldn't have done those things. Was anybody killed with these fires?

Julie Rosmos: No, he only died because he jumped. Was it Buck or something along that line?

Barbara Estok: I know I wrote it down.

Brenda Velasco: We'll come back and maybe you'll recall it. Okay, anything else? How about construction? Were you there when they were building all those roads in Keasbey?

Barbara Estok: His name was Bill Romer.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Julie Rosmos: Yes, a lot of dirt and a lot of noise. I think the Edison Bridge was built in 1940 around there, that's what Tony said.

Barbara Estok: The *Victory Bridge* was the first bridge and that was in 1927 and there was a huge celebration. It was actually the same day that Lindbergh landed in Paris on his transatlantic flight and that was the *Victory Bridge*. And then the *Edison Bridge* was in the 1940s and then there was a big celebration when they built that bridge. You had a big party on the bridge, right?

Julie Rosmos: And then there was a bridge in Keasbey going to Fords, you know, by Wagonhoffer's store and Pete Dalina had something to do with that and there was a celebration there too.

Barbara Estok: Right, and then the Parkway Bridge was I think, in the '50s.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, 1954 or something like that.

Barbara Estok: Right, so it was all of these bridges and much of that construction took the houses.

Brenda Velasco: Were they still having the brickyards there at that time?

Barbara Estok: When they built the *Edison Bridge* the brickyard was I think then kind of going out of business. Then the Parkway Bridge, most definitely, that property was all bought up.

Julie Rosmos: They say the *Empire State Building* was built from that brick from the **Natco Brick Company**.

Brenda Velasco: Wow, we'll have to look that up. When did you finally move out of Keasbey?

Julie Rosmos: The State came and bought our house.

Barbara Estok: That was August of 2000.

Brenda Velasco: So you really lived there a long, long time.

Barbara Estok: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Are there any houses left on Dow Avenue now?

Barbara Estok: No.

Brenda Velasco: So this whole neighborhood, everything is kaput.

Barbara Estok: Gone, completely gone.

Brenda Velasco: Except for the memories and that's why we're taping to get this down. What a beautiful neighborhood you had and that Barbara grew up in.

Barbara Estok: Right.

Brenda Velasco: Wow!

Julie Rosmos: I still miss it. I loved Keasbey.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, I could imagine because everybody knew everybody.

Julie Rosmos: But not over here. They're nice people but everyone is a working class person. I'm retired and now that I lost my car, I can't drive anymore since I fell, it's like my independence was taken away. But then the doctor says at my age I shouldn't even drive because a teenager will hit me and they'll blame me because I'm too old on the road.

Brenda Velasco: You're ninety-six, you lived a long time, and you got your daughter right here.

Julie Rosmos: But I don't want to take her life away because, you know, she has her yoga class and all.

Brenda Velasco: Oh, I know that Barbara's very busy. I know that, anything else, any other events?

Barbara Estok: There was the Woodbridge train wreck. Keasbey Firehouse was one of the first to respond or I think it was the first to respond. There was a barge on the Raritan River on the South Amboy side that blew up and it was loaded with land mines. I don't know where it was exactly from or going to but we were right down the river from the **Raritan Arsenal**.

Julie Rosmos: It was Sayreville or someplace it came. (South Amboy – 1950)

Barbara Estok: Right, so it caused all the windows to blow out in all the houses along our street and we were evacuated for a short period of time and I think that was somewhere around 1950.

Julie Rosmos: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: And you still recall that.

Barbara Estok: I remember it but then my mother said it was during one of the wars that you had to go and walk to Elizabeth with grandpop, with your father.

Julie Rosmos: No, that was during that bad influenza that people were dying off.

Brenda Velasco: Oh yes, the influenza in (1918/1919).

Julie Rosmos: Yes, so many people died, you know, around us in the family and we all escaped it; none of us got sick. We walked all the way to Elizabeth.

Brenda Velasco: That was quite a walk.

Julie Rosmos: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: From Keasbey.

Julie Rosmos: Because he wanted to get out of Keasbey. So many people died off like flies. It was like a cold but, you know, that's when people were dying.

Brenda Velasco: Yes,

Julie Rosmos: I wonder what year, I don't remember what year that was but I know I was a little girl.

Brenda Velasco: It was 1918/1919. This was called the Spanish Flu and the Flu Epidemic. It was right as World War I ended.

Barbara Estok: Right.

Brenda Velasco: 1918 just as it ended you had this bad epidemic and a lot of people died within three days.

Julie Rosmos: Look at what we're getting now too everything.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, but you grew up in Keasbey and look at how healthy you've been.

Barbara Estok: I know.

Julie Rosmos: You know what I don't know, I must have different genes. Do you think I belong in that family?

Barbara Estok: I don't know.

Brenda Velasco: Barbara is healthy too. We're lucky. Is there anything else you want to mention about Question #9 because you gave quite a bit?

Barbara Estok: That's pretty much it.

10. What do you like about Woodbridge today?

Brenda Velasco: Do you like Woodbridge.

Julie Rosmos: Yes, the only thing I don't like is my taxes.

Brenda Velasco: Well, I don't either. None of us do. Are you involved in the Community Center or do you go to any of these.....

Julie Rosmos: You know what after you reach my age already I think they should give the seniors a break.

Brenda Velasco: We've got to introduce your mom to the mayor: ninety-six years old.

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

Julie Rosmos: Yes, Fran.

Barbara Estok: She's not in Woodbridge, she's in Edison. Yes, she's got her brother and sister-in-laws and a niece and her family.

Brenda Velasco: Where do they live in Fords or.....?

Barbara Estok: The brother and the sister-in-law live in Fords. The niece and her family live in Woodbridge Proper. Then she's got me; I'm in Fords. Then my brother is still alive and he's with her in Iselin. The rest of the family has either died off or moved away.

Brenda Velasco: That's still quite a few. I know it doesn't amount to much compared to your mom growing up but she's ninety-six years old. So we still have people from this family still living here.

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

Barbara Estok: I would like to go back to what I like about Woodbridge. The services are good, the schools are good, it's close to cities like New York and Philadelphia, it's close to all the major highways and airports and it's close to the shore.

Brenda Velasco: It's a perfect location. You can go anywhere and be there within an hour and a half.

Barbara Estok: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Or less than an hour even if you're going to New York City.

Barbara Estok: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: And we've got the trains. You don't even have to drive. Okay, anything else that we haven't covered that you want to mention, any other events?

Barbara Estok: The whole area was a real busy delivery services and peddlers so that on our street, on a regular basis at least like once a day or once a week the milkman came, the bread man came, the ice man came, the vegetable and fruit peddlers came, the soda man came, the junk man came, the rag man came and the tool and repair and tool sharpening man came.

Brenda Velasco: You're taking us back to things that no longer exist.

Barbara Estok: So all of these goods and services were brought to you and they all had bells on their wagon. I can even remember some of those were horse drawn but a few of them had drawn the wagon and all of the vegetables and fruits.....

Julie Rosmos: She came from Fords. She raised all the vegetables and all and she used to sell.

Barbara Estok: Do you remember her name.

Julie Rosmos: Oh, what's her name?

Brenda Velasco: So you didn't even need a car.

Barbara Estok: No.

Brenda Velasco: You didn't even need a car. You had people coming to you with these services. The only thing you really needed was to go to a doctor.

Barbara Estok: Right and even the doctor came.

Brenda Velasco: Oh right, doctors made house calls.

Julie Rosmos: Mrs. Tupachek, I think her name was Tupachek, that's an odd name but there's something humorous about her too so I won't mention it.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, well.

Julie Rosmos: So you'll ask me after you shut that off.

Brenda Velasco: I'll ask you after we conclude. If there's nothing more than maybe we should conclude.

Barbara Estok: Okay.

Brenda Velasco: Alright, and I thank you both. It's been a great time with great conversation. We had a lot of laughs so thank you Julie and Barbara thank you so much.

Barbara Estok: Thank you.